House of Commons
Home Affairs Committee

Child sexual exploitation and the response to localised grooming


Volume II

Oral and written evidence

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Home Affairs Committee

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Witnesses

Tuesday 12 June 2012

Jim Taylor, Chief Executive, and Councillor Colin Lambert, Leader, Rochdale Council

Chief Constable Peter Fahy and Detective Chief Superintendent Mary Doyle, Greater Manchester Police

Peter Davies, Chief Executive, Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre

Sue Berelowitz, Deputy Children’s Commissioner

Tuesday 3 July 2012

Tim Loughton MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children

Tuesday 23 October 2012

Jon Brown, Head of Strategy and Development, Sexual Abuse, NSPCC, Sue Minto, Head of ChildLine, and Michelle Lee-izu, Director of Barnardo’s, South East

Tuesday 30 October 2012

David Dillnut, Head of UK Human Trafficking Centre, and Mark Webster, Deputy Director, Operational Services Department, Serious and Organised Crime Agency

Tuesday 6 November 2012

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

Jim Taylor, Chief Executive, and Roger Ellis, former Chief Executive, Rochdale Council

Tuesday 20 November 2012

Detective Superintendent Ian Critchley, Head of Public Protection, Lancashire Police and Head of ACPO Child Sexual Exploitation Task Force, and Detective Chief Superintendent Mary Doyle, Head of Public Protection, Greater Manchester Police

Steve Garner, former Director of Children’s Social Care, Rochdale Council

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Martin Kimber, Chief Executive, and Joyce Thacker, Strategic Director of Children’s and Young People’s Services, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

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Oral evidence

Taken before the Home Affairs Committee

on Tuesday 12 June 2012

Members present:
Keith Vaz (Chair)
Nicola Blackwood
Michael Ellis
Dr Julian Huppert
Alun Michael

Bridget Phillipson
Mark Reckless
Mr David Winnick

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Jim Taylor, Chief Executive, Rochdale Council, and Councillor Colin Lambert, Leader of Rochdale Council, gave evidence.

Q1 Chair: Could I call the Committee to order and ask Mr Lambert and Mr Taylor to sit down? Thank you very much for coming this morning. This is the Committee’s first session in our inquiry into child exploitation and we are very pleased to have both of you here today. Are there any interests that need to be declared before the Committee other than those that are in the Register of Members’ Interests?

Councillor Lambert: I should declare that although I am here as a councillor, I work full-time for Jim Dobbin, Member of Parliament.

Q2 Chair: Thank you.

Can I begin with a question about the recent cases in Rochdale? All five girls who were witnesses against the defendants in these cases were known to social services at some point. You have publicly expressed concern about the way in which social services have reacted to this, Councillor Lambert. What are you concerns about what you have seen so far concerning this matter?

Councillor Lambert: Specific to the individuals here is the lack of sharing of data across services. You will be aware from the trial that the initial allegations were made some four years ago and then did not proceed, and at that point it appears that the co-ordination of the sharing of information with social services partner agencies therefore did not continue.

Q3 Chair: Do you consider that there ought to have been more resources given to the social services department in Rochdale? Obviously you have been the centre of a lot of interest on these matters. You tended to imply in the statements that you have made that social services perhaps had failed to provide the necessary leadership and support for these girls who eventually ended up either as witnesses or, I think in one case, as one of the victims in one of the prosecutions.

Councillor Lambert: Certainly, Chair, I would agree that I felt the back-up and support was not there. I would not necessarily link that at the time to lack of resources, but to a lack of procedures and a lack of understanding of what they were facing.

Q4 Chair: Mr Taylor, you have seen reference in the national media to the issue of race as being a factor in these cases. What is your view on this? Do you think that the origin of the perpetrators of these terrible crimes is a relevant factor? How important is it? Are you considering it, or do you think that this is just something that has emerged and needs to be looked at?

Jim Taylor: My opinion is that it is a terrible crime and that it is not exclusively a race issue, although clearly within Rochdale the issue of race has been raised. There are other victims across the country and other perpetrators who are not Asian, as is the case in Rochdale. My personal view is that I would treat this as a crime first and foremost, and then if any underlying issues are identified within individual communities—whether they be Asian or whether they be white communities, or indeed other communities—we need to deal with those in terms of strengthening those communities to help to identify these issues early and to bring them to the attention of the authorities.

Councillor Lambert: Certainly throughout, I have stuck to the fact that this is a horrendous crime against children. In this particular case, it is a group of Asian men and white girls. We do know that once this conviction has gone through successfully, there will no doubt be more cases coming forward. It is no more an Asian issue in terms of it being specific that it is the only time grooming and sex abuse takes place. Right across the country—and looking at a wider European scale—it is not always men; it can be men and women. It is not always white or non-white. It is an issue of the crime of child sex abuse. The one thing that I have tried to keep focused on in this Rochdale case is the need for legislative change in terms of protecting vulnerable children, both those in care and those in the chaotic families. We need to look at a way in which the UK deals with children who are vulnerable and how they can be attached to by groups.

Q5 Chair: But you will know that very senior politicians who know the community, in particular the British Pakistani community, have said that that is not the case. Jack Straw, the former Home Secretary, said, and I quote, that they, meaning the people of Pakistani
heritage, “see these young women, white girls who are vulnerable, some of them in care...who they think are easy meat”. Baroness Warsi, the chair of the Conservative party and a member of the Cabinet, agreed with him by saying that some Pakistani men see white girls as fair game. I think it is important we put this to you because you are the leader of the council and you are the chief executive, and it is in your area. Do you agree with those statements, Mr Taylor?

Jim Taylor: I think I just go back to what I was saying earlier: the community has reacted extremely supportively to these convictions. Two weeks ago, a new initiative was launched by the community—the Rochdale Community Forum—which had regional media coverage, in which myself, the council leader and the Chief Constable of GMP endorsed the grassroots consultation within those communities as to how information can be shared across those communities in terms of how they would report those matters to the authorities and these issues would be dealt with.

Q6 Chair: Yes, but on these comments, Councillor Lambert, do you agree with Baroness Warsi and Jack Straw, or do you disagree with them? They are quite clear. There is no grey area here; they are very clear in what they are saying.

Councillor Lambert: If their clear statement is that this crime was committed because of the Asian community, I strongly disagree with them, because I feel it is too easy to badge a crime. But, more importantly, it takes away from the crime itself when you can say it occurs only in this particular community. That is not true. It happens right across all our communities. In terms of badging it as an Asian crime, I think that is wrong. You can say that there are issues within communities; there are issues in all communities.

Q7 Mr Winnick: These are vile crimes that can be carried out only by those who are deeply sick in mind, and certainly those convicted deserve to stay in prison for a very long time indeed. I hope that will be the position. However, arising from what the Chair asked, the feeling has grown. Newspapers, certainly, may not be very favourable, Mr Lambert, to your local authority or to the party that, like myself, you belong to. The accusation of a kind is that there was inhibition, or a feeling that action should not be taken because it might offend those in the Asian community—it has been described as a form of political correctness and the rest. How would you respond to that?

Councillor Lambert: I would certainly disagree that that was any decision taken by Rochdale social services at the time. The decision not to proceed was by the Crown Prosecution Service; it is now reviewing cases. In our authority, we would never back away from taking a decision because of either the nature of somebody’s sex or the colour of their skin. If that was a factor in Crown Prosecution, it would have to defend that. I certainly hope it is not because, as I say, these crimes are committed by and to all our communities.

Q8 Mr Winnick: Would it not be correct to say that in any other place, have the same feeling of distaste and horror at what has occurred as every decent person would? Is there any reason why we should not come to the view that the overwhelming majority of Asians in Rochdale, like whites and other groups, have the same feeling of horror and condemnation of those who have carried out these monstrous crimes?

Councillor Lambert: Absolutely, Mr Winnick. The Asian community from day one came out against these horrendous crimes and, 10 days ago, from the grassroots formed the community forum. The statements have always been clear from that community. Previous offences on child abuse within the authority within the past 12 months by a white male did not get this type of reaction. That is why I would not want badge a crime in any particular area. But, yes, the Asian community has come out extremely strongly against these crimes and described them for what they are.

Q9 Bridget Phillipson: Just before I move on, in terms of the work of the community forum you were just describing, obviously that sounds like an important exercise in making sure the community is involved, but can I ask what is the make-up of the forum? Given that these are crimes predominantly affecting young women, are you making efforts to ensure that women from the Pakistani community and the Asian communities in Rochdale are also involved in that work?

Councillor Lambert: Certainly. Although the forum was initially set up through the mosques, at the first meeting there were women from the Asian community, women from the white community and men from the white community. As a community forum, we have to involve the community. Although it came up from the grassroots from within the BME community, they were determined to widen that right across the area—and not just to Rochdale, but to Heywood and Middleton into the Pennines, so that we bring the community in. All faith groups and both sexes, but also the age ranges, were to be brought in.

Q10 Bridget Phillipson: Thank you. Just moving on, what investigations have been carried out by the council to make sure that what has happened does not ever happen again—as much as it is ever possible to do that?

Jim Taylor: I think it is a matter of record that I have instigated an independent review of matters within the council—this is independent of the Safeguarding Board review—of the thematic and multi-agency approach to this issue, which is going to look at all the cases that were handled by children’s social care. It is also going to look at licensing arrangements within the council and also legal issues, and council communication and data and information sharing with other agencies, including the police. Clearly we have made improvements in Rochdale, and part of the review is to give an independent opinion of those improvements and whether they are, indeed, better safeguarding young people.
Q11 Bridget Phillipson: My understanding from reports I have read on these dreadful cases is that there was an issue regarding a private care home. What steps are being taken there to look at how you manage your contracts with providers who provide services on behalf of the council?

Jim Taylor: A number of years ago, the Council instigated a private provider forum where we have 41 children’s homes within Rochdale, and two main providers. It sounds a great deal, but I understand that there are 67 places in the 41 homes, so they are not huge. But we do have a private provider forum that meets regularly with Greater Manchester Police and council officials to share information, discuss issues, talk about neighbourhoods and share information about young people, if that is necessary. I think that is a positive initiative, and it has been reasonably successful recently in Rochdale.

Q12 Bridget Phillipson: Has anyone been disciplined so far?

Jim Taylor: No, they have not. When the review reports, it may or may not result in further investigations that could lead to that, but at the moment that has not happened.

Q13 Bridget Phillipson: Regardless of the individuals—there may be individual issues to address—it would appear that there is a broader cultural issue, and this is about not just one council or one area in terms of believing victims of abuse, particularly excluded young people such as young people in care. Are you taking action to make sure that those young people are believed when they come forward with reports?

Jim Taylor: You quite rightly say that this is not an issue relating to the area that we represent. Until recently, I think that social services and children’s social services departments have found difficulty in dealing with these issues, as indeed have other partners involved in this case. Until 2009, the national guidance referred to this issue as child prostitution; that was changed in 2009 to child sexual exploitation. Just looking at the connotations of those differences actually shifts the emphasis from one way to another. That is only as recently as 2009. I do think that with recent guidelines that the Government have put forward, and also various educational institutions that have done research on this, children’s social care departments are now better equipped to deal with those issues along with partners in terms of transfer of information.

Q14 Mark Reckless: Mr Taylor, you say that Rochdale council has already developed different ways of working. What changes have you made?

Jim Taylor: We have a child sexual exploitation screening tool that is based on a Barnardo’s model, and this is a matter of routine for every single referral that comes into children’s social care for a child of 12 and upwards. Then, if necessary, we refer that to a team that we set up a few years ago called the sunrise team, which is a multi-agency team located at the police station in Rochdale. There are police, drug and alcohol workers, social workers, health workers, youth services and also support workers who meet regularly to discuss those cases in terms of sharing information. I mentioned the private provider forum, which is a positive initiative. Also, we have run awareness sessions for every single high school child within Rochdale. Over 9,000 young people have had awareness sessions and their parents and carers have also been given information. Clearly, because it has been high profile in the media within Rochdale, there has been heightened awareness within the community. The communities and young people have wanted information, and we have endeavoured to do that.

Q15 Mark Reckless: Clearly nothing takes away from the personal responsibility of the individuals carrying out these types of crimes, but may I perhaps explore this issue? When you have, say, 13 or 14-year-old girls who may be going out at all times of night with much older men, and coming back having consumed alcohol and so on, what steps can those responsible for those girls take to stop that happening?

Jim Taylor: If a child is in local authority care and a social worker is responsible, they are clearly either in a foster placement or in a children’s home, and the social worker would work with either the foster carers or the children’s home to make sure that the young person was adequately protected and safe. That is not always possible, and there are matters of distance at times in terms of young people who are placed out of borough, and there needs to be a clear assurance that those safeguards are in place. But, in terms of restraining young people and having secure arrangements for young people with a general placement, I would suggest that maybe legislation in terms of that might need to be at least examined.

Q16 Mark Reckless: Otherwise this is just going to carry on occurring?

Jim Taylor: I don’t think there is any substitute for good foster carers, good care in a children’s home, good social work, building trust and relationships with the young person, education, and keeping them engaged in society. With that care planning, the vast majority of young people in such a situation do not become vulnerable, because they are adequately protected and adequately cared for. I think that vulnerable young children are perhaps where all those elements don’t fit together.

Q17 Mark Reckless: But to confirm, are you also saying that to deal with this issue—to stop this happening—there needs to be legislative change to empower foster carers, managers of children’s homes, councils, social workers and so on, to prevent physically girls in this situation from going out with these men late at night, for example?

Jim Taylor: I am not saying that.

Q18 Mark Reckless: I thought you had said that in response to my previous question. Can I just clarify that?

Jim Taylor: I am clarifying with you now that I am not saying that. For a parent who has a child, there is a law of the land as to what that parent can do with that child. If the child is continuing to go out, the
parent may or may not decide to ground the child—I think that is the term—which may not involve locking a door, but the child is grounded because the child respects that decision of the parent or the individual. In many foster-caring placements across the country, a child can be grounded and the child would be grounded, and that would be absolutely fine.

Q19 Mark Reckless: But where that is not effective though—and perhaps I can address this to Mr Lambert—what do we do? Does Parliament need to assist you and those with a duty of care in doing that?

Councillor Lambert: I think Parliament can assist us and has a duty to assist us now that we are at this stage, on a national basis. It has not been this wide before. It is going to get wider in the UK in the next few months as cases come forward. Legislation? Yes. Children in care are all vulnerable. You have those children in care in local authority homes where there are guidelines and quite strong effective action. You then have children who are brought from outside—from other areas—into an area. So the whole authority takes the decision that this child is so vulnerable they have to be moved, perhaps by 100 or 200 miles. This is not an attack on the private homes—a lot of them are very good—but when a child is moved to a private home in, say, Rochdale, we have no say in the risk assessment, no part in the planning, and no part in saying that, given the vulnerability of that child, this is the wrong part of the community to place them in.

Q20 Chair: So those are the rules that have to change? At the moment, if it is a child placed from another local authority, you are basically saying you have no control over the situation—it is the home authority that deals with it. You would like to see those rules changed to give the local authority in whose area the child is placed more authority. Is that what you are saying?

Councillor Lambert: Certainly, Chair, what I would like to see is the authority that is receiving the child having a part in the risk assessment—in saying whether it is right for the vulnerability of that child to be served in the area they are being moved into.

Q21 Nicola Blackwood: Councillor Lambert, you said in the answer to the initial question that one of the primary problems was a failure of data collection. I find this a little bit difficult to understand, because surely all these children who were being exposed to these appalling experiences were going missing during that time. They were in care at this time and there were people who were supposed to be looking after them. While they were missing, somebody knew that they were missing, but where they were supposed to be and somebody should have tried to find out from those children when they came back what happened to them while they were missing. That is not a failure of data collection. That is a failure of care and a failure of responsibility on behalf of the people who were supposed to be caring for them. I would like to understand how that happened and who is taking responsibility for that.

Councillor Lambert: I would certainly say, with the identification of those questions you have just been asking, that a lot of it is based around the data itself.

Q22 Nicola Blackwood: Sorry, but that is not data.

Councillor Lambert: No, sorry, I may be explaining that slightly wrongly. If the home authority is being informed by the care home that the child is missing, and if it is receiving that information, what is it doing with it? Is it speaking to the local police or to their own social services? Are those social services then sharing that information with others? Quite often you find it has not been shared. So the home authority that sends a child to Rochdale does not have to share that information with us under current legislation.

Q23 Nicola Blackwood: So are you saying that all the children who were sexually exploited in Rochdale were from other authorities?

Councillor Lambert: No.

Q24 Nicola Blackwood: No. So there were some who were from Rochdale authority, which had direct decision making over whether they were placed in care homes in Rochdale, and yet the data and the experiences that they underwent while they were missing within Rochdale were not shared with either the local authority or the police over extended periods of time?

Councillor Lambert: Of the girls who were the victims in this case, one was in a care home. In terms of those known to social services, once the information had become available, I would suggest when the inquiry into the process is concluded, we may find evidence that there was a fear of sharing data and one of the issues—

Q25 Nicola Blackwood: A fear of sharing data between the services?

Councillor Lambert: There is always this fear that if you share data you need a protocol. I don’t know anybody who has been sued for sharing data that has saved somebody, but there is that fear there.

Q26 Nicola Blackwood: So you think there needs to be a change in attitudes about sharing data about children?

Councillor Lambert: We are trying to lead on that. Jim Taylor: I think there are some issues around a child after they become 18. In these cases, some of the young people were under 18, and then when the trial was coming along, they were over 18. So there are issues around data protection that overlap, particularly with health.

Q27 Nicola Blackwood: As I understand it, when a child is at risk, you are perfectly entitled to share the data about that child

Jim Taylor: Yes.

Q28 Nicola Blackwood: If a child has been going missing for periods of time, sharing data about that child is certainly not in any way breaching that child’s data protection rights, so at what point are we having a problem here?
Jim Taylor: The independent Safeguarding Board is undertaking a thematic review of multi-agency practice, which will include the questions you are asking, so I don’t have answers to those questions at the moment.

Q29 Nicola Blackwood: Yes, but while it is having thematic reviews and we are considering the multi-agency tiered approach to the bureaucratic problems that we are experiencing, children are being abused. I am trying to understand why individuals who are faced with children who are going missing can’t pick up a phone and phone a police station.

Jim Taylor: That is happening, and I have identified the sunrise team, where we have a collocated multi-agency team that meets regularly sharing data and information, sitting around the same desks, and discussing soft intelligence and also hard data about whether a child has been missing or otherwise. So those improvements have been made, and part of the internal review that I have asked for is regarding that is happening, and that is an improvement on the previous system.

Chair: Thank you. We will pursue this theme with Mr Michael, who has additional questions on data.

Q30 Alun Michael: Indeed, because I am rather shocked by what I have just heard. The sharing of data was an issue in the late 1990s. For that reason, a clause was inserted in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to make the law clear. The law had already been clear, but that made it explicit on the face of the Bill that the sharing of data for the purpose of preventing crime—and this is one of the most serious of crimes—is a legitimate issue of data sharing. It has to be shared properly and professionally. Could you explain to me why, Mr Taylor, you appear to be unaware of the obligation for sharing data in order to prevent crime?

Jim Taylor: I am not unaware of the obligation. I was trying to answer a question from the other side of the room. There is an obligation to share data. What I was explaining was that when a young person reaches the age of 18, there are clearly at times some issues around data protection, and some agencies feel that they need to look very carefully at the way in which they share data before they do so.

Q31 Alun Michael: There is an issue of properly managing data, but the responsibility to share data for preventing offending, particularly in this sort of sensitive area, is, I suggest to you, Mr Taylor, absolutely clear.

Jim Taylor: I would agree with that.

Q32 Alun Michael: One of the issues that seems to have emerged is the question of whether local authorities should be required to feed data to police forces that cover a wider area. Mr Lambert has already referred to the need to improve practice in terms of local authorities sharing, but would you not agree, Mr Taylor, that if that is an issue, it is an issue of getting the practice to fit with the law?

Jim Taylor: Absolutely. With regard to the terms you have clearly articulated, I do agree about the need and the requirement to do that and that is what agencies in Rochdale and across the country are doing. I particularly refer back to the current multi-agency nature of teams, whereas there used to be a silo approach to these types of activity. I think I explained earlier that practice has been updated since 2009–10, which has made it a lot easier to look at these issues.

Q33 Alun Michael: Both of you—particularly Mr Lambert, I think—have referred to the need for changes in the law. This aspect of the law, it seems to me, is absolutely clear, so could we be clear about what changes in the law are required? I am not sure from the evidence so far.

Councillor Lambert: Perhaps it is best if I go through this one. It is an issue that I have certainly been on in terms of care homes and children’s care since 2006. An early-day motion went through from Jim Dobbin and other MPs on 17 October 2006, and the issue of the care homes was first raised in the House by—

Q34 Chair: Was it drafted by you, Mr Lambert?

Councillor Lambert: The early-day motion was drafted by me, yes.

Q35 Chair: You must remind people then.

Councillor Lambert: It had been previously raised by Ian Austin MP in his maiden speech regarding Dudley, so it has been an ongoing issue.

Q36 Alun Michael: Can we be clear what the legislative change is?

Councillor Lambert: The legislative change is, I think, number one in terms of children coming from a home authority to a receiving authority.

Q37 Alun Michael: Sorry. We have already clarified that the duty of care and the duty of sharing data for the prevention of crime means that that is already something that those authorities ought to do. You have very clear legislative grounding for requiring precisely the information that you are talking about.

Councillor Lambert: Sorry, Mr Michael, I cannot see that the legislation enforces them to do that.

Q38 Alun Michael: Legislation does not enforce; legislation places obligations.

Councillor Lambert: An obligation on them. Where that has not been shared across authorities, we somehow need to toughen that up.

In terms of the data, yes, there should be that presumption in terms of preventing the crime, but beyond the child itself, when you get to those who are perpetrating the crime, we need to have that data shared in terms of licensing for taxis, fast-food takeaways and the night-time economy.

Chair: Thank you. That is very helpful. Can I just say to colleagues that as we do have other witnesses, we need brief questions and, though they are very helpful, slightly briefer answers?

Q39 Bridget Phillipson: We have established that the legislation is clear that sharing information is acceptable in order to protect children. If we accept that everyone should understand that it is fine to share information to prevent crime, is it then a question of
social work practice? Do practitioners understand their responsibilities? The law is clear, but do social workers understand that, or are people using this as something convenient to hide behind and not take action?

**Councillor Lambert:** Can I just say that Mr Taylor, whom your question is for, is new to the authority? He is a new chief executive who walked into this not four weeks ago, and I am new as council leader, but we are determined we will tackle it. In terms of whether people are hiding behind it, I think it is what I said before. There is a genuine fear of sharing the data, and what has been said today will be really helpful, because that can now be used across the services.

**Q40 Bridget Phillipson:** Is that genuine fear simply because social workers did not want to believe what they were seeing or found it just too difficult, and it was convenient to hide behind apparent legislation rather than act because that gave them a means of not dealing with an issue that is very sensitive and difficult and, frankly, about which often victims—not just child victims—are not believed?

**Jim Taylor:** I would not agree with that. I don’t think anybody would have used that as an excuse. You talk about social workers not sharing data. This is a multi-agency approach. It is not just social workers; there are police and health colleagues involved. I think the issue with the idea of being proactive with sharing stories—not just data or information—and soft intelligence about young people is that it has been difficult to join those stories together, as opposed to a lack of wishing to share data. So I don’t think that is exclusively something that social workers would have done.

**Q41 Bridget Phillipson:** It is just, for example, that with a child in care, you would have regular looked-after reviews, and you would have a social worker acting as a corporate parent for that child. Yes, of course you want all the agencies to work together, but ultimately somebody has to take responsibility and failure to share is not—

**Jim Taylor:** Which is why we are reviewing historically all the cases that we have been dealing with, and no doubt the Safeguarding Board will look at that from a multi-agency perspective as well.

**Q42 Chair:** How many cases are you reviewing?

**Jim Taylor:** Within the trial, I understand that there were 47—either witnesses or victims. There were five victims in the trial. The scope of the review, as far as I am concerned, will not only cover those 47, but look at other cases that may have been.

**Q43 Chair:** Are we talking about hundreds?

**Jim Taylor:** I couldn’t comment until the review starts, but certainly a minimum of 47.

**Chair:** A minimum of 47.

Mr Ellis has been waiting very patiently.

**Michael Ellis:** As I always do, I hope, Mr Chairman. Thank you very much—

**Chair:** Sorry, Mr Ellis. Ms Blackwood is bursting to ask a question.

**Q44 Nicola Blackwood:** Sorry, I just wanted to follow up on Bridget Phillipson’s question. In between the legislation and the culture of sharing data, there is lots and lots of guidance. I just wonder whether it is the guidance that is getting in the way, whether that is Ofsted guidance, NHS guidance, or police guidance about whether the data should be shared. Do you think that that is the case, and can you identify specific guidance that is getting in the way?

**Jim Taylor:** I wouldn’t have enough knowledge at the moment to comment on that. However, the deputy Children’s Commissioner is undertaking a review of CSA.

**Q45 Michael Ellis:** People are frightened about sharing data, aren’t they, because they fear that they will get into trouble—that they will either be prosecuted, or get into administrative or disciplinary difficulty at their place of work in some way? This is reflected in many strata of society now, is it not? Is that not your understanding of how the situation is?

**Councillor Lambert:** It would certainly be my understanding and view.

**Q46 Michael Ellis:** Do you think that is due in part to over-regulation in the past 15 years or so?

**Jim Taylor:** In the case of children’s social work, a number of reviews have taken place, including the latest one, the Munro Review, which looks to give social workers more opportunity to do social work and to reduce bureaucracy and so on. That has been well documented.

**Q47 Michael Ellis:** Going back to what the Chair raised at the beginning, there is a very valid point about those who have made suggestions about a racial aspect to this particular case—for my part, I do not accept any racial stereotyping. I think that people of all ethnicities, backgrounds and incomes commit these types of wicked offences, and I agree with the sentiments that both of you have expressed. Can I just move on to how you think that social services can work with others to recognise and support victims, and to recognise where victims might be if they are not identifying themselves, such as with schools and other health care professionals such as general practitioners? Might there be ways in which social services can expand their horizons and work with others who might come into contact with young people who might recognise some symptoms of an underlying problem that is not being disclosed by the victim?

**Jim Taylor:** I think it is about identifying risk to young people and doing so early. There are some early indicators, such as children who perhaps have poor attendance at school, that are risk factors for not only potential child sexual exploitation, but in terms of drugs and alcohol, antisocial behaviour and other aspects that young people will become involved with. I mentioned earlier that we have done an education programme in Rochdale with all the high school
children, which went down very well, and some of the independent schools in Rochdale also asked us to do that training. I understand that many of the schools are now building this into their PHSE curriculum, which will be part of the regular curriculum in terms of awareness raising and giving young people confidence to speak out.

Q48 Michael Ellis: That is excellent, but do you think that there ought to be some type of hub? I notice that CEOP have recommended that all local safeguarding children boards should have a multi-agency hub to improve the recognition of abuse in the first place and support for victims, but first of all you have to establish who the victims are and where they are. Do we need to establish these hubs to recognise victims of abuse?

Jim Taylor: I think a good example of a hub is the team that we have set up within Rochdale, which I have referred to a couple of times this morning. That is not exclusive to Rochdale; there are such hubs in other local authorities.

Q49 Michael Ellis: You would recommend that to other areas?

Jim Taylor: Yes, I would.

Councillor Lambert: I would certainly recommend that. The hub that we are building is crucial to the whole understanding and identification, to early identification and therefore to early intervention. I think part of that message has to be a wider openness with the community.

Chair: Thank you very much for giving evidence today. We may write to you again. Our inquiry is not just about Rochdale. We are looking at other areas and the terms of reference that we have agreed today are much wider, but we may come back to you to ask for further information. Thank you very much.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Chief Constable Peter Fahy and Detective Chief Superintendent Mary Doyle, Greater Manchester Police, gave evidence.

Q50 Chair: Chief Constable, thank you very much for giving evidence to us again, albeit for the first time on this issue. This must be a huge embarrassment to the Greater Manchester Police force. In response to the cases over the past few years, this first came to your attention four years ago. I think your response or that of your Assistant Chief Constable was, “Things could have been done better”.

Chief Constable Fahy: I think we have a very good record in Greater Manchester Police in dealing with vulnerable victims. We have long had operations against things like child prostitution—Operation Messenger in places like Oldham. We have almost eliminated street prostitution from Greater Manchester. We are angry that certain individuals got away with offending longer than we would have liked.

Q51 Chair: But you are not angry with your own organisation? Forty-seven girls who were the vulnerable victims of gangs over a period of four years had come to the police to complain and your response was, “We could have done things better.” Lives have been ruined and there seems to be no anger directed at the police officers who have dealt with this case. I find that extraordinary.

Chief Constable Fahy: The thing I would point out is that the officers have investigated this case and brought it to a conviction, and they are investigating lots of other cases. We have said there are things we can learn. We had a lot of focus on victims at the time, and the issue about this case, which has not come out, is the vulnerability of the witnesses—they all tend to be damaged young people. They have lots of things in their background that can be exploited by the court system.

Q52 Chair: But surely they were damaged further by the failure of the police to take action. What I find is that there does not seem to be any contrition before this Committee today over the way in which these matters were handled. You have groups of men who were exploiting young girls over a period of four years until the very long and large articles in The Times, written by Mr Norfolk, brought this to the attention of the public. This seemed to have been just drifting on. We don’t seem to look at our system and see what we did wrong.

Chief Constable Fahy: As I say, I think the fact is that we very quickly got on with the investigations and convicted people in a very difficult case. We are sorry that it took us that long, but what I would say is that you have to put that in the context of the huge amount of work that we are doing as a force and the difficult situation that police officers and prosecutors are often put in, in terms of the credibility of individual witnesses. What happened, particularly at the beginning of this case, was that it was investigated, but a view was taken by the CPS that the victim would not be credible in the court system. I have some sympathy with those prosecutors, because we know even from this case the way in which some of the witnesses were treated by the court system. If your house is burgled, you will not be asked in court if it was your fault because you left the back door open or you left a laptop on the table, but the victims in those sorts of cases—

Q53 Chair: But you can’t possibly compare what happened to these girls to a stolen laptop, surely?

Chief Constable Fahy: No. What I am saying, Chairman, is that the victims in the case—and in all these types of cases; indeed, in all cases of sexual violence against women—are put through a fairly horrendous experience in the court system. Individual prosecutors and police officers, when considering whether to take a case forward, very much have in mind whether this young person is going to be further damaged by appearing as a witness and possibly then
12 June 2012  Chief Constable Peter Fahy and Detective Chief Superintendent Mary Doyle

feeling they have not been believed by the court system.

Q54 Chair: It is said that the reason why you did not take action was partly because of the race and heritage of the people involved, and that Greater Manchester Police, which has a large number of ethnic minorities living within its area—not just in Rochdale but in other areas—thus feared the reaction of the communities. You could therefore have been much tougher at dealing with this, but you decided not to because of the community tensions that could arise.

Chief Constable Fahy: No, I completely reject that, Chairman. You have questioned me at this Committee about things like stop and search figures and arrest figures, which disproportionately feature Asian and black people. There is no evidence that we have that form of political correctness. I would say that we were focusing so much on victims that perhaps we did not make the links with some of the offenders and their offending behaviour, sometimes across boundaries. We are a lot better at that, but I do come back to the fact that I do not think that what has come out in these sorts of cases is the really difficult situation of damaged children going into the court system and the way they will be treated.

Q55 Chair: Do you disagree with the former Home Secretary, Jack Straw, who said, talking about people of Pakistani heritage, that they “see these young women, white girls who are vulnerable, some of them in care…who they think are easy meat”? The Prime Minister said, “There are particular problems in particular communities. We need to face up to these problems and deal with them”. Baroness Warsi, who is herself of Pakistani origin, said “Some Pakistani men see white girls as fair game”. The Chief Crown Prosecutor for the north-west, Nazir Afzal, said, “The fact that the perpetrators were Asian and the victims were not should not pass unnoticed”. Do you agree with any of these people?

Chief Constable Fahy: What I am saying is that if there is a feeling that there was a reluctance of police action, that was not because of any feeling of fear about community tensions or political correctness. We have said in this type of offending, street grooming, that Asian men do feature disproportionately, but we would also say that has to be put in the context of a whole range of different sexual offences, and violence against women would sadly feature in all communities.

Q56 Chair: Are you saying that their race would be a factor?

Chief Constable Fahy: We are saying that if you look at this type of offence, Asian men feature disproportionately, but I do not think that that necessarily means that race of itself was a factor or culture was a factor. It is a very complex issue.

Q57 Chair: Overall, for those in the Greater Manchester area, I think you gave us figures that only 5% of those on its convicted sex offenders register were Asian males. These are the figures that you have released.

Chief Constable Fahy: That is right.

Q58 Chair: What you saying is that in these particular cases, it was a factor, but maybe not in others—or what are you saying?

Chief Constable Fahy: No, we are saying that there is a whole range of sexual offences and sexual offending. There is grooming on the internet and there are people who clearly rape strangers, and therefore there is a whole range of different offenders on the sexual offenders register. Asian men do not feature disproportionately but, on the other hand, if we look at this particular type of offending around grooming children on the streets, Asian men do feature disproportionately.

Q59 Chair: DCS Doyle, please feel free to interrupt your Chief Constable whenever you want if you have anything to say. Please do not feel because he is here and we are asking him questions that you don’t have anything to say. You may contribute in any way you like.

Detective Chief Superintendent Doyle: I was about to add that we have taken the view very publicly from the start that there are sections or parts of our community that seem to have problems and issues around child sexual exploitation and the willingness to exploit the vulnerable, but that is not exclusively one of their issues. It is much broader than that. It is quite unhelpful for us when we get hung up on race and culture and not the real aspects and issues of it: men and women who abuse vulnerability both in children and adults.

Q60 Chair: You were involved in the Anuj Bidve case and have been praised by a lot of people for the way in which you found and prosecuted the person responsible. Do you think that things could have been better, as the Chief Constable has said, and that having looked at these cases, with your experience in these matters, there ought to have been earlier prosecutions?

Detective Chief Superintendent Doyle: I think we accept that lessons have been learned, as we have said from a very early point. One of the issues was perhaps one of geography. The collocation you heard Mr Taylor and Mr Lambert allude to earlier of the multi-agency team breaks down some of the barriers and improves not only information and intelligence sharing, but the opportunity of professional challenge. We accept that that perhaps was lacking in the earlier case, when I would have expected to challenge the CPS and issue a decision, but the officer took a view—

Q61 Chair: That didn’t happen?

Detective Chief Superintendent Doyle: That didn’t happen.

Q62 Chair: Looking back again, you wanted to see the prosecutions? Having looked at the papers, you think this should have been challenged?

Detective Chief Superintendent Doyle: Yes. If I had been in that position at the time, I certainly would have felt that a challenge would have been appropriate.
Q63 Mr Winnick: Chief Constable, the accusation made against the police force is quite clear, namely that the allegations were originally not taken at all seriously. Do you challenge that?

Chief Constable Fahy: No, we do know that the allegations were taken seriously, but it is about the credibility of individual witness. What has not come forward in almost all these cases is the fact that sadly, in a lot of cases of sexual offences involving women, the system will try to exploit weaknesses. It will exploit differences in the evidence. It will exploit the facts. You have heard—I still hear commentators talking about it—that women are asking for it because they dress in a particular way. It is those sorts of features, so, as I said, an officer or a prosecutor agonises about how that young person is going to be treated. As Mary Doyle has said, however, in this case, when a prosecutor took a decision that the witness would not be credible in the court system, that should have been challenged and we should have sought another view.

Q64 Mr Winnick: When the first victim was arrested for smashing glass at an Indian restaurant in August 2008, she made allegations about grooming. On video, Chief Constable, it was shown that the police officer who was conducting the interview let out a loud yawn before continuing his questions. The obvious implication was that the officer thought this young female was simply making it all up, so why take it seriously?

Chief Constable Fahy: I think we do know from the papers that the recommendation that went to the Crown Prosecution Service was that there should have been a prosecution and that the victim was believed. Clearly, yawning in an interview is unacceptable in terms of the way we treat victims, but what we do know is that the victim was believed. It is often an issue for the police officers that are dealing with a victim. They believe the victim and they believe that the offences occurred, but when that is in hard evidence for the Crown Prosecution Service, it takes an independent view and believes that the court system and the jury will not believe this particular victim.

Chair: Can we move on after this last question?

Q65 Mr Winnick: Yes. An apology has been given on behalf of the Greater Manchester force. I think it was given, if not by yourself, by Assistant Chief Constable Steve Heywood—the same name as the community. In giving that apology, it is recognised that the police force did not do what they should have been doing.

Chief Constable Fahy: I think you heard from Mary Doyle that we should have challenged the original decision, but the best way we can show our contrition is through the way in which we are now investigating these offences, the number of cases under investigation and the number of cases that are now pending trial.

Q66 Bridget Phillipson: Finally, on the issue of whether the victim will be believed and are credible—you just said that that decision should have been challenged further with the CPS—is it not sometimes the case that the CPS is too cautious in assuming that the victim may not be credible, whereas if put before a jury, there may be a different conclusion? Sometimes, although it is well intentioned in seeking to protect an already vulnerable person, it can further damage that person if they do not have the opportunity to see their case go to court?

Chief Constable Fahy: Absolutely, but I think, as you say, it is well intentioned and the prosecutor has this awful dilemma. When you already have a damaged young person, are you going to put them in the court system when they may be further damaged by the experience? I think the key issue here that we have to look at is the way in which the court system deals with all victims of sexual violence.

Q67 Bridget Phillipson: The complaints I have sometimes seen are not just that it does not go to court because of the credibility of the victim, but that is never fully discussed with the victim, meaning that they do not have the opportunity to say, “I know I am going to be attacked and I know it is going to be very difficult, but I want that opportunity regardless.” It can live with them for the rest of their lives if they have not had that opportunity to see the case in court, even if it ultimately goes nowhere.

Chief Constable Fahy: I would agree with that, but if the victim is a child, that becomes a more difficult decision in terms of whether the prosecution and the police officer understand the court system and what that person might have to go through more than the young person themselves.

Q68 Nicola Blackwood: We are talking here about the failure of the police to investigate the case that walked in your door and said, “I am a victim,” or failure to believe that victim initially, and then a failure by the CPS. But the problem with victims of child sexual exploitation is that a lot of them are groomed from a very young age—about 11 or 12—and most of them don’t really believe that they are victims because they think they are engaging in being an adult or something like that. They go missing, they come back, they do not disclose what is going on and they do not tell anyone what is going on, and they are engaging in wildly risky behaviours and being abused in the most appalling way. How exactly are you going to train your officers to investigate those kinds of victims if you are not getting it right on investigating victims who do disclose?

Chief Constable Fahy: I think the important thing is that we have 400 officers constantly working on issues around children abuse, domestic violence and rape. We have huge numbers of investigations every year. We deal with them very professionally. We have to make very complex investigations, often involving members of family and relatives—those sorts of issues. You are absolutely right that part of the difficulty of the system is accepting that although a young person is, on the face of it, consenting to certain behaviour and to being in a relationship because that adds to their self-worth, that still means they are a victim and the system should take that forward. I think officers are very aware of this issue and the difficulty.
They work very closely with social workers and charities such as Barnardo’s absolutely to understand that, but it is then how you translate that into evidence in the court system in a way meaning that you have some confidence that a jury will believe that. Mary, do you want to say anything more?  

Detective Chief Superintendent Doyle: Can I just add that it is about building trust and rapport, and trying to understand it from your young person’s point of view? We have certainly learnt though the Rochdale case, with the help of people such as Sheila Taylor of the National Working Group, that it is about investing time in these young people, listening to them and not forcing them to do things they do not want to do. It is not forcing them to make snap decisions, and allowing a relationship to form that is a little bit like the relationship that often forms in homicide between a family liaison officer and a victim’s family. This is having a dedicated, bespoke contact officer, preferably specially trained in sexual offences, who spends time with and invests time in that young person. What we found was that people who were initially unwilling to see themselves as victims, after working with the police, the local authority and the third sector—Barnardo’s in particular—were more willing to, or would, become better at understanding their situation and the riskiness of their behaviours. It requires a considerable investment and that is something that GMP has done in terms of the multi-agency teams—there is not just a multi-agency team at Rochdale. We will invest time in those victims to allow them to go through the decision-making process and to understand what is happening to them.

Q69 Michael Ellis: In the time before I was a Member of Parliament, I was a barrister and I have prosecuted child abuse cases. For my part, I think that police officers are very decent and caring people who are motivated, as one would expect, to get evil people off the streets. That is what I think the vast majority of police officers go into policing to do, and that was certainly my experience as a barrister in criminal courts. I am particularly interested, Chief Constable, in your comments that seem to be seeking to blame the court system on a failure here, so I want to explore that a bit more if I may. Clearly, you appreciate that it is the duty of the Crown Prosecution Service—whether it be a shoplifting case, a murder case or anything in between—to satisfy itself that two criteria are met before any prosecution is launched. It has to be satisfied, first, that there is a realistic prospect of conviction and, secondly, that it is in the public interest to pursue the prosecution. Where it is not satisfied that there is a realistic prospect of conviction, is it your position that you would seek to challenge that legal analysis and say that in your view and the view of your officers there is a realistic prospect of conviction? Do you think that the Crown Prosecution Service should maintain that as a criterion? Is the alternative not of some concern—that prosecutions will be launched that will necessarily fail and that will therefore have a public cost implication in addition to, of course, the distress for witnesses and others who

will go through the proceedings of a trial, potentially to no avail?

Chief Constable Fahy: I think it is your second point. I would not say it is the cost issue. What you have articulated there is the huge dilemma should prosecutions fail, but I would say that the fundamental issue is the way in which victims of sexual offences are treated in the court system compared with the way in which victims of burglary, for instance, are not. I think that is at the heart of this issue, and at the heart of some of the difficult issues about the investigation of rape. Of course, the court system does not sit in isolation. It sits in the context of what is sometimes the attitude in the wider society: women, just because they dress in a particular way, are asking for it.  

Q70 Michael Ellis: You use that as an example. I do not think questions like that would be permitted by a judge now in the courts of law, but—

Chief Constable Fahy: They know that the jury may well have those thoughts because those thoughts are often articulated in the media and elsewhere. It is a wider issue of the societal attitude. I am not blaming the court system, but I am saying that we all need to understand the real difficulties of investigating and prosecuting these sorts of offences, and that we all have a wider responsibility to take violence against women more seriously.

Q71 Michael Ellis: Yes. I absolutely agree with the need to do that. I am just interested in an attempt, I think—correct me if I am wrong—by you to transfer responsibility and blame to the legal process, whereas in fact, of course, it is the responsibility of the police to investigate these offences and take them seriously when complaints are made by victims.

Chief Constable Fahy: We totally accept that responsibility. As I have just said, I am not really blaming the court system as such. It is wider societal attitudes. When you look at the awful toll of things like domestic violence and the number of women who are killed by people known to them, we have to say that the system, on the whole, is still not sufficiently protecting women—that is the point I am trying to make.

Q72 Alun Michael: You referred specifically to getting to the point of prosecution and the difficulty of getting a case to court. Would you accept that the first purpose of the police is to prevent offending and reoffending and that, in that sense, prosecution is a means to an end, rather than the end in itself?

Chief Constable Fahy: Yes.

Q73 Alun Michael: Was there a point in the four years after these cases had started to come to your attention that a different approach—accepting that the avenue of prosecution was going to be problematic—was considered as something that the police, the local authority and others ought to invest time and effort in?

Chief Constable Fahy: I think you are pointing to a much wider issue that we would raise, which I think was explored a little bit by our colleagues from Rochdale, which is just about this whole issue about
the care system and what we call the problem of runaways.

Q74 Alun Michael: The question I am asking is: was there a point when you said, “Prosecution is not the only instrument for dealing with these issues. We need strategically to take a different approach,” because of the difficulties you have outlined in getting it, rightly or wrongly, pursued through the courts?

Chief Constable Fahy: I think we did, and we always will try to work on that child welfare issue, but it comes up against the actual tactics that are available to social workers and the police to try to dissuade this. I think there is a really difficult point about whether, at the point of crisis, social workers and care workers can restrain young people who they believe are vulnerable. I understand that this is a difficult issue, and I do not want to turn children’s homes into prisons, but police officers see situations daily where youngsters are just regularly going missing from care, but they are vulnerable—

Q75 Alun Michael: Yes, but what about an approach that is more proactive in terms of the adult participants.

Chief Constable Fahy: I think you can always try that and there is a lot of work trying to build relationships.

Q76 Alun Michael: Was it tried?

Detective Chief Superintendent Doyle: It has been.

Chief Constable Fahy: It was tried, yes.

Detective Chief Superintendent Doyle: We have used proactive tactics for a number of years, from 2006 across the Protect team in the city, and Messenger in Oldham in terms of using some of the licensing legislation around some of the locations and the people that might be involved. We have also used the legislation in terms of abduction notices, which is great if the young person is under 14. There are proactive opportunities that we have identified and taken, and that we are building up. We are building around Rochdale and have been since 2010 when this came to light.

Q77 Alun Michael: I would like to pursue this further but I know our time is limited. I think it would be very useful to have a note of the means that were considered other than the prosecution role, because this is a constant—

Chair: Mr Michael’s suggestion is very helpful.

Chief Constable Fahy: We will. I want to make the point, though, that whatever the long-term aims are and whatever good work has been done in the background, at the point of crisis when the care worker or social worker sees that the young person wants to go out and knows that they are going to be either riding in a stolen car or mixing with bad people, there is not a system in place at the moment that allows that care worker—

Q78 Alun Michael: I understand that. The point is that if you have this major problem, which has been identified over a number of years—you have a problem in relation to the evidential aspects for prosecution; you have a problem with youngsters going out—it is clear then that a different strategic approach is needed, is it not?

Chief Constable Fahy: Yes, and we can certainly give you evidence of all those things.

Q79 Mark Reckless: Chief Constable, I was perplexed by Mr Ellis’s line of questioning. He seems to suggest that you were trying to shift the blame to the courts or legal system. I wonder if I can clarify the factual matrix here. Is it the case that Greater Manchester police forwarded a file to the CPS recommending prosecution and that the CPS refused to prosecute, and yet it is Greater Manchester Police who have apologised?

Chief Constable Fahy: Yes, because we think—

Chair: Is that the scenario? Is that what happened?

Chief Constable Fahy: That is the basic scenario, but on the other hand we do feel that our officer and the Detective Inspector involved should have challenged the CPS as to why it was not prosecuting the case, and there is a general issue that we did not do enough to try to link the different offenders and say, “Was there another way of coming at this?”

Q80 Mark Reckless: Who at the CPS was responsible for this decision not to prosecute, and have they been held accountable for that?

Chief Constable Fahy: I think the Chief Prosecutor for the north-west has apologised on behalf of the CPS for the actions—

Chair: We will be having the Chief Crown Prosecutor for the north-west come to give evidence to us. Colleagues, we do have two other witnesses.

Q81 Mr Winnick: I want to be quite clear about a point that my colleagues have raised, including Mr Reckless just a moment ago. The CPS decided not to prosecute—that is not in doubt. It was the wrong decision and it was highly regrettable, am I not right, Chief Constable, that the fact remains that following that CPS decision, the Manchester Police dropped all further investigations into a number of similar allegations—yes or no?

Detective Chief Superintendent Doyle: I cannot say in all honesty whether— I do not think all of them were dropped, but I don’t think they got to a positive point of going back before the CPS.

Q82 Chair: Sorry, is that a yes or no? That was a bit vague. Were the other cases dropped, or were they not dropped?

Detective Chief Superintendent Doyle: They were not dropped immediately as a result. We did not just go, “Stop investigating.” We continued to investigate—

Chair: But they were dropped eventually.

DCS Doyle:—but we had had a threshold that we did not think we could get past.

Q83 Mr Winnick: I will put this as my final question to the two witnesses before us. Is it accepted that that was wrong, and that there should have been more diligence in investigating them?

Detective Chief Superintendent Doyle: Yes.
Q84 Mr Winnick: There is no doubt you accept that entirely?
Detective Chief Superintendent Doyle: Absolutely.
Mr Winnick: Thank you very much.

Q85 Chair: Have you taken steps to make sure that this does not happen again?
Detective Chief Superintendent Doyle: Absolutely.

Q86 Alun Michael: Is the fact that there is not an independent complaints process in relation to the Crown Prosecution Service, whereas there is in relation to the police, an issue in regard to some of the difficult decisions that need to be challenged?
Chief Constable Fahy: I don’t know, really. For us, it is about making sure that senior detectives do challenge decisions that investigators do not agree with and that they have enough confidence to do that. I think that is the issue that we addressed, and it is us having a good relationship with the Crown Prosecution Service, and it understanding issues like child sexual exploitation and the dynamics that we face.

Q87 Alun Michael: But at the end of the day, if the relationships don’t result in a change, there is nowhere you can go in terms of a complaint.
Chief Constable Fahy: No, you are absolutely right. Its decision is final, yes.

Q88 Bridget Phillipson: I agree with Alun Michael’s point about some kind of independent oversight of the CPS in terms of a complaints mechanism, but is part of the problem often the way in which these decisions are communicated to victims, and that often there is not a great deal of explanation given either by the police or the CPS as to why cases are not being taken forward? Therefore, without seeking even to complain, they don’t understand why their case is not proceeding?
Detective Chief Superintendent Doyle: I think that is possibly the case and I don’t think it is out of any malice. I think, again, it is well intentioned—trying to avoid making your victim feel worse than they already do. I now proactively encourage victims to challenge CPS decision making and to avail themselves of the opportunity of a face-to-face meeting, rightly or wrongly. I think it is absolutely right, it is their right, and asking the challenging questions will continue.

Q89 Nicola Blackwood: Obviously, there are two sides to a prosecution. One is the credibility of the victim and the other is the credibility of the offender. I wonder if you have learned from the lessons of Lancashire, which I understand is considered to operate some best practice in the way in which it uses section 2 abduction notices to establish a record of bad character on the part of the perpetrator so that claims that they did not know that the victim was under 16 and so on can be undermined by the prosecutor. Do you use that practice in Greater Manchester, and have you done so in this case, in particular?
Detective Chief Superintendent Doyle: We do use it in Greater Manchester. It is very effective, particularly when your victim tells the potential perpetrators that they are in fact 16 or 18, which does happen on a number of occasions. So, yes, we do use the abduction warning notices that make it very clear how old that alleged victim is. We did not use it initially in this case. However, as the case was then reinvestigated and has moved on, we have used abduction warning notices in it. I am looking for it to be rolled out across all the local authority areas within Greater Manchester, most of which now have a multi-agency partnership and properly collocated team of one form or another directly to tackle CSE. It is to improve or to share the good practice and learning that we have learned out of this and out of previous cases with Messenger and Operation Protect in the city. But, yes, we use abduction warning notices frequently.

Q90 Nicola Blackwood: What other available tools are particularly effective to establish bad character or to achieve outcomes in these cases?
Detective Chief Superintendent Doyle: The effective use and sharing of intelligence, as you know, can be used within the bad character as well. We need to improve the way we record our intelligence, particularly intelligence that comes in from our partner agencies, so that we can use it for subsequent bad character. I think we need our officers to be thinking more about this as if they were approaching a homicide, if you see what I mean.
Nicola Blackwood: Not really.

Q91 Chair: Prior to this, and prior to the publicity that has been received, do you feel that the attitude has not been to treat this type of case with the seriousness that you clearly believe it deserves?

DCS Doyle: To give it the gravitas—the seriousness—that this type of offending deserves, and to start thinking of all those tools that you ordinarily would not use for a lower-level crime or a volume crime.

Q92 Nicola Blackwood: Do you think that your officers were shocked by the number of victims who were involved in this case when it became clear?

DCS Doyle: They were absolutely horrified. I think it is fair to say that not only the officers, but the GMP as a whole, were absolutely horrified by it.

Q93 Chair: Finally, Chief Constable, on another matter, some of us were surprised that you did not apply to become the Chief Inspector of Police when the post was advertised. In principle, is there any objection to a non-police officer being appointed to that post? I am not asking you to comment on the candidate, just the principle.
Chief Constable Fahy: No. I personally don’t, but I think we need to see it in the light of all the other changes. I think this would give a big opportunity to the new police professional body and to the voice of police professionalism. I don’t think you can see this just in isolation. I think there are arguments both ways but, as you have heard, I have plenty to do in Greater Manchester.

Q94 Chair: Indeed. In respect of the other matters that you have given evidence to us about before concerning the reductions and the changes in Greater Manchester, are they going according to your plan?

Chief Constable Fahy: Yes, they are. They are very painful for all the people involved—they are big changes—but the force continues to reduce crime and to deal with all sorts of difficult challenges, because whatever their personal concerns, individual officers and members of staff are putting the public first.

Chair: Can I again commend your force on the way in which you took action on the Bidve case? I think everyone concerned was delighted with the fact that the person was apprehended, and the trial is due to start very shortly, so well done. Thank you very much for coming today; we are most grateful.

**Examination of Witness**

Witness: Peter Davies, Chief Executive, Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre, gave evidence.

Q95 Chair: But you heard what Mary Doyle said.

Peter Davies: Yes, they are. They are very effective and I think there are aspects of the culture that will need to change, not just within the police service but wider within the whole array of local partners whose responsibility it is to protect the public, and particularly vulnerable children. That is something we highlighted very clearly last year in the publication of our report.

Q97 Chair: Yes. We will come on to your report in a second. Tell me some practical things that could be done—the cultural shift that Mary Doyle referred to.

Peter Davies: Okay, quick examples: No. 1, share data better between the agencies and be far more open with information about individuals who are potential victims; No. 2, be smarter at identifying the risk factors for what they are and looking beyond the obvious, which may appear to be petty or minor, to what lies behind it, which may be extremely serious; No. 3, get used to communicating about issues like this collectively through vehicles such as multi-agency safeguarding hubs, have a common way of assessing the risk and a common agreed teamwork-based approach to tackling the problems; and finally—if you want a short list—remember it is about focusing on the victims first and about prevention and protecting victims. Although it is technically difficult to secure successful prosecutions, as you have just heard, that is far less of an outcome than preventing the harm in the first place or rescuing a child from the kind of horrific harm that has been done in these and many other cases.

Q99 Chair: Some of the Committee have been in to see the excellent work of CEOP. I would have thought that CEOP is best placed to have a co-ordination role on these issues, but we have heard that the Rochdale cases have gone on for four years. When did you all have sight of what was happening there?

Peter Davies: We are a small centre with, as you know, quite a complex mission. We have taken more of an investment into this particular specific area of child sexual exploitation over the last 18 months, producing the report I referred to and following up with a number of other events. I think this is one example where lodging ourselves within the National Crime Agency, which has an overall public protection responsibility and the ability to co-ordinate resources on a national scale, will make us significantly more influential, and rightly so, in managing this. At the present time, co-ordinating the work of 43 police forces in England and Wales alone and the others in Northern Ireland and Scotland and the work of other partners is a matter of negotiation and influencing rather than direction.

Q100 Chair: At the moment it is still not happening. We support your being in the NCA, as you know.

Peter Davies: Of course.

Chair: But our concern is a lot of the experience has built up in Rochdale. We have heard from the chief executive and the leader, and from the Chief Constable. It would be a pity if new networks had to be formed when there is an organisation that has a certain degree of expertise. We know it is online stuff that you are super-good at, but there is not any co-ordination happening at the moment, is there?

Peter Davies: No, forgive me if my previous answer suggested there wasn’t any co-ordination. Some of the work we are doing is bringing together practitioners. We had two colleagues from Greater Manchester at an event we held in the week before last, on 29 May,
precisely on this issue—a revisit on the issue. We train practitioners; we share good practice. We, along with colleagues in other parts of SOCA, offer specialist support to forces so that they can do a more expert job of this when they may have not dealt with it before. There is a whole variety of co-ordination, good practice sharing and specialist support currently going on. We have a lead role in that, but we are a small organisation with, as you say, a fairly hefty investment in online work as well. The intelligent way to tackle this is to work with other people and understand how many other people are out there with whom we can work in partnership. But there is significant progress in the last 18 months.

Q101 Chair: But officers in Derby who perhaps do not read The Times and did not know about all this—I am not suggesting that nobody reads The Times in Derby—are able to ring you up and say, “By the way, we have heard about this Rochdale case. Is there any good practice that you can tell us about that would help us deal with this issue?”

Peter Davies: Yes. Of course, Derbyshire was for some people the starting point with Operation Retriever. Any force in the country can approach CEOP, or people with whom we work in the UK Human Trafficking Centre, and seek specialist support and advice and get it from us. That is available and we are delivering front-line training and trained specialist practitioners as we speak.

Q102 Chair: Now two quick answers, if I may, before we move on to other members of the Committee, because we will cover your report in more detail. In terms of the number of recommendations that you made and those that have been implemented, how many of the recommendations you made in June 2011 have now been implemented to your satisfaction?

Peter Davies: These fell into certain groups, and if I may just refer to them—I know you want a brief answer, but it is quite hard to answer these briefly. First, about victims, there is a clear intention in the ministerial action plan on CSE to improve the lot of victims in terms of getting front-line support, identification of risk factors and also the experience in court when prosecutions get to that point. In terms of multi-agency working and front-line services, I detect a sea change in awareness and commitment to tackling CSE among local safeguarding children boards, but one can’t be entirely happy until they have all done the steps recommended in the 2009 guidance. We have discussions with CPS, and I know they take place locally, about how to provide specialist prosecution awareness at every stage, and early support from a prosecutor in the investigation is best practice here. That is improving. In terms of data recording, I think that is still a major challenge. If we send out for data to police forces, it is very difficult to get good quality data back because it is not kept in a nice, easily accessible repository. That is within the police service; multiply that several times by the other key agencies who are involved in this kind of work. There is still work to do there. Across the board, on areas for development, I think that data recording is the area where there is the biggest gap between what we recommended and what is currently taking place.

Q103 Chair: You are talking about intention, awareness, good practice and so on, but I get the feeling—you are being very careful with your language when you talk about challenges—that it is not to your satisfaction and that more does need to be done very rapidly because, of course, the victim—the child—can’t wait for reviews, intentions and awareness. They need help now. If you were marking it all out of 10, what would you give them?

Peter Davies: Who am I marking?

Chair: Those who are supposed to implement.

Peter Davies: If I am marking the whole public sector’s ability to protect children in this area, I would probably give it a five out of 10—six out of 10 for effort; four out of 10 for delivery. That is an improvement on where I would have marked it last year, but you can’t be responsible for child protection in the UK without being painfully aware of the gap between what is provided and what is needed. As you know better than most people, child sexual abuse and exploitation is massively under-recorded, under-reported and not well enough understood. It is a simple fact of everyday life that there is a huge gap. My words are probably chosen to bridge that gap. It is very easy to be critical of practitioners who are dealing with large caseloads.

Q104 Chair: No, but you have been very helpful to the Committee. You have given us a good indication. Can I ask you finally about the issue of race and ethnicity which, of course, has been a feature of the discussions that have been going on? There is one camp, Jack Straw, the Prime Minister—Well, it is not the Prime Minister to that extent, but Jack Straw, Baroness Warsi and others say the fact that they are Asian perpetrators is an issue. There is the other camp from whom we have heard today—the chief executive of Rochdale, the leader of the council and the Chief Constable—who do not say it is a dominant issue. What is your view on this? Is it a distraction or is it an issue?

Peter Davies: I think the point is that it is an issue, but not the issue. You can’t look at these cases and see the prevalence in some gangs and groups of certain types of ethnicity, either among the victims or among the offenders, without being struck by it and asking what that means and how that can be prevented. However, I can also tell you that it is not the issue. When you look behind these groups, you find characteristics shared in common by these offenders and those of completely different paedophile groups. This is about lack of empathy for the victim, justifying it on the basis that the victim asked for it or enjoyed it, the pack mentality and the targeting of victims of opportunity. All these things are common to paedophile groups in the UK, regardless of their ethnicity.

Q105 Chair: So it is a factor?

Peter Davies: In particular communities it may be a factor, but one of the things we must be very careful to do is not to take those cases that we know about
and extrapolate across the rest of the UK and assume everything is like that because, apart from anything else, the risk then is that victims have a very narrow view about who the risk comes from, which is not justified, and that in tackling one particular manifestation or one label of this kind of offending, we miss the far deeper, more comprehensive challenge that actually confronts us.

Q106 Chair: Are you saying that it might even lull the victims into a sense that they may not see others who are involved as potential perpetrators?

Peter Davies: There is no doubt. In some parts of the country—I think you will hear this from your next witness—there are threats posed to children by people of all kinds of ethnicity. If the whole story becomes that you have to watch out for what are loosely labelled as British Asians or British Pakistani men, you are possibly blinding potential victims or victims to the risk that is presented by other people. Again, if you are in the business of child protection, you need to be very careful of not doing that.

Q107 Bridget Phillipson: In terms of the sexual exploitation of children online, is that a crime that you think is on the increase?

Peter Davies: Yes, I am afraid it is. We are due to launch a thematic assessment on precisely this issue on Thursday this week. Some of the disturbing conclusions that we come to are that the apparent age of victims in images in circulation is lower, that the seriousness of the abuse that is depicted in the images is increasing, and there are still many, many people in the UK, as there are around the world, who have—“an interest” is the wrong phrase—a perverse habit of accessing, sharing and trading child abuse images. These are scenes of crime, every single one of them. There are opportunities to investigate. There are opportunities to identify and rescue victims. It is still a very serious issue and it is on the increase.

Q108 Bridget Phillipson: In terms of the so-called grooming of children and young people, do you think that is more prevalent in terms of the internet or on-street grooming?

Peter Davies: I think numerically it is more prevalent on the internet. The number of people who are internet offenders of a level that I would want CEOP to be interested in is far in excess of those involved in what is loosely called street grooming. The internet amplifies, multiplies, distorts and normalises certain types of activity. For fairly obvious reasons, it is possible for a paedophile to groom many, many children over the internet—far more than they could possibly do in a local offline setting—so I think the numbers are much higher.

Q109 Bridget Phillipson: I was interested in your comments about making sure that people understand it is not just one particular type of person or group of people that might carry out child abuse so that victims are not blind to the risks that could be posed by others. Obviously, I accept that on-street grooming and internet offences—whether grooming or the sharing of the abuse of children—is appalling and, as you said, a growing problem in some ways. Do you think that the focus on that might blind victims or wider society to the risks that can often be faced by children either at home or by people that are known to them, and the fact that it is not just strangers or people—

Peter Davies: You are absolutely right to raise that. All the research suggests that the majority of child sexual abuse is committed in a familial setting. In terms of tackling the overall issue, we must still retain a focus on the familial setting. Clearly, CEOP specialises in certain forms of child sexual exploitation, but we want to tackle the whole problem. I think the online area is a development where there is a need for specialist work, and that is what we do. The street grooming, as some people call it—the group or gang-associated child sexual exploitation—is another area where the awareness is not enough. But you are absolutely right; the overall context is that the majority of child sexual abuse, which is suffered by about one in 20 children under the age of 16, takes place in a familial setting.

Q110 Bridget Phillipson: My concern is that it is sometimes easier to focus on these kinds of types of abuse. Dreadful though they are, it is sometimes easier to understand that a stranger might abuse a child. It is sometimes harder to understand that perhaps a father or a trusted family friend might abuse their own child or a known child.

Peter Davies: You are absolutely right. I agree with you. I think the observation I make is that the online world presents an opportunity to identify people who are abusing in a familial setting as well, but the overall picture of child sexual abuse in the UK is predominantly familial. I think the existence of a place like CEOP and the focus on group and gang-associated CSE is evidence of where the awareness is less high and where there may be a bigger gap between what is provided and what is needed. But we do need to keep that sense of proportion.

Q111 Nicola Blackwood: Mr Davies, we have spoken a little about the problem that the excessive focus on ethnicity might blind victims to risk, but surely one of the problems that has become evident over the last little while has been the blindness of law enforcement, social services and other service providers to the risk factors that victims are exposed to, and also to who the perpetrators are. Do you think that they are exposed to similar risks of blindness by this focus on ethnicity? Secondly, what work is CEOP doing to try to give them a better understanding of the risk factors that are involved in this issue?

Peter Davies: On the first issue, I am not conscious that there is a concern about law enforcement or the other protective services zoning in solely on one particular manifestation of this. Frankly, as a police officer of over 26 years’ service, I think the service long ago left behind the idea of typecasting certain types of offences and offenders. I think the evidence you heard from Peter Fahy and Mary Doyle will have illustrated the depth of understanding you get, so I don’t sense that that is an issue.
On the second issue, yes, a variety of agencies have been not deliberately blind to some risk factors, but perhaps not well enough aware or well enough informed. One of the things that we are doing at the moment is waiting eagerly for the deputy Children’s Commissioner’s report, which is coming out very shortly. When that identifies, as I believe it will, certain really telling risk factors that are indicative of a wider problem, what we will do as a centre, and what I will do as the lead for ACPO on child protection and child abuse investigation, is to make sure that those are distributed across the service and that support is given to people who identify these forms to have somewhere to go with that information, backed up by awareness training and the kind of specialist services that I mentioned before.

Q112 Nicola Blackwood: I note that when you did your thematic review on localised grooming you struggled to get much of a response from local authorities and police authorities.

Peter Davies: Yes.

Q113 Nicola Blackwood: How are you going to ensure that in dispersing this information it reaches the right people and has some kind of an outcome? I know that in sending out guidance it can just go into an inbox somewhere and never be seen again. We need to make sure that this is being effective and protecting children, not just adding to a pile of paper.

Peter Davies: I couldn’t agree more. I think there is a limit to what I can do and I see myself here as part of a wider team of people. The Children’s Minister, Tim Loughton, I think announced this morning a draft for consultation.

Chair: Sorry, who announced it?

Peter Davies: I am sorry. Tim Loughton, the Children’s Minister, announced a reduction in the guidance of Working Together—a needed reduction because the previous document was heavy. However, just to be clear, the 2009 guidance specific to sexual exploitation still stands. As I understand it, he articulated very clearly a determination to empower and put more responsibility on local Safeguarding Children Boards, which are actually the organisations best placed to tackle this at a local level. The material we are providing supports that. I think it is pretty inescapable for people now that this is a serious issue. There is a role for CEOP in providing awareness, influencing the national agenda, providing intelligence products, delivering training or providing information to people to go and put into action, but it would be a mistake for me to take sole responsibility for doing that because the number of agencies involved and the amount of national leadership required is beyond what the chief executive of CEOP can do alone.

Q114 Nicola Blackwood: How does that sit with your opening statement that CEOP under the NCA will have a more directive and co-ordinating role? That is what you have been saying that you do not have until now.

Peter Davies: Well, how that sits with the NCA is that there are certain features of the emerging design of the NCA that create new opportunities: first, access to a far larger base of operational staff who can be tasked to child sexual exploitation operational activity from within the NCA; and, secondly, through the processes under design, influencing the national tasking process. The final point I will raise, although I could go on far longer, is that in the Bill that will create the NCA, the whole agency will be subject to section 11 of the Children Act 2004, which places a responsibility on it to have regard to the safeguarding of children in all its actions. This is something that police forces have been subject to for some time. It is something that SOCA—and therefore, perversely, CEOP—has not been subject to until now. I think the way that is embraced by the NCA when it emerges late next year will be very significant in terms of moving this on, but the description I gave of what we can do now is based on the present day, not on the future.

Q115 Michael Ellis: Do you think, Mr Davies, that there are any risk factors that are obviously being missed? Secondly, do you think there are too many agencies working towards the same goal and, therefore, doubling up on work levels? Can it be in some way reduced? Would that be something that you would suggest?

Peter Davies: On the first point, I actually defer to your next witness, because I think the Children’s Commissioner for England, with the inquiry, is best placed to identify the critical risk factors. I think the problem is that we are not short of people theorising about what the risk factors are. In a sense, the debate around ethnicity is an example of people theorising about this and latching on to something. We have to be led by facts. We have to define the problem carefully. I am not ducking the question, but I would rather defer to Sue Berelowitz, who is going to speak to you next. We will be led by what that inquiry identifies as the real risk factors—the things that you can lift out of all the different assumptions and possibly stereotypes that people have as the critical indicative things—and we are going to make sure that practitioners are aware of those.

The second issue is, yes, that the world of child protection is potentially quite a cluttered stage. I think simplifying it to a point can help, but all the players understanding how they fit in with everybody else is equally important. An example of that is how we have made an agreement with the UK Human Trafficking Centre about who does what, in simple terms, but another example is recognising the lead role that local Safeguarding Children Boards have in identifying, understanding and tackling this issue locally, and not assuming so much power, control and influence over it that people somehow lose that fact.

Q116 Mark Reckless: We have heard of problems about information exchange and particularly a reluctance in the public sector—perhaps broadly—to share information because of misplaced concerns about the Data Protection Act. Is there a specific issue in your field in terms of local authorities that have key information through their social services departments sharing that with the police, who will have a responsibility across several local authority areas and are not necessarily able to put the dots together if...
those local authorities are not sharing the information that they need for those dots? 

**Peter Davies:** If you go to different parts of the country, I think you will find examples of where that seems to be an insurmountable obstacle. You can also go to parts of the country where people have surmounted it very easily and are in a far better place with sharing data. In terms of what the national issues are, I still think culturally, for many practitioners, that data protection equals “don’t share information”. I think that is something that has to be got over. It is almost a cultural issue as much as an issue about the legislation. But for as many times as somebody can point to me a place where it does not seem to be able to work, I can point them to places where it does work. The issue is whether it is part of a cultural norm and about relationships at local level, or something more complex.

**Q117 Mark Reckless:** How can those areas that do not share information more easily become like those areas that do?

**Peter Davies:** Well, there are some examples of good practice. There are, for example, the multi-agency safeguarding hubs or similar, which are about common sharing of information, common risk assessment and agreeing common plans of action. Those good practice areas have been developed in one or two parts of the country, and good practice is being promulgated, and it has been for some time. Of course, the decision makers here are the local agencies. They have to choose how they deal with this. They have to decide what level of priority they attach to this. If cultural baggage or relationship baggage gets in the way, they have to decide how to manage that. It is very difficult to dictate how that is done from a national perspective.

**Q118 Alun Michael:** You know that there was a great deal of concern on the part of this Committee about the move into the National Crime Agency. What is your assessment now of the potential benefits and risks of that, both in terms of the arrangements that will be and the process of transition?

**Peter Davies:** In terms of the benefits, as the design of the NCA emerges, and it has grown significantly since the last time I was here, it is all good, in the sense that it provides a secure, stable, well-resourced home for CEOP into the future. It provides operational support that is far more accessible than I currently have. That is notwithstanding the fact that we get very good support from the Serious and Organised Crime Agency at present. It gives us an opportunity to be involved in the national tasking process, which is not about issuing orders to police forces, except in extreme circumstances, but about making sure that nationally an overview is taken about the need for public protection and a co-ordinated set of activity is done. That, in the context of the other fairly seismic changes to the national policing landscape, is the best place for CEOP to be, and I am firmly of that belief. In terms of the risks, I mentioned to you last time I gave evidence about the six operational principles of the centre, and I think I told you then that we had spent a lot of time getting people to sign up to those. Those are signed up to and hardwired into the design of the NCA and the lodging of CEOP within NCA, and I have no concerns about those.

**Q119 Alun Michael:** I suppose I would naturally expect a senior police officer to be able to illustrate the way in which things are always for the best in the best of all possible worlds. One of the worries was that the inter-agency element of the working would at least become less important in such a specifically police-oriented organisation. Secondly, there were concerns that were expressed by this Committee that there were very few mentions of either CEOP or of child protection in key Government documents such as *Policing in the 21st Century; National Crime Agency Business Case* and so on. Are you satisfied that this is now sufficiently high up the agenda for both the Government and for the National Crime Agency in receiving its tasking from Government?

**Peter Davies:** I get the sense that if I just say I am satisfied, that will not be quite enough for you.

**Alun Michael:** Well done.

**Peter Davies:** Thank you. Let me give you a couple of examples. On the first point, which was about partnership working, the way CEOP works in partnership with others, I think, being seen as a model for how other commands within the NCA should work with partners and how the NCA should position itself in terms of its understanding that protecting the public nationally requires a complex and well-managed set of relationships. I think what I would say is that rather than the NCA being a monolithic, non-listening, non-engaging law enforcement organisation, the design of it is going to look and feel a bit more like CEOP than any of its precursors. Forgive me, I have lost your second part of the question.

**Alun Michael:** It was in relation to the Government’s view of the priorities.

**Peter Davies:** Yes, thank you for that. I can see why reading the early documents might have given rise to that concern. If you look at the more recent documents that are coming out and will come out about the NCA, you will see a rather different flavour. First, you will see that the NCA’s mission is primarily about protecting the public and, secondly, that its business is about dealing with serious organised or complex crime, not serious and organised crime as previously defined. This expands the scope of the NCA to embrace an awful lot of what CEOP actually deals with. With that, plus the subjection of the NCA to section 11 of the Children Act 2004 and the obligations it would have under that, I think you will see that the more explicit articulations of how CEOP will work within the NCA and how it will lock in should give you the assurances you need.

**Q120 Chair:** On the NCA design that you are referring to, you have your little home of CEOP in the NCA village, but most of it is unoccupied at the moment. We have the chief executive there and we have CEOP there, but the final landscape has not been settled, has it? Are you involved in those discussions?

**Q121 Chair:** You are. How often do they take place?
Peter Davies: They take place on an alarmingly frequent basis—just about every week.

Q122 Chair: You have a weekly meeting about what is going into the NCA?
Peter Davies: It is not a regular, but rarely does a week go by without me being involved in a meeting about the NCA, and I am delighted to be so involved.

Q123 Chair: Of course. You want to know who your neighbours are in the village.
Peter Davies: Well, and I want to help design the layout of the village and not just my own little house, to use your analogy.
Chair: Indeed.
Peter Davies: Our engagement with the NCA design could not be more thorough or at a higher level than what it is. That is how it has always been.

Q124 Chair: In terms of people leaving CEOP, the last time you were here I think you were concerned about the brain drain. Has that now stopped? Are the brains being retained?
Peter Davies: Yes, it has. I think it has reversed, actually. In 2010, more people left CEOP than joined. In 2011, more people joined CEOP than left. By dint of some modernisation work that we have just completed, we are now able to grow the centre to larger than it has ever been before. As I sit here, I have over 20 more people in the centre than I had previously.
Chair: Excellent.
Peter Davies: We are growing, and I will not be happy until we have recruited somebody to every one of those posts.

Q125 Chair: You mentioned your 26 years as a police officer. You were the Chief Constable of Lincolnshire.
Peter Davies: No, I wasn’t. I was the Assistant Chief Constable in Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire.

Q126 Chair: You will know that G4S has just won a contract to design, build and run a police station.
Peter Davies: I am aware of that.

Q127 Chair: I am puzzled as to why the private sector is able to do it better than the public sector as far as policing is concerned in Lincolnshire. This could be an essay sort of question, but a quick answer.
Peter Davies: How much time have I got?
Chair: About 30 seconds.
Peter Davies: Okay. I worked in Lincolnshire for many years. I am very proud of working there. It was, and I believe still is, per head of population, the lowest-funded force in the country and as such it has been the first force to confront some of the austerity issues that many other forces are now experiencing. I know that it has gone through a very difficult time in terms of reorganising and being as lean and efficient as possible. I have not been involved in the decision to contract out, but I understand enough about the force to realise that it would be the first police force to have to take a measure like that if it was its judgement that it was in the best interests of providing a service to the public. That is clearly what it has done, but it has been driven by a funding situation. If I may have 10 more seconds, I think one of the things the private sector can sometimes do that the public sector organisations cannot is invest—invest to save. That might be something that sits behind G4S’s interest in servicing Lincolnshire, and also that of the other large companies that took an interest.
Chair: Indeed. Mr Davies, thank you very much for coming. We are most grateful, and I am sure we will see you again.

Examination of Witness

Witness: Sue Berelowitz. Deputy Children’s Commissioner, gave evidence.

Q128 Chair: With great apologies, may I call to the dais the deputy Children’s Commissioner for England? Thank you very much for coming and for sitting so patiently.
Sue Berelowitz: Thank you so much for inviting me.

Q129 Chair: Can I say at the start we know that you are at the start of your inquiry? We know that you do not have conclusions so we understand that your answers are going to be brief—we will try to do the same in our questioning. Can I start with an issue that has been a thread through the whole of the Rochdale cases and a matter of public interest: ethnicity? Is there anything that you have turned up so far that leads you to believe that this is an issue that affects one particular community, or even a part of one particular community?
Sue Berelowitz: Well, thank you for that question. I should say I am nine months into year one, so I can probably say more than you might imagine I might be able to say, because we have so far gathered a lot of evidence. I have done 14 site visits across the country, so I have spoken to hundreds of people in addition to getting a huge amount of evidence. There will be a full report on year one coming out in September.

In terms of ethnicity, it is a very complex issue. What I would say—and I can say this definitively—is that although the figures will come out, the pattern that has been seen in Rochdale, with Operation Retriever and so on, is one particular pattern. I do become concerned when people talk about “Asian men”, and I put that in inverted commas really because Asia is a very large continent with very many people living in it of different nationalities. I think some more specificity is required, quite frankly, but it is very clear from the evidence I have gathered that there are many patterns. We are finding patterns in terms of victims, because again it is important to think of the ethnicity of victims, where people are almost exclusively talking...
Chair: Indeed. Let us move on.

Sue Berelowitz: I think we have been sufficiently alive to it until now. All I am saying is that we must recognise the breadth of the issue that we are calling group associated as well as gang associated. They have slightly different but sometimes overlapping profiles. Girls from black and minority ethnic groups are definitely victims. They are too often missed out, and if you come to the question of cultural shifts, I will say something about that then. But they are not being properly identified as victims. I am unearthing them through the nature of the conversations I am having with youth offending teams, for example, health agencies, police and local authorities.

Q130 Chair: You do not agree with Baroness Warsi when she says that some Pakistani men see white girls as “fair game”, or Jack Straw when he says that with white girls who are vulnerable, some of them in care, some Pakistani men believe they are “easy meat”? Sue Berelowitz: What I am finding, which is not the same as saying that that is not so, is that I regret to say there are parts of every single community—white, Pakistani, Afghan, Traveller, Gypsy and Romany travellers; you name it—who are seeing children as easy access in terms of sexual exploitation. In terms of victims, we are seeing the same kind of profile. I have been to parts of the country where the pattern, because they are largely white areas of the country, is almost exclusively of white males sexually assaulting, in the form of sexual exploitation, white children. I have been to other parts of the country where you get different kinds of patterns. The pattern in relation to gangs in London is again a different one where we are seeing a lot of black and minority ethnic victims and black and minority ethnic perpetrators—because, again, one can think that they are the only gangs around.

Chair: Of course, yes.

Sue Berelowitz: I have been to gang-associated areas in the north of England. I am thinking of one particular estate that is exclusively white, because it is such a racist estate, where there is a very strong and identified pattern of the white males on that estate sexually exploiting the white females on that estate. It is really important to hold all of it in mind.

Q131 Chair: That is very interesting and very important, and we are grateful for that. But this issue, which suddenly has come to the fore partly because of newspaper articles, in particular in *The Times*, is something that we have neglected in the past, but now that it is out there in front of us, do we simply have to deal with the whole issue of child exploitation in a different way?

Sue Berelowitz: We have to deal with it, yes. I don’t think we have been sufficiently alive to it until now. All I am saying is that we must recognise the breadth of sexual exploitation rather than seeing it as one narrow group, because it is happening everywhere is what I am unearthing.

Chair: Indeed. Let us move on.

Q132 Mr Winnick: Would it be right to say, given your inquiries and the ongoing situation that you are looking into, that the vast majority of Asians are as horrified about what occurred in Rochdale as all decent people are? Is there any evidence to suggest otherwise?

Sue Berelowitz: Interestingly enough, I was talking to a young woman yesterday who has a terrible history of being sexually exploited, and she made that very point to me. The situation in which she was exploited was one in which most, but not all, of the people who were exploiting her were Pakistani males, but there were some white males involved as well. It was interesting that she made the point that she has been living in her local area for many years and she knows more people within the Pakistani community who are horrified at what was done to her than the few who did it to her. Of course, that is the case. All decent people are horrified at what is going on, and there are decent people in every single community.

Q133 Mr Winnick: Where those responsible are white, would it not be right to say just the same—that the overwhelming majority of white people totally condemn it? One should be very careful, should one not, when it comes to ethnic definitions and so on?

Sue Berelowitz: Absolutely. All right-thinking people are horrified about what is going on and it is a small—I think maybe I can put this in a different way. Obviously, I have worked in the children’s world for many, many years. I have spent many years working in the field of child sexual abuse also. I am yet, unfortunately, to encounter any community in which there are not some people who are keen—and actually carrying it out—to abuse children. There are always horrible people within every community who will take every opportunity to hurt children, but they are a minority.

Q134 Mr Winnick: We learned some of what was occurring in other parts of the world when the Committee visited Russia and the Ukraine, so we have no illusions on that. On the sort of horror and sickness that occurred in Rochdale, how far would you say this is happening in other towns and cities in the country?

Sue Berelowitz: Well, what I am uncovering is that the sexual exploitation of children is happening all over the country. As one police officer who was a lead in a very big investigation in a very lovely, leafy, rural part of the country said to me, there is not a town, village or hamlet in which children are not being sexually exploited.

Q135 Mr Winnick: Is that so?

Sue Berelowitz: That was what he said to me.

Q136 Mr Winnick: In all parts of Britain?

Chair: Sorry, who said that?

Sue Berelowitz: It was a police officer in a particular part of the country who was responsible for quite a big investigation. He was aware of a lot of other investigations that were then bubbling up as well. The evidence that has come to the fore during the course of my inquiry is that that unfortunately appears to be the case—that we should start from the assumption
that children are being sexually exploited right the
way across the country. Certainly, my evidence is that
in urban, rural and metropolitan areas, I have hard
evidence of children being sexually exploited. It is
very sadistic, it is very violent; it is very, very ugly.

Q137 Mr Winnick: As those convicted in Rochdale? Sue Berelowitz: Yes. There are different models of
abuse. I have examples of abuse, gang-associated
abuse for example, where I can talk to you about hard
evidence of children being contacted by another child
over the internet, through social networking sites, and
then lured across London to meet what appears to be
a friend you have made over the internet. That friend
is not there, but eight boys are. They pick the girl up
at the station. They take her to the local park and they
serially rape her. Then another group of boys come,
they take her to another part of the park and she is
serially raped again. I wish I could say to you that
such things were uncommon, but I am afraid they are
quite common. There are parts of London where
certainly children expect to have to perform oral sex
on line-ups of boys, for up to two hours at a time,
from the age of 11. It is part of what is going on in
some parts of our country. There are different patterns.
We have those kinds of patterns. We have the pattern
that came up in Rochdale, but we need to remember
that there are many different patterns, and within that
scope children are being sexually exploited all over
the place.

Q138 Mr Winnick: Obviously one thinks of females
first and foremost, like the unfortunate victims in
Rochdale, but males as well? Sue Berelowitz: Yes, definitely. One of the patterns I
have picked up—
Mr Winnick: Not the same numbers, presumably?
Sue Berelowitz: No, it does not appear to be in the
same numbers. With boys, of course, there is a greater
taboo around disclosure, so boys are less likely to
come forward. But one of the patterns I have picked
up in a number of different cities is of boys who are
exploring their sexuality, thinking they may be gay
and may be feeling that they have difficulty in doing
that in their home town or their home area, and
moving to other places where they feel that
homosexuality is easier and more acceptable, and then
finding that they are homeless and without jobs, so
they are going to clubs and exchanging sex for
accommodation and being exploited in that kind of
context. So, it is happening.

Q139 Alun Michael: Your inquiry is looking at
group-associated and gang-associated exploitation.
Could you say exactly how you distinguish between
these and what are you finding? Is it as you
anticipated, or is this a journey?
Sue Berelowitz: Well, it is definitely a journey,
because I am definitely learning all the time, as are
the inquiry panel members. I will just give you the
definitions. Would it be helpful to give you the
definitions we are working to? The definition of a
gang is taken from two sources. It is from Professor
John Pitts, who is the lead in this area, and the
definition used by the Centre for Social Justice. Our

Q140 Alun Michael: You referred to exploitation in
terms of finance. To what extent is this a business
proposition as distinct from merely—sorry, “merely”
is not the right word—a narrower set of motivations?
Sue Berelowitz: Again, I think that varies. The
definition of exploitation is that somebody is making
some gain out of this. It is not always financial gain.
Certainly, there have been some cases in the country
where it has been difficult to see what the motivation
is. What I can say is that the evidence I am gathering
is that there is always a motivation in terms of power
and control. Whether it is about young boys, whether
it is about older men or whether it is gang or group-
associated, you are talking about power and control.
Money may change hands or not as the case may be.

Q141 Bridget Phillipson: You have talked a little bit
about this already, but could you just explain further
what evidence you have seen about the role of the
internet in facilitating or allowing this kind of abuse
to happen?
Sue Berelowitz: A number of examples come to mind,
if I can give you some real cases to illustrate. One
shocking case, which I am afraid turns out again not
to be as unusual as I would have hoped, was of a very,
very young girl being serially raped over a series of
days by a group of boys aged 14 to 15. I have this
from reading the police files. What is known is that
they were being summoned through the use of BBM.
Boys were being called while some were raping the
girl, “Come, come, come, you can join in too”, and
they were arriving and elbowing each other out the
way to rape her. It went on for several days.

There are other examples of where social networking
sites such as Facebook are being used by males to
access children. One police force showed me a list of
girls that had been found on the computer of one man
in his 40s. He was masquerading as a boy, and over
1,000 girls aged between about 12 and 14 were his friends. That same police force talked me through some sites they had gone in and, in terms of trying to identify what was going on, they had pretended to be a young girl. Within minutes they had adult men who were masturbating on them in response to what they had put out on to the site. It is quite clear. I can give you other examples, but we have gathered quite a lot of evidence to show that actually there is no doubt that social networking sites can be a source of real problem for this. I would also add the issue around pornography. Again, I know people differ in their views of this, but the evidence we have been gathering is that pornography is definitely having an impact. Young people are accessing very extreme pornography; there is no question about that. We have had boys say to us—some of the boys I have spoken to who have been involved in sexual exploitation—“It was like being in a porn movie.” They have watched things and then they have enacted them. I am extremely concerned about what is going on in terms of pornography. Parents may think that they can control what is going on because they can have a blockage on a computer, but the reality is children can get anything they like on their mobile phones, and they are. The other thing, of course, that one has to say in this context is they are sometimes filming the victim. Girls are making themselves vulnerable by filming themselves in compromising positions and sending that around. They have no control over where it goes. We have found instances where the use of a film made of somebody being abused is a way of threatening them and holding them, keeping them entrapped. I have also found one instance where we had a situation of gang-associated sexual exploitation, but behind that there was a group of adult men who were using the young boys as the front line for the sexual exploitation. They had made two of the boys of 16 have sex with each other. They had filmed those boys having sex with each other and that was a way of then controlling the boys as well as the girls, who were at the end of the line, really.

Q142 Bridget Phillipson: I am pleased that you mentioned pornography, because I think that there is increasingly an issue with the kinds of extreme and degrading pornography that young people are exposed to and how that shapes their views, particularly those towards women and how you treat and regard women. What are your views around the proposals that we have seen in terms of restricting access to pornography and the work on the opt-in in terms of internet service providers?

Sue Berelowitz: Well, I think it is a start. The difficulty is that it does not go far enough. I will be looking into this more in year two, but what I am not sure about is what can go far enough. You can do things when people are buying new sets or a new computer, but most people have computers in their homes already. There is the issue about mobile phones. Children are just using them out there all the time. I am beginning to think that the best way to deal with this, short of whatever the Government can do around getting pornographers to stop what they are doing, is to build resilience in children. You are quite right: it is definitely affecting children’s thresholds of what they think is normal. There is no doubt.

Q143 Nicola Blackwood: You are describing a set of victims who are subject to the most appalling abuses. If they admit that they are victims, they are subject to extreme levels of control. We have heard from local authorities that they are trying to improve their responses to victims and their identification of victims. We have heard from police authorities that they believe the victims, but you have been actually speaking to these victims. Can you tell us do you think that these victims up and down the country feel like they can disclose to authorities and police at this point, or is there a problem with that?

Sue Berelowitz: The picture is inevitably variable. What I would say, though, is that while a start has been made, we have a lot further to go. I heard you talking to Peter Davies about cultural shifts. There is still too much of a culture of blaming children and seeing them as promiscuous. The language that I still sometimes hear is of children being prostitutes, instead of recognising that these are children who are being sexually exploited. The effect of that is that the professionals are less likely to take the children seriously. I was talking to this young woman yesterday—she is by no means an exception—who was telling me how she had tried to tell and people had not listened. They had not believed her because her story was not always consistent. She said sometimes she was drugged and sometimes she was very drunk, and she was not always aware of exactly what was going on. She recognises that her stories were not always consistent, but as a result she was not always believed. I think we have to recognise that what is being done is so terrible that people need to lay aside their denial—because it is a natural human response to want to say, “This is so awful I can’t believe it is actually happening”—and face up to the fact that some truly terrible things are being done. I was talking to a young woman who was being abducted on a regular basis and was held for days at a time, sometimes more than a week, with no food, very little water and no access to washing facilities. She said she would come out filthy, covered in sores and ill, and when she went back to the place where she was living and her school, nobody was asking questions. People were not picking up what was going on. Professionals across all agencies do need to wake up to what is going on. It goes back to the question right at the beginning about ethnicity in a sense and waking up to the fact that there are a multiple number of patterns. For example, I was at one large metropolitan area where—this is a joint police and local authority CSE unit, a very good unit doing really good work—they gave me a fabulous pack of evidence on girls in care who were known to be being sexually exploited—all white girls, all in care. I then asked about girls not in care and girls of other ethnicities, and the response was, “We’re not looking for them”.

Q144 Nicola Blackwood: Are there specific examples, either structurally or culturally, that you
would recommend should be put in place in other parts of the country to address this particular problem of victims being believed by agencies and the police?

Sue Berelowitz: We are gathering data on the indicator set at the moment and the evidence on that will come out in September. We are doing some modelling on what are the most worrying indicator sets that should lead people to be suspicious or concerned about sexual exploitation taking place. That will come out in September. Once we have that, we will be in a much stronger position to say to people, “If a child has these indicators, you must be proactive, not wait for them to disclose,” because that is the other thing—people wait for children to disclose and, of course, they don’t just walk into a classroom and say, “By the way,” or walk into a homeless hostel where they have been placed to say, “By the way, I am being sexually exploited.” They give cues, and the professionals need to be proactive in looking and then on picking up the cues. Putting out the indicator set with some hard evidence will, I hope, take this forward.

Q145 Chair: That is very helpful. In conclusion, I know it is difficult for you, but if you were talking about numbers, what would we be talking about?

Sue Berelowitz: I think it would be unwise for me to try to put a figure to it.

Q146 Chair: But this goes beyond the hundreds, does it?

Sue Berelowitz: We are talking about thousands.

Q147 Chair: Thousands?

Sue Berelowitz: But I do not want to start saying how many numbers of thousands.

Chair: Of course.

Sue Berelowitz: I will be able to say something much more specific in September, but we are talking about a big problem.

Q148 Mr Winnick: In every part of the country.

Chair: In every part of the country, as Mr Winnick says.

Sue Berelowitz: Yes.

Q149 Chair: When we started this inquiry, it was to look at what was happening in Rochdale, but what you have described today is the tip of an iceberg.

Sue Berelowitz: It is.

Chair: The Committee is certainly very shocked by some of the things that you have told us. We commend you for your work. We want you to continue it. We can only do part of this work. You have an extensive study into what is going on over a period of time. But could I ask you to do this, because we are going to have other hearings connected with the subject: if there are some easy wins that you think could be implemented immediately—it goes back to Ms Blackwood’s point about reviews and inquiries taking a long time, but people, young girls, are immediately at risk—please will you contact the Committee and tell us what you think they are? We will then take them up, write to Ministers and make sure that something happens about it. But please continue with your work and please continue to keep us informed.

Sue Berelowitz: Thank you, and thank you for that invitation. I will take you up on it.

Chair: We will continue with other hearings as a result of what we have heard today.

Sue Berelowitz: Thank you so much.

Chair: Thank you very much. That concludes this inquiry for today.
Tuesday 3 July 2012

Members present:

Keith Vaz (Chair)

Nicola Blackwood
Mr James Clappison
Michael Ellis
Lorraine Fullbrook
Dr Julian Huppert

Alun Michael
Bridget Phillipson
Mark Reckless
Mr David Winnick

Examination of Witness

Witness: Tim Loughton MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children, gave evidence.

Q150 Chair: Good morning, Minister. Order, I call the Committee to order and refer all those present to the Register of Members’ Interests where the interests of Members are noted. Are there any additional interests that need to be made at this point?

Alun Michael: May I declare an interest in relation to several of today’s interviews that I am a candidate for election as police commissioner in South Wales.

Mr Clappison: I declare an interest as a governor of an independent school.

Chair: Thank you. Minister, thank you so much for coming before us. This morning, of course, the Children’s Commissioner’s interim report was published and the Government has responded to some extent. The purpose of your coming here today is perhaps to elaborate on that response and to answer some of the questions of the Committee in respect of our inquiry into child exploitation. Can I begin with the evidence that we received from the Deputy Commissioner when she talked about grooming going on in every town, village and hamlet in the United Kingdom; do you accept that and is that a surprising, shocking statement for you, as it was for the Committee when we heard it?

Tim Loughton: Chairman, thank you for holding this inquiry because I think it is very important. It is a very important subject for the Government and this inquiry will help raise the profile of this appalling issue. I certainly accept the description by Sue Berelowitz, although hamlets might be pushing it slightly. But I was warning last year, when we first alighted on the work towards the Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan, that this had been going on under the radar for many years and it was not something that was just for the preserve of northern metropolitan boroughs such as Rochdale and Derby where we have had the high profile cases brought to court, but it is happening in market towns and it is happening in rural areas as well. The cases of child sexual abuse going on in rural Cornwall and other counties like that show that this is not something that we can ignore anywhere. It is coming from any part of the country; it is coming from all different communities and different social sets as well. So I was not surprised by her comments because I have been making similar comments for some time and I fear that it was appropriate and right to make that description when we did.

Q151 Chair: Who is at fault? If you have known for some time, and you gave a warning some time ago about a system that has presumably existed for a number of years, who is at fault?

Tim Loughton: What we revealed last year—work that we carried out in the Department, work that CEOP carried out in their Out of Mind, Out of Sight report and useful work that the University of Bedfordshire carried out—showed, one, that the awareness of this problem among the public, but also among professionals, whose duty it is to be able to take measures to avoid it and to deal with it, was remarkably low, and one of those reports showed that some three-quarters of Local Safeguarding Children Boards who are tasked to deal with child sexual exploitation as part of their responsibilities did not have comprehensive plans to deal with it. So that is why I brought together a whole range of interested parties from the police, from children’s organisations, from Children’s Services Departments, from five Government Departments, to work on what then became the Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan in November last year. Since then, the awareness of it has been going up and a number of practical measures have started to come to fruition.

Q152 Chair: There were a number of articles in The Times, which has highlighted the problem in Rochdale in particular. But I think the figure that most surprised me was the fact that, on average, the 5,000 children in care cost—presumably the council taxpayer—£200,000 each; it is £1 billion to keep 5,000 children in care. Is that right? Can you confirm those figures?

Tim Loughton: Yes. The bill for children in care overall is about £2.8 billion and of that £1 billion, thereabouts, is being spent on looking after up to 5,000 children who will be in residential children’s homes within a year. Obviously the figure fluctuates because on average children are only there for about three months in many cases. So the average of that is £200,000. That masks a great deal of discrepancies. There may be some that are a lot cheaper than that, but also some a lot more expensive than that as well. The point I also want to make is I do not want to tar all residential homes with the same brush, and a lot of those homes are providing very specialist services to children with very severe disabilities or very severe behavioural problems, who are not physically capable of getting involved in some of the problems we are talking about here. But there are a great many of them
for whom we are paying a not inconsiderable amount of money for whom I do not think we are getting value for money, but more importantly, I do not think they are nearly as safe as they need to be.

Q153 Chair: But on the issue of children in local authority care going to other parts of the country, and those who transfer them to other parts of the country, knowing they are going to crime hotspots, it is a kind of official trafficking. Knowing that they are going to face these difficulties they are still being sent from the south, for example, to the north because it happens to be cheaper. Is that a worry to you, that this seems to have an official sanction? That there have been examples going on for a number of years and this practice of the official trafficking of these children seems to continue.

Tim Loughton: I think this is the most important part of the problem that you are addressing and on which we are announcing proposals today; it is something I have been worried about for some time. That is why over a year ago I overhauled the guidance regarding placing children out of area. There is a series of thresholds that local authorities have to meet before they can place children out of area. Over a year on, the number of children being placed out of area, which accounts for almost a half of those children in residential children’s homes, is little changed. Clearly that guidance has not worked. That is why, as a central part of the recommendations we are making today, having appointed a task and finish group specifically to look at out of area placements, I want to beef up that guidance seriously so fewer children are placed out of area. I think what has gone wrong in the past is that a local authority will look at a children’s home that might have a good or excellent rating from Ofsted or look at a foster placement that has been rated highly but they have not looked at the area in which those placements happen, and we need to be just as careful when the child leaves the front door of that placement rather than just looking at what happens within those four walls.

Kent in particular has done some very detailed work on the heat maps, as I have called them, or the hotspots as you referred to them. Kent Police have been to see me about this, and I have some examples of those heat maps where we have a large concentration of children in children’s homes or foster care alongside a large concentration of known sex offenders, sex offenders’ hostels, people out of prison on licence and a lot of other vulnerable children in an area that I would find it very hard to justify as safe, let alone safer than the area from where those children come. That is the reality and I am now going to confront those corporate parents responsible.

Q154 Chair: It would be helpful if you could clear up one issue, that of ethnicity. You have seen the report that was published today—you probably have it in front of you—and table 5 has a list of the ethnicity of those involved but it has no figures. Do you think ethnicity is a factor in child exploitation?

Tim Loughton: Yes. It is no good pretending otherwise, and I gave many interviews over a year ago, when the Derby case came up, saying that if there is some form of political correctness around ethnicity, which is getting in the way of police and other agencies investigating, tracking down and nailing these perpetrators, then that needs to be removed and we need to do something about it.

Q155 Chair: But what is interesting about that table is that it has ethnicity by country of origin but it does not have any figures. That is what I find odd because if you have gone through data and you have found out ethnicity, surely you would be able to tell us percentages?

Tim Loughton: I do not have that information. Part of the problem—

Q156 Chair: Do you not think it is possible to get those figures?

Tim Loughton: I think it will be possible to get that information. The trouble is we are looking at a relatively small number of prosecutions so far. The majority of individuals who are already in jail for child sexual offences tend to be white middle-aged men. Their tool of choice might be the grooming over the internet. Clearly, what we have seen in the high-profile cases in Derby, in Rochdale, and in other cases still to come fully to court is a problem involving, in most cases, British Pakistani men, although there are a few other cases of Afghani and Bangladeshi men, who are operating loosely in gangs, preying on mostly teenage white girls, not exclusively, but that has been the pattern that we have seen in these high-profile cases.

In other parts of the country I can take you to we have communities originally from central Africa who have all sorts of other practices, preying on vulnerable children as well. The point I am trying to make, and the point the Government is making absolutely clear, is that we have to make sure that the police, social services, and other enforcement agencies are using the right tool to nail these perpetrators in the most appropriate way regardless of their culture or ethnicity. It all amounts to serious child abuse and they all need to be nailed for whatever form they are doing it.

Q157 Chair: Indeed. That is very helpful, but do you think you could find that data? That there is no reason why we should not be able to find that data?

Tim Loughton: I think we can find it from the limited sample of those who have gone through but I will point out that the figures provided in this report are emerging findings. Sue Berelowitz’s report will not be complete until next year. She has assimilated a whole load of data, which are yet to be properly assessed, and I am sure when she has her fuller report, of which there will be an interim version available this autumn, there will be much more empirical evidence to go with it.

Q158 Mr Winnick: Minister, is it not the case of dealing, in fact, with criminality, whether it is of Asian origin, white or anything else, and that there is no evidence whatsoever that any group in the country, be it British, white British or Asian or black, condones such criminality and abuse of children?
**Tim Loughton:** No, I do not think there is any evidence to say anybody condones it. I think what is important is how prepared or from communities are to come forward and shop it. I know in certain more closed communities, without going into any detail, people who know about this form of abuse are less inclined to or feel threatened about coming forward and reporting it to the authorities. It is not in the interest of the British Pakistani community or the British Congolese community for this sort of abuse to be going on by members of their own community. It is in their best interest to make sure that it is being reported, rooted out, and the perpetrators dealt with as criminals, which is what they are.

**Q159 Mr Winnick:** Everyone would agree with every single word of that. Would you say that what was revealed in Rochdale, the sickening abuse that came to light and the criminals have rightly been convicted, was a wake-up call on what is occurring, and to that extent it served a purpose in spotlighting what undoubtedly is going on at the moment?

**Tim Loughton:** Yes, and I think we had an earlier wake-up call in the Operation Retriever case in Derby the previous year. Again, I think it is important to make it clear that this is not just some new phenomenon. This has been going on for years under the radar. People did not come forward and report it, and the police, for whatever reason, did not investigate it, certainly investigate it sufficiently for cases to be brought to court that then stuck. I would say, in one respect, that the fact we are now seeing these high-profile cases is a cause to say that progress is being made because they are now being investigated, proper evidence is being brought to bear and the perpetrators are being nailed, and I am glad to say in the Rochdale case, with some pretty hefty sentences as well. We need that to send out very clear messages to other people who think this is some kind of transgression. This is serious sexual child abuse against vulnerable children and it needs to be dealt with in a very serious manner.

**Q160 Mr Winnick:** I hope I will not be hanged and drawn by some of my own colleagues, since the Murdoch organisation is rightly under much fire, absolutely justified, but praise should go to The Times newspaper for its coverage.

**Tim Loughton:** In particular, Andrew Norfolk, the journalist who quietly and diligently has been investigating this for some years and getting under the skin in a very constructive way, and the profile that his newspaper has been able to bring to this has certainly helped us to make sure that everybody is getting in gear and stepping up to the mark. So in this case they have served a purpose.

**Q161 Mr Winnick:** One more question, Minister. Arising from what you said, yes, location is important obviously, the number of children who are far from their normal place of abode, but is it not far more important, and I think you stressed this, did you not, that safety should be the issue, not location? We want these children in care to be in a position where obviously they have all the safety and security that this Parliament wants to see provided.

**Tim Loughton:** Yes, we take children into care to put them in a safer place from which they have come and we need to make sure that we are looking after them in the safest possible way. We also need to make sure that we are giving them the best possible quality of support and the services that they require as well.

**Q162 Bridget Phillipson:** It is my feeling that there is often a culture of disbelief when it comes to people coming forward with allegations of sexual abuse, whether that is children or adults. How do you think we change that culture whereby people who come forward and disclose that they have been subjected to sexual abuse are believed, because often the abuse is not carried out by these organised gangs, dreadful though that is, it is often carried out by perhaps a family member or a trusted family friend, and it can be very difficult, I think, for others to believe that that person might be capable of such dreadful acts.

**Tim Loughton:** Yes, and it is a very good point. I am not primarily concerned in the work today with sexual abuse within a family, but it is a big problem, and often victims of these gangs and others may have had some experience of sexual abuse within their family, which is maybe the reason they are in care in the first place. I think there is a bit of a culture shift we need to engender and certainly some of the remarks that Sue Berelowitz made earlier about the way society views some of these victims—they are victims—in terms of “They were asking for it, they were putting themselves forward and they got what was coming to them”, is completely and utterly wrong, can only succeed in deterring those victims from coming forward and reporting it in the first place, let alone then having to appear, in very traumatic circumstances, in a court as well in front of not just one but in many cases a fleet of defence barristers, which is a very intimidating exercise.

Just one aside on this, awareness of this whole issue is important—awareness of kids of what to look out for, of parents to what to look out for for signs from their own children, of care home operators, social workers and other professionals to look out for for children who are in the care system. The Eastenders storyline, which I have often cited, of Whitney Dean being sexually exploited by somebody who she thought was her friend was a chillingly realistic storyline—in fact they were advised by Barnardo’s on this—and I think it succeeded in bringing into everybody’s front room the reality that this stuff happens and it could be happening in your street, in your town, in your workplace, involving a relative or a work colleague. We must get the message across to everybody that it is up to all of us to be more vigilant and understanding and remember these girls, and some boys, are victims, they are not the perpetrators. Some of them think they have brought it on themselves and we need to make it clear that they haven’t.

**Q163 Bridget Phillipson:** Do you think the training offered to social workers, in particular, but other care professionals, perhaps those in children’s homes, is
Tim Loughton: Absolutely right, and it has not been adequate. It is getting better and the progress report, which we are publishing today, is deliberately littered with a number of examples of things that have tangibly happened since we published the action plan last year in terms of police awareness, police training, social work training and the College of Social Work making sure we are getting the right modules for potential social workers to learn from. The National Health Service is producing a video for training its own staff and to raise awareness. There is no one single bullet but we need to raise awareness across all sorts of professionals and make sure the appropriate training is there and in terms of residential home workers, again one of the things we are flagging up today and one of the task and finish working groups we are setting up is about the quality of children’s residential homes and inevitably the quality and the skillset of the people working within those homes, and the skills of those people. There are some very good ones, some very dedicated ones, but if you are working in an equivalent home in the Continent you would need a graduate level qualification. You don’t need such qualification to work in a home here and that is something we are looking at very closely.

Q164 Alun Michael: It is very important to know the extent of the problem in order to take the appropriate steps and you have acknowledged yourself the full extent of the dangers faced by those who abscond or otherwise go missing from care because of official figures, and I think I am using your words, fail to capture the scale of the problem. Now the All-Party Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults found the police data are showing an estimated 10,000 individual children going missing from care but Government official data record only 930 children going missing. How do you account for that and, even more importantly, how do we get to dealing with realistic facts and figures in future?

Tim Loughton: It is a very important point. As you say, we need to understand the extent of the problem and we do not at the moment. I can account for both of those figures. Neither of those figures do I trust anyway. We are counting two different things. The figure of 930, which is reported from Children’s Services Departments to the DfE and Ofsted are children who have been missing for more than 24 hours. The police figure, which has variously been put at 10,000 or higher, is on instance of children who have gone missing, and that may be little Johnny is due back at the care home at 9.00 am, at 9.01 pm he has not arrived so the first thing the care home does is to ring up the police to say: “Little Johnny is missing” even though every Friday evening little Johnny is off with his mate playing PlayStation, they know where he is and he tends to come back late. But the police—and I have this when I go out on patrol with my own police, we have a lot of homes in my constituency—get called out, have to go through all the paperwork when they know that the child in 99.9% of the case is not a genuine missing case for whom we need to intervene heavily.

Q165 Alun Michael: What is being done to make sure that this is a shared problem between the police and the individual care homes and social services more generally?

Tim Loughton: There are two problems and we have already set up a task and finish group, which has started working, which will report back to us in September. The two problems are, one, we have two different sets of data, both unreliable. The second problem is that the police and local authorities are not allowed to share information about simple things like the location of these children’s homes under the Care Standards Act 2000. That is nonsense and it is going to change.

Q166 Alun Michael: Is that a specific prohibition because there is also legislation in place that says data can be shared for the purpose of preventing crime, which would seem to me to apply in this case?

Tim Loughton: You would have thought so and common sense would suggest that we should be sharing data if it means that we are more likely to make those children safer. Under the Care Standards Act 2000, I understand, and updated regulations in 2010, there is still a limit on sharing information about location and other data between the police and local services. I can find no good reason why that limitation should remain therefore we want to enable police and local authorities to share data about location of homes and the missing, and we can do that very easily by changing regulations, which is our intention to do within a matter of weeks. Secondly, I am not convinced we are collecting the right data. I want one dataset of the police and Children’s Services working together to work out first of all what is a meaningful missing statistic. Should it be 24 hours, should it be 48 hours, should it be somebody who goes missing only once in a while or somebody who does it on a regular basis? I do not know the answer to that, which is why we have tasked this group to come up with a meaningful definition of missing on which we can, in future, then collect one set of data that is reliable from which we can then know the extent of the problem and know what to do about it.

Q167 Alun Michael: Can I suggest that you look at the requirements of the 1998 Act because it may be that that would assist?

Tim Loughton: I think we can do it by simple standing statutory instrument change of regulations, which I hope we can do as early as September, but we have given that very clear indication.

Chair: Can I just say to colleagues, we have other witnesses and this is a fascinating subject but we do need to be moving on.

Mr Clappison: This is my first question, Mr Chairman. I waited 13 minutes while you have your question, if I may say.

Chair: It is not directed at you, Mr Clappison.
Q168 Mr Clappison: Minister, I think we all welcome the sense of urgency, which you are bringing to this subject. But reports we have seen suggest that a number of the girls who were sexually exploited were in local authority care at the time the exploitation took place and it appeared to be happening over and over again. You mentioned figures; do you have any idea of the proportion of children who have been victims who were in local authority care at the time?

Tim Loughton: No, because again the work in progress, Sue Berelowitz’s report, has a lot of data that has yet to be analysed. What I can tell you is this is not just children in care who are being abused like this. I have met the families of many children, perfectly decent loving families whose children are lured away by these predators, and it is more children from families than children in care. There are 65,500 children in care in this country, so they are proportionately more represented than are children in their own families. The extent of it I do not know.

Q169 Mr Clappison: You could not give me figures for how many of the victims have been in care or what proportion of children in care are victims?

Tim Loughton: Not so far, insomuch as you do not have figures for the nationality of the perpetrator, either. It is disproportionately children in care who are being exploited.

Q170 Mr Clappison: Would you agree, just looking in a general way from the point of view of the public, members of the public tend to ask, “Why haven’t alarm bells been ringing about the care system before now?”

Tim Loughton: I was very loudly ringing these alarm bells—

Mr Clappison: I appreciate the urgency you have shown.

Tim Loughton: I and various other people were doing that over a year ago, but this was a chicken and egg situation around child sexual exploitation. Because it was not getting reported, because victims were not fully appreciating that they are victims and this is something that needs to be dealt with seriously, so there was very little profile to this, therefore people thought it was not really a problem. It was just one-off of a few girls who were “asking for it”. When we have seen that this is organised stuff by gangs and other serious criminals, people have realised the extent of it. That is why over a year ago we did work on this and produced our action plan at the end of last year from which a lot of action has already flowed. It should have happened years ago, I absolutely agree; it is now happening with a sense of urgency.

Q171 Mr Clappison: Briefly, members of the public could also think that £200,000 is a fantastic amount of money to spend on this when there have been apparently so many failures in the system. Do you think local authorities should look at, where possible, other settings for children who need this type of care? It just occurs to me, and I have declared an interest in this, it would be a heck of a lot cheaper, possibly more effective and give a better education, if children were sent to independent schools or boarding schools.

Tim Loughton: That is one matter—I made a speech about it last week—that we are proposing, and have been working with independent schools to send more children on the edge of care as well as in care to boarding schools. But also, you are absolutely right, one would have thought one would get a much better service for the extraordinarily high amount of money we are spending on these children. We are not getting value for money, I believe. It is a pretty shambolic system anyway because there is a lot of spot purchasing that goes on, a lot of these kids end up in children’s homes as a sort of last resort rather than being put through a more advanced and early planning system, which it needs to be.

I do not know whether we need to take more children into care or fewer children into care, or that we need to have more in children’s homes or fewer. What I do know is we need to have the right children in the most appropriate settings and that is not happening at the moment, which is what our work announced today is intended to get to the bottom of and use a large amount of public money rather more efficiently but, more importantly, rather more effectively to make those children safer.

Q172 Nicola Blackwood: You will be aware of the distressing case that has come forward in Oxford, and I think that everybody there is very grateful for the work that you have been doing to try and take action on the issue of child sexual exploitation. But looking at the recommendations that have come forward here, I think that there will be some concern that they are focusing, one, exclusively on care and as just come out in the answer to Mr Clappison’s comments, not all children who are exploited are in care, and, secondly, the recommendations about data focus on sharing between police and Ofsted and the care services, and not on, for example, the justice sector and the health service. I just wonder if future recommendations might focus on those areas as we have heard evidence that there are opportunities to bring in preventive measures at those points as well.

Tim Loughton: Absolutely right. The progress report today details a number of initiatives involving the justice service and involving health, and I alluded to the video that the National Health Service is making, for example. There were five Government Departments, five Ministers, involved in the working group around the Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan including the Attorney-General, the Minister for Health, Anne Milton was part of that, representatives from the Home Office and the MoJ as well as my own Department. A number of briefings and advice sheets have been put out over recent months. Barnardo’s has worked with us on a briefing for parents, the signs that they should look out for if they suspect there is something wrong with their children. Today we are launching another step-by-step guide for front-line practitioners, all of the people you mentioned, social workers and others, as to what they should look out for, in addition to the enhanced training that is now going in for police, for social workers, in education settings, health and others. This absolutely needs to be a joint effort from all those different interested parties about awareness and knowing how to work
together, knowing how to intervene, knowing who to report it to and to carry it forward. All of those are important areas.

Q173 Nicola Blackwood: The discussions that I have had with the local service providers imply that there are all sorts of barriers about data and information sharing and that maybe the only way to overcome that, because of the culture of data protection, is co-location of services. What is your view on that?

Tim Loughton: I believe that excuses around data sharing are usually just that. Maybe, as Mr Michael has mentioned, a number of things were being made easier back in 1998, we need to look at this very closely. I think what we are doing on data sharing in this particular case will send out a very clear message that niceties and perceived protocols around data sharing need to be changed if they are standing in the way of making children safer. I do not believe that they are when you drill down to the detail.

Peter Davies of CEOP, I know gave you evidence about MASH, multi-agency safeguarding hubs, which I am a big fan of, and many years ago, when I was in Opposition, I went to see the Devon MASH, which is where the MASH model developed, and I have seen many since. I spoke at the London Area of Safeguarding Children Board Conference on MASH. I have been to spend the morning with the Haringey MASH, which is a very good example. Absolutely what we have co-located there, be it for vulnerable children, those vulnerable to child sexual exploitation or for safeguarding issues, may be a social worker with somebody from the police, somebody from the domestic violence unit and somebody from housing who, when intelligence comes in, can very quickly leap into action, compare notes, often do not even need to do it with a computer, and they have some experience of that.

When I spent a week being a social worker up in Stockport a while ago within that team we had a domestic violence specialist social worker, we had a police member, we had somebody from the Family Nurse Partnership, as well as some good social workers. Rarely did they use their computer because they had that knowledge and made those sorts of connections because they sat close to each other and they communicated. You really cannot be a social worker who, when intelligence comes in, can very quickly leap into action, compare notes, often do not even need to do it with a computer, and they have some experience of that.

Q174 Nicola Blackwood: Do you think that you are going to change or update the Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy as a result of the information coming out of the Child Commissioner’s inquiry?

Tim Loughton: We have. I was due to publish the progress report in May; then Rochdale happened. Within 24 hours the Secretary of State had asked Sue Berelowitz to bring forward a part of her report specifically around the subject of children in care homes. She produced that report a couple of weeks ago to deliver to us. We have updated and expanded the progress report to reflect her findings and her recommendations, in addition to which Ann Coffey’s All-Party Parliamentary report Mr Michael referred to, which was an excellent report, again came up with many parallel observations and recommendations. I would be happy to adopt just about all of those. In fact yesterday, when we did an embargoed press conference to publish all this, I did it alongside Sue Berelowitz and Ann Coffey because we do need a united front on this, and everybody weighing in to help.

Q175 Dr Huppert: The Deputy Children’s Commissioner suggested that pornography was having an impact on child abuse. Are you aware of any evidence of a causal link there?

Tim Loughton: Yes, there is evidence and using my hat as one of the co-chairmen of the United Kingdom Council for Child Internet Safety, this is an area obviously where we have been doing an awful lot of work. That is why we want to make sure that children being exposed to inappropriate adult material is dealt with rather more effectively than it is now. Again this is something that needs a joined up approach for which there is no single silver bullet. Certainly evidence and study shows that the impact about the normalisation of sexualised behaviour and sexual exploitation of young girls is affecting the way that some people get involved in their relationships, and that is very unhealthy.

Q176 Dr Huppert: Do you support the conclusions of the Bailey Review, which called for active choice filters and then noted with regard to default settings that having defaults could lull some parents into a false sense of security as they would do nothing more to help their children go online safely? Do you agree with those conclusions?

Tim Loughton: I chair the committee that has been taking forward some of the recommendations from the Bailey Report, and Reg Bailey has given evidence to UKCCIS. The preferred model that we have been moving forward with is Active Choice. We have been getting the ISPs, the retailers, the software manufacturers, the device manufacturers to develop strategies for that, but we are also aware that there are many strings to the bow that we need. The, again, very well informed report that Claire Perry chaired here, which was promulgating an opt-in service, again has some merits. So that is why last week, with the support of the Prime Minister, we launched a consultation looking at the merits of that alongside Active Choice and everything else, and we are waiting to see the responses to that consultation as to how we may need to adapt the various tools that we are using to make sure the internet is safer for children in many different aspects, as well as social media. We seem to have concentrated an awful lot on access to harmful content, be it adult material or violence. I think an equally if not greater problem is cyber-bullying and violence over the internet and invasion of people’s integrity in various social media as well, which is why Facebook and others, for example, are represented on the UKCCIS board.
Q177 Chair: We have a problem also with BlackBerries and the PIN numbers, don’t we, because they are untraceable? The Committee has received a letter from a father who is very concerned that the police could not trace who the message came from.

Tim Loughton: Your technical knowledge is slightly above my pay grade on that one, but I am happy to advise—

Chair: Dr Huppert’s is even better than mine but that is what I have been informed. I will send you the details.

Q178 Michael Ellis: Minister, you have already mentioned Peter Davies of the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre, can I come back to that and also the issue of data and data collection or recording. He told this Committee that all front-line agencies should, in his estimation, develop ways of capturing and recording data of known and suspected cases of sexual exploitation. What sort of improvements do you think could be made to data recording to prevent child exploitation?

Tim Loughton: I’ve answered that in part in addressing Mr Michael’s question about children who go missing, and we need to have better empirical data, part of which will come through the Sue Berelowitz report and much of that data has been provided by my Department, and my local authorities of course, as to the propensity of those children in care and particularly those who go missing from care, then to end up in the hands of these predators. Absolutely we need to have that data in as much detail and as transparent as possible to be able to model the right responses to it. We have not really touched on Local Safeguarding Children Boards. LSCBs are a really important medium in all of this because you have got all the key players involved in this from the health service, from education, from children’s services, police and others, sitting around the same table tasked with making sure that all those agencies have got robust up-to-date effective plans of action to deal with child sexual exploitation and all sorts of other safeguarding issues, and that all of those partners are pulling their weight and they are interacting effectively together. If they are not, then the LSCBs need to kick some backsides and do something about it working together in a joint strategy to do something about it anyway.

Q180 Nicola Blackwood: You have mentioned the CEOP’s report on child exploitation and the role that LSCBs have to play in working with the police. But CEOP’s report did find that there was very inconsistent delivery of child safeguarding and child sexual exploitation measures among LSCBs across the country. What you have sort of pointed out is patches of really good practice and patches of really bad practice. How are we going to make sure that we have consistent delivery across the country from now on?

Tim Loughton: It is a very important point that I alluded to earlier because LSCBs were just not on the game on this, a few were but the majority were not. What we are also very bad at is sharing best practice across LSCBs generally, they were acting in silos in too many cases. Last year I spoke at the National Network of the Local Safeguarding Children Boards conference in Birmingham, the first time that event had ever been held. We had the chairs of all the LSCBs in the same room feeding off each other and learning about examples of best practice. I want that network to flourish, to thrive, to exchange best practice and act as an early warning system for each other because they are facing the same problems in different complexions and parts of the country. If LSCBs are going to be absolutely at the hub of making sure we have robust systems for dealing with this, then they need to be talking to each other as well, just as they need their internal partners to be talking to each other around the same table. So I have written, I have been meeting regional heads of local safeguarding boards as well and there is a much greater dialogue going on, a much greater sense of urgency going on, and we are in a much better place than we were just a year ago.

Q181 Bridget Phillipson: Councillor Lambert from Rochdale Council told us that he felt that they were not offered the back-up and support that was needed and there was a lack of understanding about what they were facing. What support and guidance are you offering to councils now so that we do not see a repeat of the cases in Rochdale?

Tim Loughton: Apart from the progress report today, the three working groups that I have set up will report back to us in September. The first report is on data sharing, which is very pertinent to local authorities, and our intention is to share its findings. Secondly, on placements out of area, counties such as Kent have been facing for some years a massive influx of children from out of area, particularly placed by London boroughs, which has safeguarding issues but is also putting huge pressure on schools in the area and things like that as well. There is a task and finish working group which will report back to me in September for how we clamp down on that to make sure those areas are made properly safe and we have heat maps before any child can be placed out of area. Then the third bit of work that is being done, which will take slightly longer, centres on the quality of the children’s residential homes and the quality of the people working within them. Rochdale itself have
carried out two studies which are yet to report, very thorough studies about what exactly has gone on in Rochdale—a thematic study and also the history of some of these cases that have come to light after the Rochdale court cases. There is a huge amount of learning there which all of us need to take advantage of.

Q182 Mark Reckless: Minister, CEOP recommends that all LSCBs have a multi-agency safeguarding hub which I now understand is called a MASH. Is there a danger that we become overly prescriptive in the structures? You said all the key players were on the LSCB, yet it is recommended they must operate through a MASH. Is it really appropriate to bring in statutory definitions and requirements in terms of those or could we alternatively leave things more to the local discretion of people to talk to each other and use common sense?

Tim Loughton: No, we are not being prescriptive at all and we are not at this stage saying that every local area should have a MASH. Personally I believe that is the way to go because I have seen how effective they can be and it just makes sense that you have all the key players co-located, sharing that information instantaneously.

Mark Reckless: But you just said we had all the key players co-located on the LSCB. To assist the Committee, could you just state what is it about doing that through a MASH that makes it more effective than having the players at the LSCB level?

Tim Loughton: They are two completely separate things. The Local Safeguarding Children Boards are there to oversee the effectiveness of services and how well children are being safeguarded in that area. So you will get very senior people on them—the senior safeguarding police officer, senior head teacher and so on. The MASHs are the troops on the ground, the social worker sitting next to the domestic violence specialist, police officer next to a housing officer, who will very quickly compare information and decide on an action plan and who is going to intervene. In the past I think it is too much of the police doing one thing, a housing officer doing another thing, social services doing another thing, in a rather random approach. Here, all that information is shared, this is what needs to be done and that is the person from police, social services, who is going to be tasked to do it and pick up the ball and run with it. We are being very unprescriptive; we just reduced the working together guidance which is a highly prescriptive document amounting to 713 pages. We have now shrunk it down to I think 68 which is all about setting down guidelines and requirements but leaving it to local best practice as how best to intervene, and how you intervene in Medway may be very different to the way you intervene on some vulnerable groups in Leicester, for example. We are relying much more on the professional expertise of those professionals to come up with the most effective ways of intervention in their own areas, without have to spend all their time in front of a computer, looking over their shoulder, or flicking through 713 pages of a very prescriptive manual that has undermined professionalism.

Q183 Chair: The articles in The Times by Andrew Norfolk, is this the tip of the iceberg or is this the extent? Are we talking about thousands of children?

Tim Loughton: We are talking about a considerable number of children.

Q184 Chair: Does it run into the thousands, because we know the geographical part which is in every part of the country. Are we talking about thousands of children who are currently being abused?

Tim Loughton: I think we are probably talking about thousands of children, be it in care or from their own families, who are in some shape or form the subject of sexual abuse and we have not seen the half of it yet.

Q185 Chair: When you took your position as Minister for Children did you think it was that kind of extent or is this something you have discovered in the last two years?

Tim Loughton: Well, I have said that I think I was as guilty as everybody else in not fully appreciating the extent of this problem. All of us were unaware, I think, previous Ministers, chief police officials, directors of children’s services, frankly, and we have had a very serious wake-up call, as Mr Winnick described it earlier and everybody really has stepped up to the mark and we need them to do that. So I was not really surprised when I started to see some of the evidence, but my main concern is to make sure that everybody else is completely on the ball and up to the job of making sure we clamp down on this wherever it manifests itself.

Chair: Minister, thank you very much for your evidence today.
Tuesday 23 October 2012

Members present:
Keith Vaz (Chair)
Nicola Blackwood
Steve McCabe
Mr James Clappison
Mark Reckless
Mr David Winnick

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Jon Brown, Head of Strategy and Development, Sexual Abuse, NSPCC, Sue Minto, Head of ChildLine, NSPCC, and Michelle Lee-Izu, Director of Barnardo’s South East, gave evidence.

Q186 Chair: Mr Brown, Ms Lee-Izu and Ms Minto, thank you very much for coming, and thank you for waiting patiently outside. I am sorry we are running a little late.

You have probably been following the Committee’s inquiry into child grooming and you are aware of the evidence that we have received so far. I think the Committee was astonished to hear how widespread this matter was. We took evidence from the Deputy Children’s Commissioner before the recess, and she basically told the Committee that this was going on in every town and village in the whole of the United Kingdom, which I think was a shock to some of us, who believed that this was not the case. How widespread is it? Ms Minto.

Sue Minto: Certainly from ChildLine’s point of view, you will have the figures that in 2011–12 we received over 15,000 contacts from children and young people who were talking to us about sexual abuse. Grooming has its place across all types of sexual abuse, and we would say that that clearly is the tip of the iceberg and these are children who predominantly are not feeling like they can talk in their locality or within their network about it.

Chair: Mr Brown.

Jon Brown: Child sexual exploitation and child sexual abuse—and I think I would say that child sexual exploitation is a part of a wider problem of child sexual abuse within the UK—is a widespread problem, and undoubtedly the great majority of child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation goes unreported. It goes unreported, sometimes for the totality of the victim’s life, and sometimes it gets disclosed, as we have heard recently, many, many, many decades later. So I think we are looking at the visible peak of a much larger problem, and certainly from our research—prevalence research that the NSPCC has undertaken and other comparable research as well—it is estimated that between 60% and 90% of all child sexual abuse goes unreported, so we are looking at a major problem. We shouldn’t be hysterical about this. We need to take a very considered evidence-based look at the scale of the problem and the scope of the problem and how it can best be prevented. It can be prevented, but I think we need to recognise that we are dealing with a much larger problem than most people consider to be the case.

Q187 Chair: From a Barnardo’s point of view, Ms Lee-Izu, do you think it is as widespread as Mr Brown and Ms Minto have indicated?

Michelle Lee-Izu: Yes. We have set up specialised services, then we have very quickly seen ourselves identifying higher numbers of young people than we might have originally anticipated, and very quickly our services do become quite stretched in terms of resources. Sometimes even when we have done a piece of research, the research has not always identified the numbers of young people because it is a hidden problem, so it is once you start working directly with those young people and work with them at their level and understand that they then start to disclose the abuse. I would agree with Mr Brown that there are times that it does take quite a considerable amount of time to get young people to the point where they disclose that abuse.

Q188 Chair: You may or may not have seen the evidence given to us last week by the Chief Constable of South Yorkshire. I think the whole Committee was very surprised to know that in the whole of this year, nobody had been prosecuted for grooming, bearing in mind there has been a lot of publicity, especially in The Times and other newspapers, about what has been happening in South Yorkshire. A figure of zero was a surprise to this Committee. Why do you think there is a problem? It is clearly out there, it is happening and it is widespread, as we have heard. It is unreported in some circumstances, but, Ms Minto, why are there so few prosecutions? What is going wrong with getting to the bottom of the people responsible?

Sue Minto: Certainly from ChildLine’s point of view, there is a real naivety, if not an ignorance, around grooming and around the impact that it has on children and young people, and I think that the system—the child protection system and the criminal system—is still set up to expect children and young people to talk in a very coherent way about their experiences, and that isn’t going to happen. When you consider the impact issues, particularly around embarrassment and shame, which is a really key issue for children and young people who, because of the very nature of the grooming, are feeling very responsible, the way that they will then describe what has happened, and their role in it, if you like, really doesn’t fit very well with the way that our system responds. Certainly from ChildLine’s point of view, as I said earlier, a huge number of the children that contact us are not talking to anybody in their locality.
Chair: Mr Brown.

Jon Brown: Grooming of children for child sexual exploitation and child sexual abuse is part of a bigger picture in relation to the dynamics of child sexual abuse. As well as grooming, it involves planning, it involves targeting the children, it involves the sexual abuse itself and then it involves further planning of subsequent abuse, and abusers of course don’t only groom the child themselves; they are responsible for grooming the child’s immediate network, for convincing the parents and the carers of the child or the young person and their friends that they are in some way benign, they are in some way wanting to form a genuine friendship with the child or the young person, or they are in some way wanting to genuinely help them out. They are also responsible for grooming their wider environment as well. So I think because of that it is perfectly plausible, and in fact we do see professional networks getting groomed and hoodwinked into thinking that the girls and the young women are in some way complicit— are in some way agreeing to this abuse happening. Teenage girls, whether they be 12, 13, 14 or 15, cannot consent to sexual abuse, to sexual activity, as indeed boys cannot either. I think that is the hurdle we still need to get over with some professionals. I think we are getting there, but we are still looking at quite a piecemeal picture across the UK. There has been some really good practice in some local authority areas now in terms of ensuring that professionals, through the local Safeguarding Children Board, have a much better understanding in relation to the dynamics of sexual abuse, how they can get hoodwinked and how key professionals like social workers and police officers can get tricked into thinking that. So I think that is part of the problem.

I think in terms of dealing with an increasing number of prosecutions, we do need more education and information at quite a basic level to ensure that those responsible for securing prosecutions and those responsible for dispensing justice have a good, clear understanding in relation to the dynamics of it all.

Q189 Chair: You say that, but some of it is common sense. I put the example to the Chief Constable of a case that came to this Committee of a young 12-year-old girl with a 22-year-old man in a car with a bottle of vodka, and her images were on the young man’s phone, but nobody was prosecuted. So you are right, there does need to be more training, but a lot of this is just common sense. It is seeing people in very unusual circumstances, without jumping to conclusions on seeing people together. I mean, that is fairly obvious, isn’t it?

Jon Brown: Absolutely, and that is a completely unacceptable situation and we have certainly seen that replicate itself.

I guess the other point I would make is that I think over the last few years, the child protection focus has probably not been on girls and young women vulnerable to child sexual exploitation; it has been elsewhere as a result of other tragedies, other concerns, the killing of Peter Connelly and other babies as well, and I think that has focused some of the key elements of the child protection system on to babies and younger children and not on to the particular vulnerabilities that teenagers and young people have. So I think that is a problem. We need to ensure that the child protection system is robust enough to cope and to have a clear view in relation to all the risks that are out there and not have a tunnel vision on to one particular area of concern at the moment.

Q190 Chair: Ms Lee-Izu, do you agree?

Michelle Lee-Izu: Yes. We have seen some improvement in terms of police activity, but we still feel that the prosecution rates are too low. I would agree with my colleagues from NSPCC that often the young person is not believed, frequently not seen as a reliable witness by the CPS, and the young person, if they are the main witness, finds it very difficult sometimes to be able to talk about the issues that they have been the subject of, because they are of such a sensitive nature, and the young people feel quite embarrassed. At times the young person really doesn’t realise or understand at that stage the level of the abuse they have been through, so they may not make a willing witness.

Barnardo’s believes that policing could really be improved by better awareness among front-line officers in particular, but that there are senior officers with responsibility for tackling the abuse and really appointing specialist officers to investigate cases and engage with the victims. The victims really do need to be supported through the process, because they do find it traumatic, and obviously we wouldn’t want to doubly abuse young people by the process they have to go through. Obviously, the person who is perpetrating the abuse has a right for that case to be thoroughly heard.

Chair: Very helpful. David Winnick has a supplementary.

Q191 Mr Winnick: If the sexual abuse of children has not had a particularly high profile—the very opposite is the position at the moment, for reasons that we are all very familiar with—do you feel that the current publicity, which will no doubt continue for some time over the allegations made about someone who has died, will help or hinder the work carried out by organisations such as yourself? Mr Brown.

Jon Brown: Thank you. My view is that the unfolding tragedy that we have seen in relation to the Savile case will bring some good, I think for a number of reasons. It will focus public attention on the reality of child sexual abuse, how difficult it is for victims of child sexual abuse to talk about it, to disclose, and how long that can take. There are all sorts of mirrors, I think, to some of the cases we have seen of child sexual exploitation a lot more recently.

Sue Minto: For me, I think about it from the position of children and young people who are watching it unfold, and certainly I have had experience of children who are saying, “How come these children weren’t believed?” or, “How come this wasn’t uncovered?” So I think for me we really have to do something that says to our children and young people, “You really must speak out, and we are here, we will listen and we will do something.”
Q192 Nicola Blackwood: I just want to take you back for a moment to your comments about consent and attitudes to consent among police officers, and obviously I accept all those points, but I also wondered if we could talk a little bit about the attitude within the courts and CPS, because some of the comment that I have received from police officers is that they often have cases that they have assembled thrown back at them by the CPS because witnesses, victims of child sexual exploitation, are not credible witnesses, that they might have consented, and that the attitude towards them by juries and others would be very negative. I just wondered how that could be resolved or what your views are on that issue, because that is the other issue that is creating a problem for the prosecutors.

Michelle Lee-Izu: I think that one is supporting the children and young people who are going through the process. The other is to use some of the methodology that we know has been used in other court cases in terms of giving young people more protection, and training as well for people working in the court system and the CPS to try to understand some of the issues.

Nicola Blackwood: Did you have a comment, Mr Brown?

Jon Brown: Certainly; thank you. The NSPCC has been working with child witnesses, with young witnesses, for approximately 15 years, and I think during that time we have identified a fairly good body of practice evidence in terms of what works and what facilitates children to give the best-quality evidence, particularly in cases of child sexual abuse—child abuse generally, but particularly in cases of child sexual abuse—and I think preparation, ensuring that the child knows what to expect, ensuring that they are supported through the process and ensuring that where appropriate they are able to give evidence via remote video-link and those sorts of things are absolutely critical. We are currently working with Victim Support to try to ensure that that level of practice is disseminated right across the UK. So we think that is absolutely critical. A child or a young person in a court facing their perpetrator is going to be, generally speaking, extremely compromised in terms of the quality of the evidence that they are able to give, because that grooming process continues in court. One look at the child from that offender can significantly affect their ability to answer a question. So I think the practice that we have developed over 15 years, and really ensuring that that is embedded throughout the criminal justice system, should be a key way forward in terms of the quality of evidence that children can give and upping the level of successful prosecutions.

Q193 Nicola Blackwood: But if that sort of practice has been developed over 15 years, then why aren’t there more prosecutions now? For example, I spoke to one officer recently and she said, “I have been through the court process with a child witness. The child witness was cross-examined by multiple barristers, because there were multiple perpetrators, and I would not put my own child through what that child was put through on the stand, because quite frankly it was making her relive the nightmare all over again.” If we are not protecting those child witnesses through our court system now, when we have 15 years of experience like that, then what is it that we need to be doing differently in order to make sure that we can get these prosecutions?

Jon Brown: I think our view would be that those practice models need to be rolled out and need to be disseminated on a consistent basis right across the country, because they have not been at the moment. So, for example, we have developed in the South-West of England some really good practice based around Exeter Crown Court, just for example. But I think it has been slow progress, and we would have liked to see much faster progress and the development of that kind of practice right across the country at a much faster rate.

Q194 Nicola Blackwood: What is the barrier to progress?

Jon Brown: At the NSPCC, we think the barrier is about, in a sense, in relation to the criminal justice system itself, the adversarial system, the perceived need for the child—for all witnesses, including children—to be there in court facing the accused, and sometimes I do think the criminal justice system is blind to the reality of that, particularly in cases of child abuse and particularly child sexual abuse, so I think there is further work to be done with those responsible for the criminal justice system to ensure that there is a better understanding of the specific impacts on children giving evidence under those circumstances.

Q195 Nicola Blackwood: Have you provided the Committee in writing with the work and practices that you found particularly helpful for child witnesses?

Jon Brown: Yes, we have.

Chair: Ms Lee-Izu, you indicated you wanted to say something.

Michelle Lee-Izu: Yes. No, that is fine. We could also present some information in writing on the Ministry of Justice witness intermediary scheme as well. The other thing that we would like to see more of is more expert witnesses being used in these cases so that the children themselves don’t have to give the evidence, but an expert witness could.

Nicola Blackwood: Okay, thanks.

Q196 Steve McCabe: The NSPCC report that their London-based staff say that perpetrators and victims come from all ages, all backgrounds and male and female. I just wondered, is that the same in your experience of other projects throughout the country?

Sue Minto: Certainly it would be a mistake to assume that only men abuse or only certain ethnic groups abuse, and that is when we really do miss children that are being abused. The majority of children are abused by men, but women abuse as well, boys get abused, and so I think that it would be very dangerous to try to put it into any kind of category. I think we have all heard about this tip of the iceberg and how concerning it is, and how difficult it is for children and young people to speak out, so we have to have our eyes open much more than they already are.

Jon Brown: Yes, our experience is that the great majority of child sexual abuse is perpetrated by white
men. If you look at the totality of child sexual abuse committed within the family, within the extended family and indeed outside of the family, the great majority is committed by white men. However, as my colleague says, it is also important to remember that approximately a third of all sexual offences against children are perpetrated by under-18s, so it is important to remember that factor, and also, as far as we know from our research within the UK and looking at international research, child sexual abuse is perpetrated across all communities and across all socio-economic groups as well. We are also aware of the recent cases of child sexual exploitation within the north of England and the particular predominance in terms of arrests and prosecutions there of men particularly from British Pakistani backgrounds, so we are aware of that and we wouldn’t want to ignore it. We think that there does need to be a better understanding in terms of how that has happened, the focus on that, and indeed, the NSPCC are setting up a round-table event early in December in Manchester, hosted by Manchester Police\(^1\), to have a focused discussion and look at that very issue on perpetrators of child sexual exploitation, to begin to get a bit more of a rational evidence-based analysis of the issue.

**Steve McCabe:** Thank you. Do you have anything to add?

**Michelle Lee-Izu:** We would agree that the ethnicity of the young people we are working with is variable in terms of those that are abused, but also across our core of services; although we don’t collate the data around the men who perpetrate the abuse, there are variable ethnicities. I think what we would echo is we would be really concerned that young people and those caring for children and young people would somehow assume that the perpetrators were only from one race or culture, because we think that leaves children and young people much more vulnerable.

**Q197 Steve McCabe:** Okay, fine. So, can I just clarify this? In all your experience across all your projects, you are coming across victims of all ethnicities and perpetrators and the bit of work in Manchester will be interesting, but that is an additional thing?

**Jon Brown:** Indeed.

**Q198 Mr Clappison:** Can I just take you back to what you said about the judicial approach to this and system of justice? Mr Brown, you mentioned a very understandable problem of young witnesses having to confront their accused in court. I am a bit rusty on this, but I thought there was more provision these days for evidence to be given by video-links. Do you think that is being sufficiently used and is it a success?

**Jon Brown:** Indeed, there is that provision, and I would say that is due in large part to the work of the NSPCC—

**Mr Clappison:** Yes, absolutely.

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\(^1\) The NSPCC is holding a roundtable on Child Sexual Exploitation and Race, hosted by Greater Manchester Police on 3rd December 2012. The roundtable will bring together key voices working in this field for an exploration of the issues. Invitations are being sent to Committee members.
themselves, to feel confident in addressing these sorts of issue, issues with children and ensuring that they are able to have a much better understanding in terms of how they can be targeted, how they can be groomed and what they can do themselves to ensure that they are more resilient to that as well. My colleague from ChildLine could speak very eloquently about the school service that ChildLine provides as well, which assists in that prevention approach as well.

Q203 Mr Winnick: Could the mass media be used? Could the Government take out advertisements, particularly on the television channels, warning of the sentences which are likely to be given by the court if convicted of sexual abuse?

Jon Brown: Indeed, and we would see that as a key part of primary prevention.

Q204 Mr Winnick: Have you been urging this?

Jon Brown: We are very supportive of that approach and there are organisations—and a particular organisation, Stop it Now! UK, that focuses on sexual abuse prevention, and we certainly work very closely with Stop it Now! in terms of some of the activities that they take in relation to the prevention of abuse, and indeed, as you point out, the need for key evidence-based messages about the reality of child sexual abuse and how it can be best prevented to get out there more in the mass media, not in an hysterical way, but obviously in a way that the public can understand, can be clear about, and can improve the ability of parents to be more resilient to being groomed in relation to child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, and indeed their children as well. We think that is critical way forward really, in terms of the prevention of this problem.

Q205 Mr Winnick: One of the points which has arisen from the controversy over the allegations made against Mr Savile is that the people concerned, who are now very much adults, say that at the time they took the view they simply would not be believed. Leaving aside where celebrities are involved or were involved, in ordinary circumstances it is quite likely, is it not, that someone who is 12 or 14 would have the feeling, justified or otherwise, that if she reports—

Chair: That is because we have an absolute ignorance about the impact issues for these children and young people.

Sue Minto: Yes, I would agree with my colleagues. I am just more interested to go back to your original point really, around the early-intervention stuff and the awareness-raising, because obviously there is the point when you get to court and how tough that is, but I would agree with you that the work in schools and the awareness-raising for children and young people is critical. We work with 6,000 young people in schools at the moment across our services, and that assists young people to understand healthy relationships and also it gives a chance to talk to those young people who may well become the perpetrators very early on, about what healthy relationships are and how to respect each other. We have developed a number of tools for work directly with young people and with teachers and with professionals that assists both us professionals and the young people to know that they will be believed and understood at that stage. I do think, as well as the sharp end around the prosecutions, the awareness-raising—we have seen less work than we would like to see around—would really assist.

Mr Winnick: Thank you very much indeed. It is very important.
Q208 Chair: Can I just ask some specific questions? Mr Brown, you are on record as talking about 35,000 illegal images of children found each day on the internet, and you refer to them as crime scenes. What could the internet providers be doing more in order to stop this happening? We have evidence next week from CEOP—I am sure you deal with them very closely—but if these images appear every day, somebody needs to do something about it. What do you think the internet providers ought to be doing to try to get these images off the internet?

Jon Brown: Yes, the NSPCC does indeed work closely with CEOP; and we have a team embedded there with the CEOP team. The issue of child abuse imagery on the internet has grown exponentially. The problem has grown exponentially over the last few years in particular. In terms of what can be done about it, I think a lot is being done, and the Internet Watch Foundation and CEOP and Interpol are extremely proactive working with the UK Government.

Q209 Chair: Should not the internet providers themselves be doing more, because they after all provide the ability to put these images out on the internet? We have all these various other organisations, but at the end of the day there has to be responsibility, does there not?

Jon Brown: Indeed. I think the internet service providers certainly have taken great strides over recent years to be more responsible to ensure that when they are aware of child abuse imagery on any sites that are hosted by them that they take that imagery down as soon as possible. I think the challenge is with peer-to-peer networks—with what is termed “the hidden internet”—and new techniques that abusers are using all the time to get round internet service providers and to share child abuse imagery between themselves without going through internet service providers. That is the next challenge that we are on to, I think, and that law enforcement is on to. There is more, I think, that ISPs can still do.

Q210 Chair: Ms Lee-Izu, this morning there was a report from the Chief Inspector of Prisons about Cedars, where G4S was accused of using force against a pregnant woman in the detention centre that Barnardo’s are involved in. Would you like to update the Committee on anything that might be relevant to the Committee?

Michelle Lee-Izu: Yes. Absolutely.

Chair: But you know about the case and you have an explanation as to what has been going on?

Michelle Lee-Izu: Yes, yes.

Q211 Chair: Ms Minto, we have here in front of the Committee the three biggest brand names in terms of child protection: ChildLine, which has done some extraordinary work, set up by Esther Rantzen over 20 years ago, extraordinary work; the NSPCC, which is one of the most respected organisations, I think, in the world; and Barnardo’s, which has done some wonderful work with children. Can you tell the Committee, in conclusion, do you think child grooming is on the increase or on the decrease as far as this country is concerned? Sue Minto.

Sue Minto: You just talked about the internet, and I think that the internet has provided huge opportunities for abusers to groom young people and our young people live in a world now where it is 24/7, this whole social networking, and the pressure and the risks as well as the opportunities for them are there 24/7. We have a lot of contact coming through to ChildLine about whether it is bullying or whether they have sent text messages or imaging that they wished they had not done. They have been tricked into something, they talked to someone, and they trust that this person is who they say they are. In that respect, it has opened up a whole arena, and for children and young people the pressure and the risk are immense.

Chair: Mr Brown, on the increase, on the decrease, being contained?

Jon Brown: I think setting aside for one moment the issue of online abuse, which is a huge challenge—and we recognise that and certainly we are seeing an exponential increase there undoubtedly, if one refers to offline child abuse and grooming—I think huge steps are being taken. It is difficult to say whether it is on the increase or not. Certainly awareness has increased, and that is a good thing. We need to see that awareness followed by increased prosecutions, and importantly the increased availability of treatment for victims as well. There are about 55,000 places for treatment at any one time for children who have been abused that are not available. That is a huge tragedy, and I think if we can increase availability of treatment for victims and increase training and awareness-raising for key professionals involved in this, that is going to continue to make inroads into the problem, and there is the separate challenge of online child abuse imagery, which I think requires a concerted effort as well.

Chair: Ms Lee-Izu?

Michelle Lee-Izu: It is difficult to say if it is on the increase when you have historical cases, obviously, that are only just coming to light, but definitely the numbers of young people we are working with in terms of child sexual exploitation is increasing year on year. Our numbers are going up and prevalence, as colleagues have said, around internet and technology abuse is increasing, as well as the methodology.

Q212 Chair: For the record—it is raised by Mr Winnick—one of your organisations have been approached by anybody concerning the Savile revelations? No victims have approached either ChildLine or NSPCC or Barnardo’s as far as you are aware?


Michelle Lee-Izu: Yes.

Chair: They have?

Jon Brown: Through our helpline we have had victims in relation to Savile, and it has brought a significant increase in terms of other people wanting to talk about their own experiences of child abuse as well through to our helpline.
Q213  **Chair:** Are these victims of Jimmy Savile or new victims that have come forward?

**Jon Brown:** My understanding is both. We have had people contact our helpline who have directly experienced victimisation by Savile and other related instances, and indeed unrelated incidents, all of which, of course, have been passed on to the police.

The NSPCC has been asked by the Metropolitan Police to assist their investigation into allegations made against Jimmy Savile by taking calls on this issue and compiling any new information for them. As of 1st November 2012, the NSPCC’s helpline has receive 190 calls directly relating to allegations against Jimmy Savile which we have passed to the police. The NSPCC helpline has never dealt with so many allegations against one individual. In addition, in the four weeks since the allegations against Savile first surfaced, the NSPCC has also received 217 calls by people who are not making allegations against Savile, but were prompted by this media story to discuss with the NSPCC their own experience of being sexually abused as children. 91 of these calls have also been referred to the police. The NSPCC’s 24 hour helpline provides advice and support to adults who are concerned about the safety or welfare of a child.

Q214 **Chair:** Thank you very much. We are most grateful. This inquiry is continuing and we are taking more evidence. If there is anything that we have missed out today, we are very keen to hear from you, because we know you have enormous experience and expertise in these matters. I am most grateful to you for coming today. Thank you very much. That concludes the session.

**Michelle Lee-Izu:** Thank you for the opportunity.

**Jon Brown:** Thank you.
Tuesday 30 October 2012

Members present:
Keith Vaz (Chair)
Nicola Blackwood
Dr Julian Huppert
Steve McCabe
Bridget Phillipson
Mark Reckless
Mr David Winnick

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: David Dillnut, Head of UK Human Trafficking Centre, Serious and Organised Crime Agency, and Mark Webster, Deputy Director, Operational Services Department, Serious and Organised Crime Agency, gave evidence.

Q215 Chair: I call the Committee to order and refer all those present to the Register of Members’ Interests where the interests of members of this Committee are noted and I welcome you, Mr Dillnutt, and, Mr Webster. Thank you very much for giving evidence.

Bridget Phillipson: Can I declare a further interest?

Chair: Yes, of course.

Bridget Phillipson: For the later session, my husband is employed by the FSA.

Q216 Chair: Thank you. That is very helpful, Ms Phillipson. Let us begin.

Mr Dillnutt, can we start with you because, of course, being part of the Human Trafficking Centre you have responsibility for looking carefully at the welfare of children who have been trafficked. How many adults have been prosecuted for the trafficking of children in the last year?

David Dillnut: There have been a number of prosecutions that have taken place in terms of trafficked children—a number of well publicised cases. I do not have the exact numbers of suspects, but there have been several prosecutions of traffickers of children trafficked both into the UK and within the United Kingdom. I can certainly ascertain the correct numbers and let you have them in due course.

Q217 Chair: But you must know, because this is something you do every day, is it in the tens, is it in the hundreds of people who have been prosecuted?

David Dillnut: No, it is certainly not in the hundreds. I would say it was certainly in the 10 to 20 figure in terms of prosecutions relating to children trafficked both into and within the United Kingdom.

Q218 Chair: Do you mean between 0 and 20 people were prosecuted last year?

David Dillnut: I have not got the exact figure but I will certainly ascertain that for the Committee and provide it, but there have been a number of prosecutions across the UK for these offences.

Q219 Chair: Wouldn’t that be one of the benchmarks of your organisation? You are now part of SOCA, aren’t you?

David Dillnut: Yes.

Q220 Chair: SOCA gets a budget of £500 million a year, or it did; it is about to be abolished and put into the National Crime Agency. In looking at human trafficking and the trafficking of children, the prosecutions of those who are involved in this is surely one of the key figures, is it not—one of the key indicators of the success of your organisation?

David Dillnut: In respect of the prosecutions and the offences charged, as far as the UKHTC and SOCA are concerned it is not a primary performance indicator because the work of the trafficking centre is to advise and assist the forces or other agencies conducting prosecutions, and allow the forces and the Crown Prosecution Service to conduct those prosecutions. We do not, as the Human Trafficking Centre, have a responsibility to conduct prosecutions.

Q221 Chair: You are just there to give advice?

David Dillnut: That is the role of the Human Trafficking Centre, yes.

Q222 Chair: Right. Have you seen any links between child trafficking, and by that I mean internal child trafficking—

David Dillnut: In the UK?

Chair: In the UK, and child grooming which is the subject, of course, of the inquiry that the Committee is conducting?

David Dillnut: Certainly, there has been evidence of child sexual exploitation and grooming, leading into and forming part of trafficking of children within the United Kingdom. There have certainly been cases and there is certainly information and intelligence to that effect, yes.

Q223 Chair: Mr Webster, tell us about your involvement in all this. This is obviously an issue that concerns the Committee and the public. You have no doubt read the articles in The Times and you have seen the concerns of a number of witnesses who have appeared before the Select Committee. What is your role in all this?

Mark Webster: My current role is the Head of Operational Services Department within SOCA. That encompasses quite a wide range of business, but relevant to the Committee today, I oversee the UK Human Trafficking Centre, the UK Missing Persons Bureau, the Organised Crime Coordination Centre and also the ex-NPIA units who have now come across into SOCA en route to the National Crime Agency.

Q224 Chair: That sounds very organisational. What the Committee is interested in is finding the
perpetrators of child grooming. What are you doing in respect of finding out who is responsible for the grooming of children and getting them prosecuted? Presumably that is the important role of SOCA, or the NCA as it will be. It is not just to deal with organisational structures, is it?

**Mark Webster:** I agree. That is an outline of my responsibilities. In the work that goes on beneath that, I will first talk about the Organised Crime Coordination Centre. Organised crime group mapping as a concept across the UK has developed quite significantly within the last 12 months and there is an element of work within that to look at how we adequately reflect the breadth and the depth of offending in a number of different areas; child sexual exploitation is one of these areas and trafficking is another. There is a large piece of work going on now between the Organised Crime Coordination Centre and CEOP to ensure that we adequately reflect the breadth of that offending across the UK.

**Q225 Chair:** Yes. If I could probe you a little bit more on this, you have again given me a job description; you have not given me practical examples of the way in which you have been able to help. Do you know how many people were prosecuted last year for child grooming or child exploitation?

**Mark Webster:** Not specifically for trafficking or child exploitation, no. A point I would make on the statistics is that it is sometimes quite misleading to look at individual charges because they may not be charged with trafficking, for example, under the UKHTC stats; what they may be charged with are more substantive offences of rape or abduction. We can give you a further breakdown of that in writing.

**Q226 Chair:** The Chief Constable of South Yorkshire did have figures, and he was able to tell us that nobody had been prosecuted last year. I am just surprised that the two of you, who are both very much involved in the issue, are unable to tell the Committee about prosecutions relating to this very important area. I want to take it one step further. What has your organisation done to help coordinate action between, for example? Is it organised or is it localised?

**Mark Webster:** It is a continuum, so you will have localised child sexual exploitation but you will also have organised groups as well. There are organised groups reflected in the organised crime group mapping so, yes, there are elements of organisation to this.

**Q227 Chair:** Right. So give me an example of why nobody has been prosecuted for child grooming in South Yorkshire, which includes the areas that you have talked about, even though hundreds of cases have been brought to public attention by newspaper articles.

**Mark Webster:** I cannot give you the detail as to why South Yorkshire have not prosecuted anybody for child trafficking or sexual exploitation, I am afraid.

**Q228 Chair:** Tell us about Greater Manchester, for example.

**Mark Webster:** There was input into Greater Manchester through the UK Human Trafficking Centre, through crime operations support—specialist operations support in SOCA—and we also provide surveillance support, expertise, operational advice and investigative guidance. Recently, for operations in Kent, in Oxford in Operation Bullfinch, and for a number of other operations we have provided direct investigative and specialist support, and we do that continually. I am sure Dave can talk about a number of operations, or mention a number of operations, that we are involved in today with various different police forces across the UK. There is a large input across a number of specialist areas into a number of policing operations.

**Q229 Chair:** Is this organised? Is child grooming organised? Is it an organised crime? Should SOCA be involved in this? Is it a group of people in Manchester organising with people in Rochdale, organising with people in London? Is it in the traditional organised sense that we believe the drug cartels are organised, for example? Is it organised or is it localised?

**Mark Webster:** It is a continuum, so you will have localised child sexual exploitation but you will also have organised groups as well. There are organised groups reflected in the organised crime group mapping so, yes, there are elements of organisation to this.

**Q230 Chair:** How many groups are there?

**Mark Webster:** I can provide you with that detail at a later stage if you wish. It is probably not appropriate in a public forum to talk specifically about the number of organised crime groups that we have mapped to this kind of crime.

**Q231 Chair:** Why is it not appropriate to tell a Select Committee of the House of Commons how many groups are involved, when we know about prosecutions and we have seen much evidence in the newspapers about this? Why are you not able to tell us?

**Mark Webster:** I could provide you with that detail. You just do not have it today.

**Mark Webster:** I would find it more appropriate to provide you the information on the actual number of organised crime groups involved in this in written form or in confidential briefings.

**Q232 Steve McCabe:** I can understand why prosecutions might not count as a specific target for SOCA, but given that you have this overarching view and you are advising police forces across the country, can you give us some idea of the scale of the problem that we are dealing with? Could you say how many of the 43 police forces are dealing with cases like this, and in all other inquiries that have been mentioned during the course of this Committee?

**Mark Webster:** There was input into Greater Manchester, for example.

**Q233 Chair:** Yes. If I could probe you a little bit more on this, you have again given me a job description; you have not given me practical examples of the way in which you have been able to help. Do you know how many people were prosecuted last year for child grooming or child exploitation?

**Mark Webster:** Not specifically for trafficking or child exploitation, no. A point I would make on the statistics is that it is sometimes quite misleading to look at individual charges because they may not be charged with trafficking, for example, under the UKHTC stats; what they may be charged with are more substantive offences of rape or abduction. We can give you a further breakdown of that in writing.

**Q234 Chair:** The Chief Constable of South Yorkshire did have figures, and he was able to tell us that nobody had been prosecuted last year. I am just surprised that the two of you, who are both very much involved in the issue, are unable to tell the Committee about prosecutions relating to this very important area. I want to take it one step further. What has your organisation done to help coordinate action between, for example? Is it organised or is it localised?

**Mark Webster:** It is a continuum, so you will have localised child sexual exploitation but you will also have organised groups as well. There are organised groups reflected in the organised crime group mapping so, yes, there are elements of organisation to this.

**Q235 Chair:** How many groups are there?

**Mark Webster:** I can provide you with that detail at a later stage if you wish. It is probably not appropriate in a public forum to talk specifically about the number of organised crime groups that we have mapped to this kind of crime.

**Q236 Chair:** Why is it not appropriate to tell a Select Committee of the House of Commons how many groups are involved, when we know about prosecutions and we have seen much evidence in the newspapers about this? Why are you not able to tell us?

**Mark Webster:** I could provide you with that detail. You just do not have it today.

**Mark Webster:** I would find it more appropriate to provide you the information on the actual number of organised crime groups involved in this in written form or in confidential briefings.
trafficking, adults and children. As I said earlier, there are a number of similar inquiries to those that the Committee are looking at, which we are advising on currently. Because of the nature of those inquiries and the operational ongoing aspect of them, again I would say that I would like to provide that information confidentially to the Committee, but I would assert that there are a number of those types of inquiries that we are currently engaged with: Greater Manchester police is one, West Midlands police is another. In terms of the detail and the proportionality of their work, I am unfortunately not in a position to provide that to the Committee.

Chair: Thank you. Mr Webster, do you want to comment?

David Dillnut: On your question of the seriousness and the organised nature, the important part for, certainly, myself and the rest of the HTC is to do with the serious victimology and the serious harm that is caused by the nature of these offences. Therefore, the answer to the question, "Is it serious and organised?" is that it is serious enough for HTC and SOCA to rightly be involved in assisting those investigations that we know about and are ongoing across the country.

Chair: Excellent. Just remind the Committee about your budget and the number of people who work for your organisation. I know the budget has been cut recently but what is it at the moment? How many people do you have working for you?

David Dillnut: We have 33 SOCA staff and two seconded United Kingdom BA staff who work in the Human Trafficking Centre, and it currently has a budget of around £1.7 million.

Chair: That has gone down, has it not, or has it stayed the same?

David Dillnut: It has been maintained at the same level for the past two years as far as I am aware.

Chair: Mr Webster, what kind of budget and numbers are you working to, to assist you in your important duties?

Mark Webster: I have different functions with different spreads, but the NPIA functions, or the ex-NPIA functions, are 161 people transferred across on 1 April. That includes the UK Missing Persons Bureau, which is 13 people. The budget for that entire area of my business is £10.36 million.

Chair: How many people do you have working with you?

Mark Webster: In that part of my responsibility, 161. Those are the ex-NPIA functions.

Chair: Right.

Mark Webster: I have some other portfolios of work with some other staff within those.

Mark Reckless: I understand that you advise police forces on conducting best practice interviews with victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation. For the layman, rather than the more detailed technical guidance, what are the key elements to doing a good interview to facilitate a result?

Mark Webster: Advisory services cover an awful lot of elements, but we will advise on legislation, and what the best applicability of legislation is, what the investigating officers are likely to need to prove, any particular legal difficulties they may encounter, what investigative tactics we have seen produce a result and produce the best evidence, how we deploy our vulnerable persons team, so that people who are trained in achieving best evidence from traumatised or vulnerable victims will be able to advise on the judicial process, and we are also be able to provide witness intermediaries through the witness intermediary service. SOCA can also provide surveillance support and various other investigative capabilities to help achieve best evidence.

Chair: Thank you. Mr Webster, do you want to comment?

Mark Reckless: There was a recent case involving the UK Border Agency—"I think it was called Ravindra and others, or similar—where the Border Agency was seeking to prosecute some people who were smuggling in people, largely from Sri Lanka, working illegally in the restaurant trade. That case completely collapsed despite there being quite a number of police seconded to the investigation. The most basic evidential and prosecution procedures were not followed. Are you confident that lessons have been learnt from that and it will not happen again?

Mark Webster: I am not aware of that particular investigation, but by all means I can find out what our involvement was, if any.

David Dillnut: Again, it is difficult to speak for the UKBA because they have their own agencies, but to go to the general point, where we can, as a human trafficking centre, offer advice to trafficking investigations, it is around understanding the various stresses, pressures, and tremendous fear that the victims have, and understanding some of the issues that prevail where they are trafficked from-cultural or country issues. This is expertise that we have built up over time and where forces or other agencies find these cases, we can offer investigative strategies that reflect those threats and the risks that the victims find themselves in. Similarly, if it is dealing with suspects we can provide investigative strategies that may assist an investigating officer to make more progress than they otherwise might.

Chair: Thank you. Mr Webster, do you want to comment?

Mark Reckless: Would you be happy to contact the Home Office and UKBA about the Ravindra case I described, and at least offer or make clear the expertise that SOCA and, presumably in due course, the NCA will have, because I certainly believe their investigation operation would have benefited from your expertise?

David Dillnut: Yes.

Chair: Thank you. Mr Webster, do you want to comment?

Bridget Phillipson: Where there are reasonable grounds to believe people have been victims of trafficking, more than half are subsequently found not to be victims of trafficking. What happens to those people?

David Dillnut: Clearly, between the reasonable grounds decision being made and then the conclusive
grounds decision there can be a number of issues that affect the outcome, or whether it is deemed to be conclusive or not. Primarily, that may relate to the strength or otherwise of the evidence. It may also relate to an individual’s preference to not be included, and therefore there is no conclusive grounds decision in the NRM. What in fact happens if a negative conclusive grounds decision is made, is that those victims are—through the ongoing support of the contract holder, which is the Salvation Army—referred to mainstream victim support services at a local level for further support in whichever area they wish to progress.

Q241 Bridget Phillipson: Why are the numbers as they are? What is the reason that more than half are found not to be victims of trafficking after that kind of investigation?

David Dillnut: I think I touched on that earlier. The answer is that there can be a number of reasons, and indeed the reasonable grounds decision and the conclusive grounds decision are based on two different evidence standards. It is balance of probabilities first and then a reasonable standard of evidence to put the person into the support mechanisms that the NRM will provide. There can be a number of reasons why there is a difference between the figures.

Q242 Bridget Phillipson: Could you give some examples? I do not fully follow why.

David Dillnut: For the evidence to base a reasonable grounds decision, which is on the balance of probabilities at that particular point—five days into the referral—you can make the decision on the limited amount of evidence that you have. Forty-five days later there may be a different level, less evidence to confirm the original decision, and/or the victim may have said, “I don’t wish to be conclusively put into the NRM”. There can be a number of reasons related to that.

Mark Webster: The reasonable grounds stage is set out to identify a potential victim of trafficking. Conclusive grounds are much more stringent. We would want the initial phase to provide as a wide a funnel as possible, because what you would not want to do is exclude somebody who was a potential victim. We would want that to be drawn as widely as we can, so we would expect to see it funnel down to the people who have conclusive grounds and, as Dave says, there are many different reasons for that, such as people’s willingness to engage in the process. Notwithstanding all the support available, they may not want to go through a difficult prosecution for many other reasons. There are support mechanisms for us to bring to them to support them through that process, but they may choose that they do not want to. The point I make is that we would want the number at the start to be as wide as we could possibly draw it.

Q243 Bridget Phillipson: Of the half that are found not to be victims of trafficking, what proportion of that would you say are people that perhaps do not quite meet the threshold but could be viewed as victims of trafficking? How many are simply people that have not been victims of trafficking? Are you talking about up to half? Are they people who have never been victims of trafficking?

David Dillnut: I cannot give you the actual percentages, but again I can have that looked at in terms of what the NRM data would allow us to pull out. It could well be the fact that the initial referral and the concern was such that the potential victim was there but when we examined the evidence the person, by their own admission, would say, “No I’m not trafficked. I came here and I’m content with the situation I find myself in”. There could be a raft of reasons in that area alone, and then it may well be that even if we think they are a victim of trafficking, they do not want to be put into the referral mechanism. Indeed, in our recent HTC baseline assessment we reflected that in the sense that the NRM figures say, “These are the victims of trafficking”, but we are saying in our baseline assessment that we think there are more than that because they are potential victims of trafficking but they have not got into the NRM system. That is the point Mark is making; we try to cast the net as wide as we can so we can start to represent what we think is the true picture of trafficking into and within the UK.

Bridget Phillipson: Thank you.

Q244 Chair: Are either of you involved in Operation Yewtree?

Mark Webster: No.

David Dillnut: No.

Q245 Chair: There have been no referrals to either of you?

Mark Webster: No.

David Dillnut: No.

Q246 Chair: Do we know how many of those trafficked started off in the care of a local authority? Do we have any statistics on children in the care of one local authority being taken to other parts of the country? Is that part of your remit?

David Dillnut: It is not part of the remit per se but, again, it may be something that we could look at in terms of the data that the NRM hold to see whether that can be distilled for the Committee.

Q247 Chair: Mr Webster, not part of your remit?

Mark Webster: No.

Q248 Chair: Children in care who may be trafficked and moved elsewhere?

Mark Webster: We may well support investigations, and have supported investigations, like that, but the national referral mechanism is a means to provide support and to give a period of respite and reflection to allow people to make the appropriate decision. It is not an intelligence system per se that then deals with
that level of detail, but we can do some manual work to fill in that detail should you require it.

Q249 Mr Winnick: You have both had a good deal of police experience; I have been looking at your CVs. How far would you say—both of you from different police forces in the past—has child grooming, child exploitation become much more of an issue? I do not mean what is dominating the media at the moment, but generally compared to 10 or 15 years ago. Was it taken really seriously then?

Mark Webster: Certainly memory extends back many years, when there were inquiries in GMP, which was my previous background, into various different child sexual exploitation rings in care homes, so it is not a new phenomenon. However, the methods and the tools available to deal with it have changed significantly.

Q250 Mr Winnick: I know it is not a new phenomenon; it has been going on I am sure, as in all countries, for a very long time. My question was more along the lines, how far was it taken seriously by the police at the time, going back quite a few years?

Mark Webster: My answer would be based on opinion and personal recollection.

Mr Winnick: Of course.

Mark Webster: I can remember some very serious inquiries in the Greater Manchester area many years ago about exploitation that took place with looked after children. It was taken seriously. I certainly think that there has been a spike in interest or in media coverage recently, and that can be no less than helpful if it brings awareness to the front line and to the frontline responders about the issue.

Q251 Mr Winnick: Is that your impression, Mr Dillnut?

David Dillnut: I can certainly reflect on my experience, and I can, as Mark says, bear testament to examples where child exploitation and child grooming were taking place. However, the level and seriousness that we are seeing now—so much that the Government has a strategy specifically designed as part of the organised crime strategy to deal with it—reflects the concern at the number of victims that we are now seeing and the number of cases that are more and more coming to light in terms of being discovered by police forces. It may be—Mark’s point—that because the communications and networks now allow us to be so much more aware, it is difficult to comment on whether the numbers are up or down versus 10 or 15 years ago. Certainly, we are currently seeing, as I know from the NRM figures, that the number of victims that we are seeing is increasing.

Q252 Mr Winnick: I have figures on the number of referrals of people involved in this terrible business in the UK. Those whose country of origin is the UK fell from 52 at the end of March 2011 to just six a year later. Does that mean that the problem is that much less, or simply that others are involved?

David Dillnut: No. What you are seeing there is the timing of when the figures are prepared and when they are released. In terms of the figures this year versus the figures last year for UK children, it is a consistent picture. The difference is accounted for by the release of the figures into the public domain, but I can assure you that in terms of the figures that you have versus the actual numbers of victims that we are seeing year on year, there is a consistent picture in terms of child victims in the UK.

Q253 Mr Winnick: Stories we have heard and the convictions, which fortunately have taken place from time to time, of those who bring young women into this country for one reason only, relate to the human trafficking of females, usually aged under 20. The emphasis may have been on Eastern Europe in the past but obviously they are from other places as well. Would you say there has been any decrease in that crime of bringing women into the country for prostitution and the rest?

David Dillnut: These are adults, not children. We are talking about adult females being trafficked for sex and sexual exploitation?

Mr Winnick: Yes.

David Dillnut: Looking at the intelligence and the figures we have, we are probably seeing a slight increase in the numbers of females being trafficked into the UK for sexual exploitation, from a range of the most prevalent source countries.

Q254 Mr Winnick: I mentioned young females, but of course in some instances they would indeed be under 18 or under 16.

David Dillnut: Yes, certainly.

Q255 Chair: Mr Webster, a final question to you, are you also responsible for the transition from the NPIA on the databases?

Mark Webster: No.

Chair: You are not.

Mark Webster: I was responsible for the transition of various different NPIA units into SOCA. There were five of those units. That is the 161 staff we were talking about. Also, I am responsible for the transition of the Proceeds of Crime Centre into SOCA as well. There are some databases associated with that around JARD and FISS asset recovery that come under my remit.

Q256 Chair: On that, because we are seeing the Chairman of the Financial Services Authority later and we have an inquiry into drugs running at the same time, do you think that more needs to be done by banks to try and look at suspicious occasions in respect of money laundering into the accounts of people we suspect to be drug barons, for example, after the cases in America involving HSBC? Should more be done?

Mark Webster: I feel that that is not a question for me to answer at this stage. I am responsible for the transition of POCC to SOCA, which has not yet happened.

Chair: I quite understand that. I know SOCA is a big organisation. As you were here, we thought we would ask you.

Mark Webster: Thank you.
Chair: Mr Webster and Mr Dillnut, you have been extremely helpful. Thank you very much. You did say you would write to the Committee with some information and we would be most grateful to receive it. Thank you for your help.
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) teenage 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...”
Absolutely. I would absolutely 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.

**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 for 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 beneficiary 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 10 and now we’ve only got 7

Please see attached noted relating to these figures...

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 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 10 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.

Please see attached noted relating to these figures

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 unru. Perhaps more could be done to understand why that unru 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, and told us about what has been happening over the last few years. We are shocked that, in your view, the resources are being cut in half. We will put some of this is still continuing, and we are concerned that your last few years. We are shocked that, in your view, 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 not to know.

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.

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 setups, 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 cannot 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 cannot 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
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: The 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.
Tuesday 20 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 Witnesses

Witnesses: Detective Superintendent Ian Critchley, Head of Public Protection, Lancashire Police and Head of ACPO Child Sexual Exploitation Task Force, and Detective Chief Superintendent Mary Doyle, Head of Public Protection, Greater Manchester Police, gave evidence.

Q448 Chair: May I refer everyone present to the Register of Members’ Interests, where the interests of all members of this Committee are noted? We have two sessions today, the first of which is dealing with child grooming. The second session will concern our new inquiry into e-crime. I welcome Mr Critchley and Ms Doyle; thank you very much for giving evidence. I do not know whether you have been following the proceedings of the Committee. We took evidence very recently from the CPS and from CEOP and other organisations. We have further witnesses this morning from, in particular, Rochdale Council, which comes within your area, Chief Superintendent, but I want to start with you, Mr Critchley. CEOP and commentators on the issue of child grooming have singled out Lancashire as one of the success stories. What are you doing in Lancashire to protect young girls and young men that is not being done by other police authorities all over the country?

D/Supt Critchley: Mr Chairman, we have been looking at this area as a priority in our police force since 2003, since we uncovered this as a real issue in Blackpool and then in Blackburn. Around 2005, we set up co-located multi-agency teams within Blackpool and Blackburn. We continued to scope out this as an issue, and across all our policing areas we now have dedicated co-located teams. I think that that is the real key for us in delivering what victims ultimately need, in terms of stopping this happening in the first place, recognising early the signs by dynamically sharing the information between partners, and then making sure the intervention is right, whether that is pre-exploitation or if somebody is a victim of crime and we are able to bring offenders to justice. I would say that the co-location of partnership resource is an absolute key to this. I also think it is making sure that our front-line specialists—not just police officers but teachers, parents, carers and health visitors—are all aware of this as a real public protection issue and that we identify the signs of somebody being exploited very early.

Q449 Chair: But this is not happening elsewhere, and I understand you head a task force that is specifically ACPO-based that deals with these issues. What I cannot understand is we have had horrendous stories about what is happening in places like Rochdale, and indeed in Rotherham, but the good practice from Lancashire does not seem to have crossed over the border into Greater Manchester, where again we have had a lot of complaints about the fact that police have not taken action. Why has there not been this sharing of information?

D/Supt Critchley: I can share what we have done in Lancashire. We do have conversations with colleagues from other police forces and, as you have heard, there is clearly significant progress being made now across the whole police service. I was involved in the Thematic Inspection by CEOP in terms of identifying what the issues are. I have held a seminar in Lancashire, attended by most police services across the country, in order to share what we are doing. We are also able to share all our processes, protocols and action in order to be able to make sure that we share this practice.

Q450 Chair: It is all happening now, is it not? It was not happening, say, a year or two ago, when the issue was highlighted in the media and elsewhere. This is all very recent, is it not?

D/Supt Critchley: It is not recent for Lancashire, as I said. We have been addressing this for a considerable period of time.

Q451 Chair: Yes, I know that and I have acknowledged that. How many prosecutions have you had in Lancashire in respect of these offences?

D/Supt Critchley: In 2012, there were around 100 prosecutions for child sex exploitation. The Engage team, for example, at Blackburn, since its inception in 2008, has had over 400 years’ sentencing for offenders committing offences of child exploitation. That cuts across all areas of exploitation, whether that is online grooming, or group and gang-related offences. I think it is our team’s understanding that this is a real, significant issue, and it is undertaken in a number of different ways by offenders.

Q452 Chair: Indeed. We will come on to that in later questions. That figure of 100 differs markedly from the figure given to us by the Chief Constable of South Yorkshire, which includes Rotherham and other areas that are causes for concern, in that there have been no prosecutions this year for child grooming and other areas. I know you cannot talk, for professional reasons, about other areas, but 100 is a lot of prosecutions compared with none in South Yorkshire.
D/Supt Critchley: What I can say on that, Mr Chairman, firstly from a Lancashire perspective, is that if we look for it, we will find it—and we are looking for it. We are prioritising it. We do want to capture it early. We do not want people to be exploited. Ultimately, we would rather have stopped somebody becoming a victim and having to go to court, so we are looking for it.

There are issues in the police service in terms of data collection and in terms of identifying child sex exploitation. There are convictions across the board, across the country, in relation to this, but those convictions are for rape, abduction, abuse of children and grooming; they are not necessarily categorised under child sex exploitation. I have met this morning to chair the first implementation of the action plan to make sure we improve, as a police service across the board, our ability to collect the data so that we really understand the problem.

Q453 Chair: Thank you. Chief Superintendent Doyle, welcome back. You are a frequent visitor to the Select Committee. Thank you for coming back. Greater Manchester is one of those areas that has not been successful in the past at dealing with this issue. In particular, you have probably seen a copy of the Rochdale Safeguarding Children Board Review, which talks about a series of missed opportunities and a lack of co-ordination. We took evidence last week from representatives of Sunrise—I am sure you saw the evidence—and were told that they had made 181 referrals to police and social services over a period of time. We are full of questions as to why so few people, if any, have been prosecuted.

DCS Doyle: Mr Chairman, may I start by saying I think we need to understand that Rochdale is one of 10 local authority areas that come within Greater Manchester Police? As far back as 2006, Greater Manchester Police set up a co-located multi-agency team in Oldham. We went over to Lancashire and took some of the learning from there, which has been quite successful, and there were a number of quite high profile prosecutions throughout 2007–08. Also in 2006, across the three city divisions, which is one local authority area of Manchester city, Operation Protect began—and it is still going—which has been a very successful co-located multi-agency team.

Q454 Chair: I understand all that, and we know that because you have told us that before, but what I want to know here today is: there were 181 referrals from Sunrise to the police. You have had a highly critical report from the review board. What went wrong, as far as the police are concerned?

DCS Doyle: I think, as far as the police are concerned, what Sara Rowbotham said with regard to those 181 is not inaccurate. The referrals were made in a variety of different ways, not always as a formal referral, which did cause us some difficulties. It is not fair to say we did nothing. We did do something. We perhaps didn’t do it as effectively as we would have liked to, and that has resulted in the Rochdale case more recently and the ongoing investigations that we have. As Ian says, there is a difficulty in identifying CSE. It is not a crime per se. It is made up of a number of other offences. The challenge is joining together those links and identifying it as child sexual exploitation. We have been working to try to make our own IT systems more sophisticated in order to be able to make those links. We have a change going in just next week, I think, which will allow us to flag those crimes that are associated with CSE and to help us to make those links so that we can approach the CPS prosecuting authorities with more than a single instance to make it more—

Q455 Chair: This is not personal criticism. I know you have a commitment in this area, but the fact is that we have had very profound evidence from witnesses saying you have failed to act. We have had a very critical report about the police not acting. Do you think you have let the people of Rochdale down in respect of prosecutions?

DCS Doyle: I think we have already said we were sorry that it happened. We did not do it as effectively as we could have or should have, and we have learned those lessons. In 2006, 2007 and 2008, we were in a very different place to where we are now.

Q456 Chair: How many prosecutions have there been this year—or indeed last year, if you have the figures for last year—for CSE?

DCS Doyle: Again, Mr Chairman, the difficulty is identifying which are directly related to CSE.

Q457 Chair: How come Lancashire can do it and not Greater Manchester?

DCS Doyle: As I have explained, our systems do not identify—

Q458 Chair: The systems specifically for Greater Manchester.

DCS Doyle: Yes. It is not identifying—

Q459 Chair: Which are different from the systems in Lancashire.

DCS Doyle: Yes, absolutely, which is why we have implemented—

Q460 Chair: So it is quite possible that someone who is involved in grooming might be picked up in Lancashire, but would not be picked up in Greater Manchester?

DCS Doyle: No. The intelligence would be shared. It is being able to pull out of the large number of rape and other sexual offences cases that we prosecute in Greater Manchester those that are grooming, for want of a better way of terming it.

Q461 Chair: Yes, but given that this has been with us for a while—the first big articles have been published since 2010 and, as you know, the review group was set up in 2007 in the local area—can’t you extract the information in the same way as Lancashire has extracted the information?

DCS Doyle: We will be able to after next week. What I can say is we have had the 11 we prosecuted as the first Rochdale case. We charged nine a couple of weeks ago with regards to offences related to child
sexual exploitation. In Stockport, I think we have 11 standing trial in January, across the Protect team itself.

Q462 Chair: That you can identify.

DCS Doyle: Some; it is not the whole picture.

Q463 Chair: How many did you prosecute last year?

DCS Doyle: We had 13 across the Protect team. We had the original Rochdale case, which was nine. I think the Protect team was 43 individuals across those 13 prosecutions. I can’t comment on the Oldham one; I would be wrong to comment on the Oldham one.

Q464 Chair: The total would be what?

DCS Doyle: In excess of 30. Thank you very much.

Chair: Thirty in the Greater Manchester area. Thank you very much.

DCS Doyle: That we know about; that we have identified. It could be in excess of 100—perhaps even more than that, if we were able to identify them as linked to CSE.

Chair: I understand. Thank you very much.

Q465 Bridget Phillipson: CEOP published a report back in June 2011 on this area. Were either of you aware of the scale of the issue prior to its extensive coverage by Andrew Norfolk in The Times?

DCS Doyle: I think we were aware in Greater Manchester of the scale of the issue in certain local authority areas, as I have already said. I don’t think we were aware of the scale of the issue in certain other areas. The challenge is getting 10 local authorities to understand the issue and do things in the same structured way.

Q466 Bridget Phillipson: Mr Critchley?

D/Supt Critchley: Yes, we are aware, and we have been involved in that Thematic Assessment since 2005, but more recently from 2008. Every six months, we take a good, detailed look at the data around numbers of victim referrals, offender referrals, and identify where prevalence is and undertake work in relation to targeting of offenders and where we need to intervene with victims, and we have fed into the Thematic Assessment.

Q467 Bridget Phillipson: Ms Doyle, was Greater Manchester aware of other forces facing similar issues in this area? Did you consult or work with other forces on this?

DCS Doyle: Yes. Back in 2006, as I said, we went across to Lancashire about the work they had done around Blackpool and those sorts of areas. We have been across again more recently, towards the end of last year, as part of our own problem profile and trying to understand it and take the good practice. We also went across to Derby and spoke to Debbie Platt, who ran Operation Retriever, the successful operation over there. Sheila Taylor from the National Working Group was a regular visitor and had a significant input into the way we investigated the Rochdale case, which obviously we have all learned from.

Q468 Bridget Phillipson: Do you think those kinds of informal arrangements that you build between forces are the best way, or is there a need for a greater infrastructure countrywide on this issue in terms of how forces work together in tackling these issues that often will cut across borders, or where expertise has been developed in some forces but not as well in others?

DCS Doyle: I think the informal structures and relationships are very important, as they are in any area of work, and often work the best, if I was honest, but I do think there is a need for a national infrastructure and a national understanding of what best practice is, what it looks like and where you can go to get assistance.

D/Supt Critchley: I chaired a meeting this morning with representation from forces across the country about the implementation of the national action plan, which is being led by Mr Davies from CEOP, and that is exactly to do what you say in terms of looking at best practice. The critical areas of protecting victims and pursuing offenders are two areas in terms of leadership development and how we work in partnership. There is some good practice going on across the country in all areas and, as Head of Public Protection, I am looking at not only bringing that into Lancashire, but spreading it across the country.

Q469 Steve McCabe: I was interested to read that Lancashire has established a clear offender MO for grooming, and I think there were some examples cited of the kind of things they do. Do you have any particular method of checking on people who use the internet as their preferred method of grooming?

D/Supt Critchley: We break down the method of offending, so we are aware of how offenders are working to be able to target offenders proactively. Around 30% of offenders’ initial grooming of victims is on the internet, and I think that is rising. The access to mobile data, computers and phones for children of a younger age now makes them more susceptible. A lot of our work is around educating parents, carers, schools and children around the safe use of that, but we do see it as an increasing method by which offenders are targeting victims. So we are placing priority in terms of working with CEOP and other law enforcement agencies, and we have invested in covert internet investigators in order not only to stop it happening, through education, but to target the offenders.

Q470 Steve McCabe: What would alert you to internet grooming? I can understand it if someone hangs around outside schools and offers children gifts or if people report things. Is there anything in particular that alerts you to internet grooming?

D/Supt Critchley: Individuals use a number of different methods. It probably goes hand in hand with other areas. We look at the usage by an individual, and we look at disclosures from an individual and disclosures from their friends. Then we look at the other risk factors involved in child sex exploitation: going missing, truancy from school, alcohol usage and coming home with presents. It is about engendering trust and confidence from the public, and for children, particularly, to come forward where they are being groomed or abused, and that they know there is a
multi-agency service there that they can be confident will protect them.

**DCS Doyle:** I would absolutely agree with that. We, too, have covert internet investigators that are very successful. You can go online and find a potential offender within minutes, really. It is quite frightening. It is about educating both the young people and their parents—education authorities as well—to recognise the signs and be able to alert us so that we can then start the investigations. There is always the issue of communications data and some of the difficulties around that, but certainly we find a feature in these investigations is social media—in particular Facebook, Twitter; all of those types of forums.

**Q471 Nicola Blackwood:** You have both mentioned the importance of multi-agency working, but when CEOP did its Thematic Review they had a very low response indeed from LSCBs. I think only 13 children’s services nationally and LSCBs responded. That is out of 154 councils in England. How have you found working with the local LSCBs? They are the local service that has statutory duty for child sexual exploitation response.

**DCS Doyle:** From my perspective, as I have already mentioned, the challenge for Greater Manchester is that there are 10 of them. We sit on all of them. They are effective to a greater or lesser degree—some of them are not as effective as they should be; some of them are quite effective. In addition, we have established over the past few years a pan-GMP Safeguarding Children’s Board, which sits with representatives from all the local authority areas, and that has been quite successful in driving a joined-up, structured pan-GMP agenda. In the last 12 months, we have done a lot of work with that group around CSE in particular, looking to standardise the structures and processes across all 10 local authority areas so that we can achieve some consistency of approach and the promulgation of good practice.

**D/Supt Critchley:** In my view, the LSCBs are incredibly important in terms of driving this activity forward. I sit on all three LSCBs in Lancashire. I chair a sub-group on child sex exploitation that reports into all three groups and provides our problem profile in order that there is understanding of that. It is also an ability for us to make sure that this is promulgated throughout all agencies, and through all front-line staff, and that it is very high up on all agendas. There is good evidence of that in terms of work we are doing in our multi-agency safeguarding hubs in Lancashire, because this is not just about having specialist teams; it is about identifying referrals at a very early stage that might not come in as child sex exploitation. It might be a child in a domestic abuse household or a child who is truanting from school or has sexual-health issues, but it is about being able to share that information across all agencies. All those agencies sit on the Safeguarding Board, and as such we are involved in a strategic piece of work in Lancashire now for multi-agency safeguarding hubs across Lancashire.

**Q472 Nicola Blackwood:** But if even now, when this issue is so high profile, you are still having problems getting a consistency of response and a prioritisation from LSCBs—which are, after all, responsible for child safeguarding—what more can be done to try to get this on LSCBs’ agendas up and down the country?

**D/Supt Critchley:** We can lead that from the police service. We are part of the LSCBs, and part of the national ACPO action plan is the identification of a police lead who will also have responsibility for driving this agenda, taking this agenda through LSCBs and making sure we lead from that. There has been correspondence and direction nationally to the LSCBs from, for example, Children’s Ministers and the Department for Education about the role that the LSCBs need to play in terms of their scrutiny role to make sure that we are safeguarding children in our areas.

**Q473 Nicola Blackwood:** Do you think there needs to be a reporting requirement for LSCBs back to the Department for Education? There is not at the moment, as I understand it.

**DCS Doyle:** I think that may well help, but what would help more than anything is to make it easier to share information, to give members of particularly local authorities and some of the non-governmental organisations the confidence to share sensitive information, a bit like the duty to co-operate that we have in the MAPPA processes, which works very well. There is still reluctance in some areas to share what is key information, which is why the relationships are so important, because they get past those barriers. But if we had a duty to co-operate, so the onus was on co-operation and the proactive sharing of information to protect children, rather than an ability to hide or be scared of the Data Protection Act, I think that would probably help more than anything.

**Q474 Nicola Blackwood:** Another particular strain of evidence that we have had is problems at the point of prosecution, with the CPS being nervous about the credibility of witnesses, and CSE witnesses in particular. Is there value to the idea of having CPS sitting within co-located units and being involved at an early stage? Are there any CPS in co-located units your areas? What is your view?

**DCS Doyle:** I absolutely think that early engagement of the prosecuting authorities is key. They can help us to conduct the investigation in a way that will make it easier for them to present the victims as they should be presented, rather than undermine and have some of the credibility issues that we face. We have just had an agreement with Nazir Afzal that we will have CPS embedded in each of our dedicated serious sexual offences units one day a week, which is a major step forward.

**Q475 Nicola Blackwood:** When will that start?

**DCS Doyle:** That starts on 1 December, with a view to having truly co-located teams once we have assessed the whole public protection arena and the prosecuting issues there. I think it is absolutely essential.

**D/Supt Critchley:** We have a good relationship with the CPS in terms of taking this forward. In the past
we have concentrated on the victims’ credibility, rather than their vulnerability, and seen that as a real issue in supporting victims through these court cases, and one issue of developing that is our relationship with CPS. Our CPS is in our strategic group. We are in discussions around location. I am meeting with Mr Afzal next week.

I think it is part of a wider issue around criminal justice for victims. There are other issues around supporting victims through court. We have real, valued partnerships with the voluntary sector in terms of supporting victims; not just through the court system, but dealing with the long-term impact that CSE has on victims. On timeliness of proceedings, there needs to be victim-focus in terms of the length of time it takes to bring the case to court. Also, in terms of the evidence that a victim has to give, sometimes they are cross-examined by up to 10 barristers. I think there is a better way in which that victim can be supported through the court process.

Q476 Mr Winnick: Do you think that child grooming is now being taken far more seriously than previously? If so, what role did the media play in spotlighting this matter?

DCS Doyle: I think it is absolutely being taken more seriously. A very recent example from Rochdale was that, because of the heightened awareness—probably through the media in particular—young girls recognised they were at risk at a particular takeaway. They reported to their parents, who in turn had the confidence to report to police. That takeaway is now shut. I can’t, hand on heart, say six years ago that would have happened, and that has happened really quickly. It has a three-month closure, and we are going for the revocation of the licence completely. Absolutely we take it more seriously. The media has played a really big part in raising that awareness. Rightly or wrongly, we can’t get away from the fact that, yes, they have. It is now something that every household has an awareness of. Even if they do not understand it, they certainly know about it and I think would look for it.

Q477 Mr Winnick: When we talk about the media, did you see the articles that appeared in The Times, particularly the reports of Andrew Norfolk? Did you read those reports?

DCS Doyle: Yes, I have, and I have met Andrew Norfolk on a number of occasions. He is extremely well read on the subject of CSE in general. So yes, I have read the articles and I have had conversations with Andrew Norfolk, and Sandra Laville from The Guardian, around the same issues, in terms of educating them on a bit of a broader view of it as well.

Q478 Mr Winnick: Would you say that the police and the social services should have known far more about what was going on—the criminal abuses of children—rather than the media, instead of the other way round?

DCS Doyle: I think the media have focused very much on the culture and race aspect of it, which is only one aspect. You are right: we should have had more understanding of how it manifests itself in certain areas, or that it was manifesting itself in certain areas.

Q479 Mr Winnick: It may not apply, and it does not seem to apply to Lancashire police, but when you said “using the media”, it seems that the media was the medium by which people realised what was going on, which otherwise they quite likely would not have done until court cases came about in due course.

One other question, if I may. There is an anecdotal example, for what it is worth, that when people were told what was happening—when the professionals were told in the social services, and perhaps the police—the feeling was, “It is a matter for the children themselves. They agree to do this; go with older people,” and so on. Would you say there is any truth in that?

DCS Doyle: Historically, yes, there has been. If you think back to 2004, 2005 and 2006, the term “child prostitute” was in wide use, and it was in our legislation and it was in our psyche. I personally think “child prostitution” is absolutely inappropriate as terminology. In fact, “prostitution” is inappropriate as terminology. That fed a lot of the perceptions of other people. It is true that 15-year-old and 16-year-old girls were making what people viewed as lifestyle choices and perhaps it was not seen that they were in fact victims first and they were not true choices. They were under duress, coercion, or as a result of other things that had happened to them.

Q480 Mr Winnick: Do you agree with that, Mr Critchley?

D/Supt Critchley: Our job is to protect the public. Our job is to stop people being exploited and abused, and that is our approach. In the past we have looked at individuals who suffer from mental health issues, who may be shouting abuse at us, or who drink alcohol, as problematic and we have not listened to them. The message that we are getting when we speak to victims—and we have spoken to a number of victims about the service we offer—is, “Listen to us. Don’t give up on us,” and that is the education we need within our police service. We engender that to make sure that we stop this happening.

Q481 Dr Huppert: Can I bring you both back to the comments that were made about the relationship with...
the CPS? As you probably know, we had evidence from the Director of Public Prosecutions last week. He suggested the main obstacle of getting a case to court was the relationships there. I know you touched on this somewhat. Could you say a bit more about whether you think the changes that are needed are, as some of the witnesses have suggested, about court procedures to do with video links and screens—things like that—or whether it is about relationship management, or whether it is other special measures? Can you say a little bit more about that? We are quite keen to pin down what we ought to be suggesting.

**DCS Doyle:** It is about understanding that the traditional assessment methods of a witness and their credibility that the CPS has used are probably not appropriate in this sort of case. There is no doubt that the victims of child sexual exploitation and the related offences are quite challenging to manage. You have to work at those relationships, and the relationship has to continue throughout that judicial process. We have had significant success in deploying to the victim—much as we would deploy a family liaison officer in a homicide—an officer who is trained and understands the victim to support them through the entire judicial process. The relationship with the CPS is absolutely key in terms of understanding the wider picture, so we are not looking at one offence in isolation. You have the bigger picture surrounding that of perhaps previous offending by the suspect, or previous victimisation of the victim, so you can understand the holistic picture. That is why they need to be involved from an early stage—to be able to manage that understanding and those relationships.

**D/Supt Critchley:** There is also a requirement for us as a police service to make sure that we robustly investigate what are complex investigations and that we have dedicated specialist officers, but it is also important that they are supported by targeted crime units, by Serious Organised Crime units, and the work that we need to join up from the local to the national and putting the right level of resource to some very complex trafficking investigations. I think it starts with our ability to make sure that we effectively investigate, linked in with a close working partnership with the CPS.

**Q482 Dr Huppert:** Just to check that I am understanding what you are saying, it is partly about training the CPS to take people seriously and to give them the background information to do that, and it is partly about building an ongoing relationship. What you have not said in this section is about video links, screens or any of the courtroom procedures. Is that because it is not your area of expertise, or is it because you do not think they are a key issue?

**DCS Doyle:** No, they are a key issue. We used video-link evidence quite successfully in the Rochdale case. There is often a reluctance on some part to use evidence in chief by video link in particular, or by video in particular. I sort of understand that, in that a live witness is much more imperative for a jury, but I think we need to get away from what is imperative for a jury and what is the best experience for that victim giving evidence. The other issue is the way our adversarial system allows a young person who has been through a completely traumatic experience to be cross-examined by any number of barristers. There were 11 sets of barristers in the Rochdale job, all entitled to cross-examine.

**Chair:** I am sorry, but I am going to hurry you along. We have other witnesses.

**Q483 Dr Huppert:** Are you suggesting that we should be changing the number of barristers allowed to cross-examine as well? Are you looking for a fundamental switch?

**DCS Doyle:** It would assist victims in particular if we could change to a system whereby perhaps they are cross-examined independently by somebody independent on behalf of the defence in total, so they are not revictimised every single time across every set of barristers.

**Q484 Nicola Blackwood:** You mentioned having a specialist officer to walk the witness through the court case, but a lot of these victims have quite difficult histories with the police, for various different reasons. Perhaps they might not have the best relationship with the police and establishing a relationship of trust might not be possible. Have you considered, and what is your view of, perhaps independent sexual violence advisors playing that role? They could play that role before, during and after the court case. Have you ever used them? Does it work?

**Chair:** Sorry. Could we have a brief answer to that?

**DCS Doyle:** In short, yes, they do work. They are absolutely key, but it is not impossible for police to develop relationships, if they work appropriately.

**D/Supt Critchley:** The voluntary sector, within all our partnerships, plays that role. The Children’s Society, CROP and Barnardo’s, for example, play that role is your view of, perhaps independent sexual violence advisors playing that role? They could play that role from the moment we get the disclosure through to court, and are able to play that role to support victims through to court where there is not that relationship with a police officer.

**Q485 Michael Ellis:** Perhaps we could explore this in a little more detail, because I think this is very important. What you seem to be saying—and I think what you have said to some extent—is that we must get away from how imperative these court proceedings are on juries and reflect on the victim’s experience. But the reason why these victims are going to court in the first place is because the Crown Prosecution Service and the police are trying to achieve convictions, and if there is going to be a conviction, it will be juries that convict, as it would be them acquitting. Juries are everything in a criminal court, so the priority of the Crown Prosecution Service, realistically speaking, has to be to consider what is imperative on juries, does it not?

**DCS Doyle:** Yes, you are right. However, the legislation does allow for other methods, and I do not think we perhaps explore them as proactively as we could in all cases.

**Q486 Michael Ellis:** Both of you have talked about barristers, and I declare an interest here, because in a former existence I was a barrister—I still am, but not in practice. The reality is that defendants are entitled
to have evidence tested in court. That is the whole reason we go through the process of courtroom proceedings. We do not just convict people; we have the evidence tested. Can you think of another method that would allow defendants to test evidence of witnesses? If there is more than one barrister is court, it is because there is more than one defendant in court, and defendant A may have a very different case to defendant B or C, and therefore the same barrister or the same legal representative would not have the same agenda as to the witnesses, or as to the questions they asked the witnesses. We have to bear in mind that the scales of justice must be balanced in both ways, don’t we, in order to secure safe convictions and acquittals?

D/Supt Critchley: I think we need to think of whether there is a better way.

Chair: Could we call to the dais Steve Garner from Rochdale Council, the former Director of Children’s Social Care, Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council, to address the Select Committee. Thank you very much for coming. Chair, but—

DCS Doyle: I absolutely agree with you. I don’t profess to have the answers. I think we need perhaps to think of whether there is a better way.

D/Supt Critchley: I think we hear from victims about how they feel and the trauma it puts them through beginning to end, with such things as bail and intimidation. We need to make sure that the justice system protects victims as well as recognises the rights of defendants to have a fair trial.

Examination of Witness

Witness: Steve Garner, former Director of Children’s Social Care, Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council, gave evidence.

Q489 Chair: Could we call to the dais Steve Garner from Rochdale Council, the former Director of Children’s Social Care? Mr Garner, thank you very much for coming. I understand that you have been unwell and you were unable to attend a previous hearing of the Select Committee. Thank you very much for coming. Are you fully fit and recovered?

Steve Garner: I am fit enough to be here, yes.

Q490 Chair: Excellent. You have been in the Social Services Department at Rochdale for 11 years.

Steve Garner: Yes.

Q491 Chair: You told the Daily Telegraph that your department had not let any of these young girls down and if there was any blame for ignoring the girls’ cry for help, it did not rest with your department. Who do you think was responsible for letting these girls down if it was not Rochdale Council?

Steve Garner: I do not believe that I told the Daily Telegraph that. My recollection is I said that if we had missed any opportunities to offer increased protection to these young women then we would apologise for that.

Q492 Chair: You have seen the report that was published: a very scathing report from Safeguarding Children, the review board report published on 27 September, which does in part blame Rochdale Council.

Steve Garner: Yes.

Q493 Chair: Do you now accept that you have failed these young girls in respect to what you should have done as a social services department?

Steve Garner: I think social services and other partners, including the Safeguarding Board, definitely missed opportunities to increase the level of protection to these young women.

Q494 Chair: Who is to blame within social services? Roger Ellis, the former Chief Executive, made it very clear to this Committee when he gave evidence that you were the person who ought to have known what
was going on, that you would have briefed the Director of Social Services, Cheryl Eastwood, who will be giving evidence to us shortly, and that she would have told him. What he told the Committee was that he knew nothing. Is that your position as well, or did you know about this?

Steve Garner: We know a lot more than we did back in 2008–09. When I inherited the service at the back end of 2009, because I was in a completely different part of the service before, there were a number of practice issues that we needed to deal with. Several of the items within the safeguarding report refer to items that had been going on, and I have heard reference earlier on to issues back in 2006, 2007 and so on. From my point of view, the way that knowledge was managed at that time was we would look at individual cases, so I was aware of some individual cases where young people were at risk of child sexual exploitation. However—

Q495 Chair: But were you aware that it was quite widespread? Why on earth would the Chief Executive set up a working party after 50 separate cases had been identified? Why would he do that unless there was a widespread issue here?

Steve Garner: The working party was set up by my predecessor, Steve Titcombe. I was aware of individual cases, but I certainly wasn’t aware, until the police presented their dossier to us at the back end of 2010, of the wide extent. While we realised it was an issue, we didn’t realise how big an issue it was. If I refer back to Roger Ellis’ comments, one of the comments he made was he thinks messages were not passed up, and I do think that some front-line practitioners and first-line supervisors did not identify the risks, did not see that the risks that were presented with these young people were any different—

Q496 Chair: But, Mr Garner, what he did say was, “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.” I accept that there were people below you, but you do read newspapers. This was extensively covered in The Times. A working party had been set up by your own leader of the council, even though you were in a different area of the council. This must have been covered locally. When you had your team meetings, people must have discussed child grooming. It could not have been that you did not know anything about this except for one or two cases.

Steve Garner: No, I am not saying I didn’t know anything about it. What I am saying is we did not understand the full magnitude until we had all of these cases. The way the case worked—

Q497 Chair: When did you understand the magnitude?

Steve Garner: I fully became aware of it when the police presented their information regarding the number of arrests they were going to make at the back end of 2010.
women and, because we focused on individual cases, Children’s Social Care, other services and the Safeguarding Board missed some opportunities to look at the wider position. It is with some regret that we did not have that full knowledge back before 2010.

Q508 Chair: But Sara Rowbotham has told us that she made 103 referrals and there were 181 alerts to police and social services. This is evidence that she has given to the Select Committee: “We were making referrals from 2004, very explicit referrals, which absolutely highlighted for protective services that young people were incredibly vulnerable”. That is evidence she has given to this Committee. You know nothing about these 103 referrals and nothing about the 181 police alerts.

Steve Garner: I think I need to make it very clear that I have not said in any way, shape or form that I knew nothing about all of these. What I am saying is we didn’t—

Q509 Chair: But you said you had one or two cases. How many cases were you aware of? Steve Garner: I couldn’t tell you how many cases I was aware of because I can’t recall, but in terms of the evidence that was given by Ms Rowbotham, if I may answer that, without looking at the information that is provided behind that, I am not aware, for example, from the information given—and I would welcome the opportunity to look at it—how those referrals were acted upon. What has not been clear is how many of these were followed up. I am also quite aware that one of the safeguards that is in place by the Safeguarding Board procedures is if any referrer is unhappy with the response that they receive from Children’s Social Care or any other service, they have the right to escalate that through management channels.

Q510 Chair: Mr Garner, tell us how many cases you personally knew about—that were in your knowledge—say for 2012. We do not want you to talk about other people. As the Assistant Director of Social Services, how many cases did you know about this year? You did not resign from the council because of ill health. You resigned from the council because you had one or two cases. But you did not do anything about it.

Steve Garner: Yes.

Q511 Chair: Do you think 90 people represent a serious problem? Steve Garner: Yes.

Q512 Chair: In 2011.

Steve Garner: In 2011, I was aware that, I think, some 30 or 40 were being worked with, and I know that the Sunrise team, when they worked with young people in—

Q513 Chair: No, we are talking about you. We know about the Sunrise team. They have given evidence to us. You do not work for the Sunrise team, do you?

Steve Garner: No.

Q514 Chair: No. You were the Assistant Director of Social Services. Forty cases last year; 50 cases this year. What about the year before?

Steve Garner: I am afraid I would have to go—I can’t say how many cases I knew about.

Q515 Chair: In total, over the last two years, you know of about 90 cases of vulnerable girls that were the subject of an investigation of some kind.

Steve Garner: I know of 90 cases of girls with various degrees of vulnerability, yes.

Q516 Chair: And you do not think that this is a widespread problem in Rochdale.

Steve Garner: When we are talking about the information that came to our attention in 2010, from that moment onwards, the efforts have been escalated. That is how I know, from the efforts we have taken, regarding the 50 young people who have been supported in 2010.

Q517 Chair: Mr Garner, I find it astonishing that you do not think this is a serious problem.

Steve Garner: Chair, if I may say, I have not said in any way, shape or form that I do not think this is a serious problem.

Q518 Chair: You do think it is a serious problem.

Steve Garner: I think it is a serious problem.

Q519 Chair: Do you think 90 people represent something that is very serious?

Steve Garner: Yes.

Q520 Chair: But you did not do anything about it.

Steve Garner: Some of the actions that I and my colleagues took are why we know there are that many young people out there.

Q521 Chair: What was the action you took?

Steve Garner: The action was to re-establish and reform the Sunrise team, to follow the recommendations from the University of Bedfordshire, to have a co-located team, to increase the staffing to that team, and to go out and try to find and support these young people at a far earlier stage.

Q522 Chair: Mr Garner, the funding to the Sunrise team has been cut. We heard this last week. You say you re-formed the Sunrise team when you knew about these 90 cases.

Steve Garner: Yes.

Q523 Chair: It has been cut. The budget has been cut. Did you know that? Were you aware that the budget had been cut?

Steve Garner: Can I provide a little bit of clarity regarding it?

Chair: Yes.
Steve Garner: My information is that the budget to the Sunrise team has definitely not been cut. You were given information the last time, in my understanding, regarding the Crisis Intervention Team. With regard to the funding for the Sunrise team, I think increased funding was made available in 2011 and the staffing complement was increased from February 2012.

Chair: Thank you.

Nicola Blackwood: If I could take you back to some of your answers to Ms Phillipson, Mr Garner, and to the report—the serious case review—which obviously deals with what happened before 2010 and before you apparently realised that there was a serious problem in Rochdale. Your view is that the problem was that Children’s Services just did not realise the scale of the problem and was dealing with cases on an individual basis. Is that the basis for your answer to Ms Phillipson?

Steve Garner: I think what I am saying is that Children’s Services, the Safeguarding Board and other services did not realise the full scope of the problem. That is not in any way to say that it was not a serious problem.

Nicola Blackwood: Could you explain to me why, after victims had been told by their abusers that nobody would believe them because they would be treated as prostitutes, they were then told by public officials, Children’s Services, social workers and so on that they were not victims in this case because they were making their own choices and engaging in consensual sexual activity? This is what this report in front of me on the serious case review says on page 9 and page 28. Victims came forward and said that the CSC and the police described the services as not listening to them. One victim was told by the police that she was just hanging out with a bad crowd and was making choices about relationships and sexual partners, and that her parents were not informed that she was having contact with the men who were abusing her. Can you explain why you think that all of those things were just not understanding the scale of the problem? That sounds to me like treating victims as though they were not to be believed and they were just making consensual choices about sex. Under-16-year-olds cannot consent to sex.

Steve Garner: I am very aware of that.

Nicola Blackwood: That does not quite tally with your answer to Ms Phillipson, does it?

Steve Garner: I think it does link in.

Nicola Blackwood: How?

Steve Garner: In that the fact that the references you make there, I think you refer to the police there, and obviously I can’t speak on behalf of the police—

Nicola Blackwood: And the CSC, the Children’s Social Care.

Steve Garner: I think Children’s Social Care was struggling with what to do—how to support 15 and 16-year-olds. If you look at the context of the time—and I have seen this in your parliamentary debates as well—there was, in hindsight, too great a focus, following the tragedy with Baby Peter Connelly, on younger children.

Nicola Blackwood: Are you saying that you think it is acceptable to tell vulnerable victims that they are not victims, but they are just making choices, when they are being sexually exploited?

Steve Garner: I most certainly do not find that acceptable, no.

Nicola Blackwood: Do you think that the actions of CSC and the police during that period were acceptable?

Steve Garner: I think there were many improvements that could be made, and I think some of the actions were not acceptable, no, which is why some of the actions of CSC and the police during that period were not acceptable, no, which is why some of the improvements that have been put in place have been put there. I am really quite clear that it is not acceptable to tell anyone who is under 16, at risk, that they are making lifestyle choices and putting themselves at risk.

Nicola Blackwood: Given what has been said in this report by some of the victims and the evidence that was given to the serious case review by some of these victims, do you feel there is something that you would like to say to those victims and their families today?

Steve Garner: Unfortunately, within the field of Children’s Social Care, we only come into contact with a large number of children when they have either been harmed or been at risk of harm. Where social care staff, in particular, have failed to offer the intervention that they could, I sincerely regret that. I would apologise to the children in this case, and also any other children who have suffered any harm because of the inaction or the missed opportunities of Children’s Social Care. I would offer those my most sincere apologies. Along with many of my colleagues, we get into this form of work to try to protect young people, and even now it is very distressing when I find out that young people come to harm through the fault of social care officers, other officers or for any other reason.

Nicola Blackwood: Is the clear message that you would like to go out today that if a victim comes forward now to Rochdale Children’s Services, they will be believed and their evidence will be acted on?

Steve Garner: I would like to offer that reassurance, and certainly the provision that is available is increased. The understanding of staff, both within social care and wider ranging, is increased. There were briefings delivered to more than 10,000 high school students. I would really like to believe that if people do come forward, they will be believed, and no other young people will have to suffer that kind of treatment.

Nicola Blackwood: I hope we will see the evidence of that.

Steve McCabe: Mr Garner, I would like to ask one or two questions about the problem of grooming and what we can do to tackle it. Given your background, why do you think it is that councils like
Steve Garner: Why doesn’t that happen—why there is not an automatic direction given from all agencies to look at that disruption. I think there was a concentration on prosecution or no prosecution, and I heard the point that was made earlier regarding looking at the credibility of a witness over the vulnerability of children. I understand the issues facing the CPS, but obviously my primary concern had to be about the vulnerability of children and what we can do to support them.

Q534 Steve McCabe: But this was towards the end, wasn’t it?
Steve Garner: Yes.

Q535 Steve McCabe: I am not decrying that. It is good that that happened, but I am wondering why it does not happen—why there is not an automatic response; why someone with your experience would not say, “Hang on, have a look at this.” How come there is no mechanism to alert people?
Steve Garner: I think because people were dealing with it on an individual level. Some of the focuses for the service at the time, contextually, were there was more focus on young people. I do not think people thought. A really important point—and I want to qualify this—was the CPS decision not to proceed in 2009. I was not in an assistant director role then, but certainly when I was informed of that I think that had a very negative impact, because it made Children’s Social Care and other colleagues think that some of these people they believed to be perpetrators had become untouchable again. I do not think there was a focus on disruption activities until more recently, when there is a link between safeguarding issues and organised crime issues, and there has been a much stronger focus. People were not talking about that back then, and I really can’t answer why.

Q536 Steve McCabe: I understand it came later. Do you think maybe it should be a requirement for the future that if people are asking for licences, we should be doing a check to say, “Are there any child protection issues here?”
Steve Garner: Yes.

Q537 Steve McCabe: The other thing I can’t quite understand, because I think there was quite a lot written about it at the time, is: why was not more use made of civil orders? I am thinking of things like child abduction warning notices—and particularly those that apply to under-18s who are in the care of the local authority—and ASBOs with restrictions. Did you never discuss with the police and your colleagues whether you could make greater use of those?
Steve Garner: I don’t think we discussed it enough. We did use some child abduction warnings. We did use some recovery orders as well.

Q538 Steve McCabe: Did they come towards the end again?
Steve Garner: No. They were individual cases from time to time over the three years that I was in post, and beforehand when I was in other posts as well. I would completely accept that they could have been used more, and I do not think there was enough direction given from all agencies to look at that disruption. I think there was a concentration on prosecution or no prosecution, and I heard the point that was made earlier regarding looking at the credibility of a witness over the vulnerability of children. I understand the issues facing the CPS, but obviously my primary concern had to be about the vulnerability of children and what we can do to support them.

Q539 Steve McCabe: Lancashire Constabulary seems to have done quite a lot of groundwork in this area. Did you at any stage ever talk to anyone at Lancashire Constabulary about the work they were doing to see if there was anything you and your colleagues might learn?
Steve Garner: I did not speak to anyone from Lancashire Constabulary, but we had groups from the Safeguarding Board representatives go and speak to colleagues in Blackpool, Oldham and Blackburn and find that information. I have spoken quite a lot with Sheila Taylor. I have spoken to people in Derby, Portsmouth and so on. There was quite a lot of research done in coming up with the new model that is in place now.
Steve McCabe: Thank you very much.

Q540 Mark Reckless: Mr Garner, you said, “We focused on individual cases”, but, when you were aware of these 90 cases, why?
Steve Garner: Sorry, I have not made myself very clear. We became aware when we reconstituted the Sunrise team and increased the capacity. The reason I know that there have been—my knowledge is slightly out of date—around 50 cases being worked within various degrees of vulnerability is because we set up the Sunrise team.

Q541 Mark Reckless: In 2007, when this group began to focus on the area, did they not at that point identify around 50 children who were at risk?
Steve Garner: They identified a number of children at a number of levels of risk, and they set up a model of practice that, in hindsight, was flawed in that it relied too much on the individual contributions of individual agencies working in silos. Even though they were co-located, because of a various number of difficulties—once again referring to the University of Bedfordshire report—they were not effectively co-managed, co-located and co-ordinated. Once again, hindsight is a fine thing, but some of the changes we put in place with the new model that was up and working was to address those issues and, because we had that in place, that is why I knew there were 50 young people being worked with with varying degrees of vulnerability.

Q542 Mark Reckless: Should you not have been aware at the time that, of this 50, 15 were looked-after children and, as the Assistant Director for Children’s Social Services, should you not have joined those dots?
Steve Garner: These 50 were not looked-after children. Out of the cohort that I am speaking about,
I think probably about 13 at one stage were looked-after children, out of that 50.

Q543 Mark Reckless: Can I quote from this report, Mr Garner? “The children in this group were overwhelmingly girls. They were aged between 10 and 17 years old. Just over half were in education, and over-whelmingly girls. They were aged between 10 and 15 and 15 is not that great a difference. I am talking about the last figure that I saw, which was 13 looked-after children, of whom five were looked-after children to Rochdale, and eight were looked-after children to other local authorities.

Steve Garner: Thirteen and 15 is not that great a difference. I am talking about the last figure that I saw, which was 13 looked-after children, of whom five were looked-after children to Rochdale, and eight were looked-after children to other local authorities.

Q544 Mark Reckless: Mr Garner, I suppose it is possible for us to understand why an individual social worker with an individual case would look at that file and not join the dots and mark it for no further action, but what I can’t understand is why the Assistant Director for Children’s Social Services would oversee all those files and still decide not to take further action.

Steve Garner: What do you mean by “not to take further action”? Sorry, could you clarify?

Q545 Mark Reckless: Well, to do something about it.

Steve Garner: What I have just said is that if you look at the setting up of the Sunrise team, that is some of what has been done about it, and that is some of the work that has been going on. Each of those young people now has individually tailored support plans in place, and that is the children in care to us, the children in care to other local authorities, and children who are not on the care system. I am able to say that because of those systems we put in place.

Q546 Mark Reckless: Could I ask you a specific question about the private children’s providers in Rochdale? In particular, I think Councillor Lambert has been quite critical of the Meadows Care Home. In your view, were the private providers a key problem, or do the responsibilities lie more with the council?

Steve Garner: I think it is a mixture, in that if you have children from private children’s homes coming into the area, they will place a significant demand on services such as health services. A number of them have youth offending orders that Rochdale would have to take on, so it does have an impact on services, but I am also quite aware that a lot of the homes provide therapeutic and psychological support services. It does provide an additional pressure. The other thing I am quite mindful of as well is the risk assessment that takes place before those young people come into place, and if we look at the monthly meetings we set up with residential providers, I think there has been a certain degree of responsibility. There is always a risk. I acknowledge, as a receiving authority, if we have young people with a high degree of vulnerability, and if their risk assessment is not as comprehensive as we would like—and that could be for a number of reasons—that might pose a problem for us and colleagues, certainly colleagues in the police. However, I am also mindful that there is not really a wide range of opportunities for young people—young women particularly—who are at risk of child sexual exploitation that are demonstrated to work, so I have realised we need the placements, but that can pose a problem for the local authority.

Q547 Mark Reckless: Would it not have been sensible to have the private children’s home providers represented on the Safeguarding Children Board?

Steve Garner: They are.

Q548 Mark Reckless: They are now.

Steve Garner: They are now, yes.

Q549 Mark Reckless: When did that happen?

Steve Garner: I think that was from this year.

Q550 Mark Reckless: Do you have any idea why that was not done previously?

Steve Garner: I think the relationship with the private children’s homes has increased significantly. When I took up post, there would be a meeting every three months with private home providers. I think that has changed quite significantly over the last year. In hindsight, it would have been good to invite private providers. No one had thought to do that until we did that earlier this year or back end of last year.

Q551 Mark Reckless: Why wasn’t any action taken with respect to children who just disappeared for long periods?

Steve Garner: Action was taken in regard to children who disappeared for long periods. If they are children in care, there would be an interview when they came back.

Q552 Mark Reckless: When they came back.

Steve Garner: Yes.

Q553 Mark Reckless: But not any effort to trace them for the long period while they were away?

Steve Garner: There were enormous efforts to trace them while they were away. If I was anonymously to reference previous examples, staff would go out looking for them. Liaison would be with the police to find and give addresses. There has often been liaison with police forces from different authorities because of the geographical spread. We have also, where we can, got the police to trace mobile phone messages, and there are detectors, so there is a lot of work done to try to find these young people.

Q554 Mr Winnick: Mr Garner, I have only one question to ask you: do you think any apology is due to the victims of abuse in Rochdale and to the people of Rochdale as a whole from those, like yourself, involved in children’s services?

Steve Garner: As I stated previously, where Children’s Social Care staff have missed opportunities to offer a greater degree of protection and vulnerability, I most certainly apologise to those children and young people.

Q555 Bridget Phillipson: Returning to the issue of the private care homes, I do not doubt what you say about children moving into the authority who are
looked after and the additional burdens that can place, and their vulnerability, but again my concern is: is this not again an attempt to shift responsibility away from the council?

Steve Garner: From my point of view, no. I really want to try to make it very clear. As a local authority, if we are going to bring children into care, we need good quality care placements. When I was in post in Rochdale, we would place people outside. I am quite aware that it would be very easy to criticise private care homes, and that is certainly not what I am here to do today. There is an issue in terms of I don’t think we are really very clear on how to establish good-quality therapeutic interventions that will protect, certainly, teenagers who are going through this. While it does provide additional burdens on some resources, there is a way of managing it. It is acknowledging that it does place a burden. But, no, I am not here to blame private care homes.

Q556 Bridget Phillipson: Just one final question: I accept the point you made regarding the focus that has been placed on younger children as a result of the Baby P case and other cases, but would you agree that, traditionally and historically, social work has not always dealt as well with children at the older end of the scale? This is not so much children who are looked after, but there is an understanding that you know they are not going to be on your books for too much longer, so sometimes cases involving older children—14 and 15; on the cusp of becoming 16—are perhaps not dealt with in the rigour that might be applied to younger children.

Steve Garner: If I go back to my long history, and certainly my work with young people leaving care many years ago, it was not just people not in care who didn’t get the same service, and my job was to try to advocate for those. I think historically there has been a greater emphasis on younger children. That certainly was heightened by partner agencies and social care, and there is support for that, following 2008. I do think in Rochdale at the moment, certainly in terms of the additional screening and the additional support that is in place, there are strong attempts being made to remedy that, but I do realise that that can be a problem, not just in Rochdale but in social care services across the country.

Q557 Chair: Mr Garner, we are nearly at the end. Could you clarify two questions for me and for the Committee? You said that before you took up your post you worked in a different area in social services.

Steve Garner: Yes.

Q558 Chair: But is it not the case that you were in charge of looked-after children—children in care?

Steve Garner: Yes.

Q559 Chair: You have just told the Committee that 15 of the cases that you were looking at involving child grooming were children who were in looked-after care.

Steve Garner: Fifteen children in looked-after care, of whom five were in care to Rochdale and the others were in care to other authorities.

Q560 Chair: You are telling us that you knew nothing about this when you were in charge of looked-after care?

Steve Garner: No, I am not saying that. I am saying that when we did know there were young people, we realised—and I would completely endorse the point that Sara Rowbotham made—that what these young people need is persistence. There is no quick fix. It is a really hard piece of work.

Q561 Chair: Yes, I understand that. Actually, Sara Rowbotham is extremely critical of Rochdale Council.

Steve Garner: I am aware.

Q562 Chair: You need to be aware of that. You then said to me that the funding for Sunrise had increased.

Steve Garner: Yes.

Q563 Chair: When did you leave the council?

Steve Garner: I left the council on 31 October.

Q564 Chair: So after the publication of the report.

Steve Garner: Yes.

Q565 Chair: In fact, I understand that you cut £21,135 funding for the worker on Sunrise who worked with the police intervention and supporting victims scheme because the contract ended on 31 April. Were you aware of that cut?

Steve Garner: That is not correct.

Q566 Chair: It is not. So it was increased. Is that worker still there?

Steve Garner: No. That was not a local authority decision. That was a health decision. Rather than fund that post, health decided to put, I think, £66,000 into the pot. What they decided was they wanted a different model—a more holistic model of service delivery—so health put in £66,000. Children’s Social Care added additional resources, and so did the police.

Q567 Chair: But the council has not reduced funding at all for any of these areas.

Steve Garner: No.

Chair: Thank you very much. Thank you for giving evidence today. We may be writing to you about further information.
Examination of Witness

Witness: Cheryl Eastwood, former Executive Director, Children’s Services, Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council, gave evidence.

Q568 Chair: Could we finally call, in the child grooming inquiry, Cheryl Eastwood? Ms Eastwood, thank you very much for coming. You have been sitting very patiently at the back, listening to all the other witnesses, and I am grateful to you for coming here. Sorry for keeping you waiting.

You received an e-mail from one of your councillors on 31 October 2010 in which they said to you the Safeguarding Children Board recognised the need for specialist provision and: “Can you assure me that something different has happened within mainstream services to be able to accommodate the concerns of various cases?” In paragraph 2, it said: “This particular issue is a shared concern of the local authority and the PCT. It is a huge problem across the borough, although the wider public are unaware at this time of the size of the problem.” That is quite a serious e-mail, is it not, from one of your employers?

Cheryl Eastwood: I think she was an ex-councillor at that time, to be correct, but—

Q569 Chair: But it says “councillor” on here.

Cheryl Eastwood: I may be mistaken. I am sorry. I certainly would not pretend that I was not aware that child sexual exploitation was taking place in Rochdale. We had a specialist team because we knew that there was child sexual exploitation in Rochdale. But it was also said, as part of the setting up of the team and the first progress report of the team, that the problem in Rochdale seemed to be at a similar scale to other local authorities in the region and in the country. So, while it was recognised that it was a problem, it was not seen that Rochdale was in a worse or more serious position than anywhere else.

Q570 Chair: We do not know many other examples of local authorities that have been subject to continuous publication of articles since January 2011 in the same way as Rochdale, and I understand that earlier this year you told Simon Danczuk, the local MP, that this was a new phenomenon, just that this is a developing area of practice and an area that has only received public awareness during the last two or three years. Prior to that, people knew or had heard rumours that this kind of thing may be going on, but it was not widely aware during the last two or three years. Prior to that, people knew or had heard rumours that this kind of thing may be going on, but it was not widely recognised as a different form of abuse of children and young people, as sexual abuse.

Cheryl Eastwood: Many do not, actually. This is the first authority I have worked in where there has been.

Q571 Chair: You did?

Cheryl Eastwood: Yes.

Q572 Chair: So Roger Ellis is wrong.

Cheryl Eastwood: No. I took up post in March 2010. When I arrived in Rochdale, I chaired the Safeguarding Board—that had been the previous director’s model: to chair the Safeguarding Board—and discovered that there was a specialist team called the Sunrise team, which had been set up to deal with the issue of child sexual exploitation. I was very pleased to find that there was a team that included the police, Social Care, the Crisis Intervention Team the voluntary sector, and drugs and alcohol. I thought it was very positive that the issue was being tackled in Rochdale. I was aware that there was a specialist team and that it was an issue in the borough.

Q573 Chair: I worked for a local authority in child care issues before I was elected. We all had these teams. There is always a team in a local authority.

Cheryl Eastwood: Many do not, actually. This is the first authority I have worked in where there has been.

Q574 Chair: The serious point of this inquiry, which we put to the chief executive, is: why didn’t Rochdale Council do more? This was put to him by Mr McCabe. Mr McCabe said: “Are you saying that the staff withheld information?” Roger Ellis, who was your chief executive, said: “I can’t explain what they did, whether it was withheld or what, but it did not get to me”, and he explained the chain of command. It would come from Mr Garner to you, and you would tell him about it. When he gave evidence to us, he was very specific—absolutely unequivocal—that he did not know this was a major issue in Rochdale, but every newspaper in the country, including the team that was set up by the previous chief executive and leader of the council, knew that this was a problem. The issue for this Committee is: despite having 181 alerts and despite having 103 referrals, you, as Director of Social Services, and Mr Garner did not regard it as a major issue and you could say to your local MP that this was a new phenomenon.

Cheryl Eastwood: I am sorry, but I have never said that I do not regard this as a major issue, and I did not intend to give the impression that it was a new phenomenon, just that this is a developing area of practice and an area that has only received public awareness during the last two or three years. Prior to that, people knew or had heard rumours that this kind of thing may be going on, but it was not widely recognised as a different form of abuse of children and young people, as sexual abuse.

Q575 Chair: These were not rumours. These were major articles in The Times in January 2011. A whole review board was set up in 2007. When you took up your appointment, you must have known this was a key issue. What did you do about it—you?

Cheryl Eastwood: I was very glad to find that a specialist team had been set up recently. I changed the format of the local Safeguarding Board to make it more effective and more open to scrutiny by ensuring that I did not chair the board and that we had an independent chair. The board took on an independent chair of the screening panel. We reviewed the function of the Sunrise team. All those things happened.

Q576 Chair: It sounds very “local authority”: if you do not mind—lots of reviews, lots of changes of names and lots of new formats, but the victims are still not being assisted and there appear to be no
prosecutions. Sara Rowbotham was very clear to us—103 referrals. That is a lot of referrals.

Cheryl Eastwood: I have seen the information about those referrals. Most of those referrals were made during 2006 and 2007. There were much smaller numbers in the following years. They were in single figures. While it is regrettable and they should have been dealt with, and things were not picked up as they should have been previously in 2006, 2007 and 2008, I think that cases were being dealt with much more effectively by 2010.

Q577 Chair: I think we have all found that they were not. But you didn’t tell Mr Ellis anything about this; according to Mr Ellis, he knew absolutely nothing.

Cheryl Eastwood: Mr Ellis was aware that there was a specialist team, that that included police officers, social care workers and health professionals, that they were investigating child sexual exploitation, and that it was an issue in the town.

Q578 Chair: That is not what he said to us. He said: “The head of Children’s Social Care should have been aware of what was going on and should have briefed the Director of Children’s Services, who in turn would have briefed me”. He told this Committee that he had never been briefed about this.

Cheryl Eastwood: He was certainly aware that there was a team and he knew that there was a local issue. We did not discuss cases in detail until we got to the stage of the prosecutions starting to happen.

Q579 Chair: Even after it was in the public domain, did you not have a meeting with the Chief Executive and say, “We have a major problem here. It is all over the newspapers. Rochdale is being exposed. Let’s do something about it. Let’s have an internal inquiry. Let’s find out where we have gone wrong”? None of this was done.

Cheryl Eastwood: Yes. I spoke to him before anything was in the press about Rochdale, when arrests were first being made. As I think Roger Ellis said in his evidence, we had a no-surprises sort of approach, so I would always brief the chief executive and the lead council member for children and families about anything that was likely to hit the public knowledge.

Q580 Chair: Is he wrong? You did brief him.

Cheryl Eastwood: No. He said that I told him at the point of the arrests.

Chair: With the greatest of respect, I have his transcript here. He is making it very clear that nobody briefed him about this.

Q581 Steve McCabe: I wanted to ask a simple point about something you said a second ago. When you said this was a new form of abuse or a developing field of practice, what exactly is “new”, in your experience, about this form of abuse?

Cheryl Eastwood: What is different about this form of abuse is that, because it starts very gradually and young people do not realise that they are victims at first, it insidiously grows. The way that social—

Q582 Steve McCabe: You mean grooming? It starts with—

Cheryl Eastwood: Grooming, and then it turns into abuse, so that the victims do not realise that they have been abused.

Q583 Steve McCabe: Wouldn’t that have been something that was being taught in social work courses in the early 1980s?

Cheryl Eastwood: No.

Q584 Steve McCabe: That is funny, because I used to work for the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work, and I can remember specifically discussing it.

Cheryl Eastwood: When I was a social worker in the 1980s and child sexual abuse first became an issue then, yes, it may have started to be more widely taught on social work courses, but it was still taught in the context of the family, and it was very much about recognising signs of children within their families.

Q585 Steve McCabe: But what you are suggesting is new is this process of grooming. You thought that was something that was not quite so familiar. Is that what you are saying?

Cheryl Eastwood: No. I am talking about the process of grooming taking place in different settings with teenagers who perhaps previously were seen as beyond control. As you will remember, there used to be a reason for care proceedings under the 1969 Act as children beyond the control of their parents. They were seen as difficult children, and people worked with their parents to help them set boundaries and mediate between children and their families. The signs of abuse that we know about now—going missing, having gifts, getting messages, all that kind of thing—were not recognised until the last two or three years in terms of that kind of exploitation.

Q586 Nicola Blackwood: Ms Eastwood, I think you heard the evidence of Mr Garner. In your answer to Mr McCabe, is that not the problem that you have just identified: so many of your social workers saw these victims as beyond control? The evidence in the serious case review is that these victims were seen as making life choices, as bad girls, as engaging in consensual sexual activity, and just sort of abandoned to that situation. Is that your assessment of what was going on? That is certainly the assessment of this report that I have read.

Cheryl Eastwood: Yes. I was not in Rochdale at that time, but that sounds to me to be the kind of thing that may have been happening, but that is pure speculation on my part. When I said to my MP that this was a developing area of practice, it had certainly moved from people regarding difficult teenagers as simply difficult teenagers to realising that many of the signs they are exhibiting may be showing that they are victims of child sexual exploitation.

Q587 Nicola Blackwood: Are you confident now that if these victims were to come forward, they would be treated differently?

Cheryl Eastwood: Yes, I am.
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Cheryl Eastwood

Q588 Nicola Blackwood: How are you confident? What exactly has changed all the way down? Not a couple of days’ training, but something more significant, I hope.

Cheryl Eastwood: Yes. With what has happened during the last couple of years—I do not want to keep going on about there being a specialist team but there is a specialist team now. There is a large specialist team. There are very regular information meetings that share all those bits of intelligence—from licensing to schools, to youth services, to Children’s Social Care and to health services. All those people are sharing information to make sure that the bits of the jigsaws are being put together. What used to happen was that people would have concerns about one young person and they would not realise that the nickname they were talking about was the same that was coming up elsewhere, or that they were going to the same takeaway, or that any of those bits of information were not being put together. Those bits of information are being put together now, and I think the screening tool that is used by Children’s Social Care for all children over 12 gives that focus to older children and makes sure that people are looking for the signs of exploitation and will deal with that differently. That has been in place for nearly a year.

Q589 Nicola Blackwood: Given that putting together that picture requires data sharing and given that one of the problems that has been identified is a sort of adverse reaction to sharing data about children because of fears about breaching the Data Protection Act and putting children’s confidentiality at risk—sometimes understandably but sometimes with too much caution—do you think that that culture is changing in a sensible way in Rochdale, and how are you changing it?

Cheryl Eastwood: I think having the different organisations co-located means that they can all discuss cases and share the information that they have about children and perpetrators. One of the issues, though, is about electronic recording of information and whose system gets used, and who has access to that system, because there are still difficulties within the criminal justice system about disclosure to the defence. Children do vary in what they say from one week to another, because of their ages and their understanding. Sometimes there are things on children’s social work files, for example, that have been there for a number of years, and you would not want that whole file available to somebody who is going to use it to say they are an unreliable witness. There still are some issues about what is written down and recorded electronically that people can use, but certainly people are co-located, they are sharing information and they are talking to each other. I do not think there are those fears about data protection. They are more about just making sure that things are provided as needed for evidence rather than lots of other personal information.

Q590 Steve McCabe: I want to ask the same points that I put to your former colleague earlier. In the time you were at Rochdale, why was it that you thought child protection did not figure in the work of the council in other areas like its regulatory and licensing functions?

Cheryl Eastwood: I think it did. People were aware of that, and the licensing department gave evidence in the trial at the beginning of this year.

Q591 Steve McCabe: It came at the end. Maybe a better way of asking this would be: what triggered it? What was it that made you think, “Hey, we could use this system”?

Cheryl Eastwood: One of the things that happened in Rochdale was the local authority designated officer starting to have strategy meetings about taxi drivers, which increased that crossover between Children’s Services and the licensing team that perhaps had been there loosely, but not in such a regular way.

Q592 Steve McCabe: Who was the person who alerted you to that? Who was the officer?

Cheryl Eastwood: The local authority designated officer. She was appointed in September, and meetings started to happen then around—

Q593 Steve McCabe: September 2010. So this was the person who, when she came, said, “Why aren’t you doing this?” or, “We could do this.” Was that a key moment?

Cheryl Eastwood: Certainly her appointment made a difference to some of the processes that were in place, but I think that took a little while to be established. A lot of things were happening around the end of 2010, which was the same time that Operation Span was launched and the arrests started to be made in this inquiry.

Q594 Steve McCabe: Why do you think that people were not alert to the potential of civil orders as a way of getting a greater grip of this problem?

Cheryl Eastwood: My understanding is that they were being used.

Q595 Steve McCabe: When do you think you started using them?

Cheryl Eastwood: Before I arrived in Rochdale in 2010.

Q596 Steve McCabe: Did you speak to anyone at Lancashire Constabulary about the work they were doing?

Cheryl Eastwood: No, I didn’t speak to police officers. I knew that Steve was talking to other people about child sexual exploitation, and that when the team was set up, people had talked about what was happening elsewhere before they established the team.

Q597 Bridget Phillipson: On the issue there about licensing, did you ever discuss this area of disruption activity through licensing with the former chief executive, Mr Ellis?

Cheryl Eastwood: I didn’t personally. I know that it was around but, no, it wasn’t something I discussed with him personally.
Q598 Bridget Phillipson: So it was something that was being discussed at the highest levels, and you would expect Mr Ellis would have been aware of that?

Cheryl Eastwood: I found out about the licensing issue by the time things had been resolved with one taxi driver issue, but because there were regular meetings taking place between the police, community safety people and licensing around this whole issue during 2011, I did not speak to the chief executive personally, but the meetings were reported back on.

Q599 Mark Reckless: Ms Eastwood, you said when you took up your post that you were glad that there was this team in place already and that did not happen everywhere. Is there a danger that you may have taken too much comfort from the existence of this team and that its substance may not really have been sufficient to justify that?

Cheryl Eastwood: It is possible, but I do believe that the team was certainly doing some excellent work with young people. There were, as you say, 50 or so children who had been identified as either being at risk, or had made allegations of involvement in sexual exploitation, and they were all receiving support from members of those teams, so things were being done to support those young people.

Q600 Mark Reckless: That was the Sexual Exploitation Working Group—SEWG—and above that, I understand, there was the Sexual Exploitation Steering Group that reported up to the Safeguarding Board. Could you explain what the purpose of that intermediary steering group was?

Cheryl Eastwood: Not really, no, I am afraid. I received a progress report from the team after I had been in post for three or four months, but I am not sure how the steering group fitted in. I received the report that had been to the steering group, but that was written by people involved in the setting up of the team.

Q601 Mark Reckless: Were you aware that the Sunrise project had first been proposed in 2008 but had not got going until 2010?

Cheryl Eastwood: Not at first, no; not until I got the progress report.

Q602 Mark Reckless: I wonder whether some of the problems and there not being greater traction to deal with them may reflect the degree of confidence that you had from seeing these groups apparently below you, but then reporting up to the Chief Executive, that to the extent there was a problem, it was no greater than other local authorities might have. Would you share that concern?

Cheryl Eastwood: That is possible, but I think what has happened with the press coverage and the awareness raising is because this was a case that involved so many men. In many other local authorities, there have been equal numbers of prosecutions, but they have been in ones or twos. I still do not have any evidence to suggest that the problem is much worse in Rochdale than elsewhere.

Q603 Mark Reckless: Are you still saying that the problem in Rochdale is no greater than elsewhere?

Cheryl Eastwood: I am saying the fact that there has been one appalling, very serious case does not mean that there are not an equal number of serious cases in other authorities, but they have arrived in ones, twos and threes.

Q604 Mark Reckless: But the 50 children the working group identified in 2007 and the 90 children that Mr Garner referred to—are those large numbers? Do you have any evidence suggesting that is no greater than other authorities?

Cheryl Eastwood: Only the evidence that when the team was set up and then when it did a progress report, the numbers did not seem different from other projects around the area.

Q605 Mark Reckless: Can I ask you briefly about private children’s homes, how they had not been on the Safeguarding Board previously, and the extent to which they have responsibility or otherwise for the problems there have been in Rochdale?

Cheryl Eastwood: One of the very positive things about Rochdale was that the private providers actually met. That is unusual. There is not a forum for private providers in many authorities. It was quite rare. It may be more. Rochdale was leading the way in the sense that they were regularly meeting with private providers. They are not a statutory member of safeguarding boards, so it was not something that was a common practice around the country. I think it is very good that they do now have representation on the Safeguarding Board, and they have had a member for nearly 12 months. In the case that was dealt with this year, just one of those five victims was in care and she was in the care of an authority in the south. The private provider that was looking after her followed all the safeguarding procedures properly. There was not any suggestion that they—they did things properly. They followed procedures and they dealt with things as they should have done, so that is not a problem.

Q606 Mark Reckless: Ms Eastwood, are you saying that broadly procedures were followed, and it is an emerging area of practice, but the problem has not been particularly great in Rochdale?

Cheryl Eastwood: Not at all. No, I am certainly not saying that. I am saying it is a serious issue—it is a big problem—but the point I would like to get across is that it is a big problem in many places, not just Rochdale. There has been a lot of learning in Rochdale over the past two or three years, and I think that the work that is going on in Rochdale now is probably ahead of many places. Although it certainly does not feel like it when you are the centre of press attention, it is good that this case has led to a greater awareness of the problem. I would hope that people can learn from the experiences we have had in Rochdale.

Q607 Mark Reckless: You are saying that now the work in Rochdale is greater than elsewhere. Would you also argue that the work in Rochdale was greater
than elsewhere, looking back to the 2007 to 2010 period?

Cheryl Eastwood: Certainly not.

Q608 Mark Reckless: Despite you previously taking confidence from there being this working group that had been set up.

Cheryl Eastwood: I think that things improved in terms of the work with child sexual exploitation in 2009–10 and started to develop from then to a point now where there is some very good work going on.

Q609 Chair: Thank you. Why did you leave the council so quickly after the report was published in September?

Cheryl Eastwood: I retired before the report was published. I asked to take early retirement for personal reasons in May.

Q610 Chair: I see. Can you clear up this point about the Sunrise project and council funding? It is a long time since I looked at a local authority report. I wonder whether you could have a look at this. This is an extract from the local authority’s report into the cutting of a post at Sunrise. Am I reading this wrong?

Cheryl Eastwood: It was an option. It did not take place.

Q611 Chair: Secondly, when you found out that this was so widespread, did you ever meet one of the victims? Did you, as Director of Social Services, want to find out more about how this had affected victims? Have you met any of the victims of child grooming?

Cheryl Eastwood: Not the ones in this case, no.

Q612 Chair: Which case?

Cheryl Eastwood: The recent case that led to the publicity and the trial.

Q613 Chair: In your two years as Director of Social Services, you obviously knew that there was a problem in Rochdale because of this specialist unit that you have referred to. In those two years, how many victims of child grooming had you met personally?

Cheryl Eastwood: I have not met any victims through the project. I met young people when I visited children’s homes and—

Q615 Chair: No, I understand. We all meet young people almost every day, but how many victims? You have not met any of the victims of child grooming in the two years that you have been the Director of Social Services.

Cheryl Eastwood: I have not met any of the victims of child grooming in Rochdale. I did offer to meet—

Q616 Chair: Would you have liked to have met them so that you could have ascertained how this was going on for so long, or not?

Cheryl Eastwood: I think it is always helpful to hear from a person directly. So, yes, that may have been something, but people did meet victims—

Chair: Of course. I am talking about you as a director.

Cheryl Eastwood: —and there is a balance between too many people wanting to listen to the same story from people.

Q617 Chair: Would Mr Garner have met any of the victims? We did not ask him this question, but would you have expected him to have met any of the victims? At what level of management of Rochdale would any of the victims have come across you?

Cheryl Eastwood: They would have been met by social workers, and probably team managers and people who were involved with the strategy meeting, and possibly child protection reviewing officers.

Q618 Chair: As you have left the council, and in answer to Nicola Blackwood’s question you did say things had improved enormously and this could never happen again—

Cheryl Eastwood: I would not ever say that things could never happen again.

Q619 Chair: No, but you would hope that things have improved.

Cheryl Eastwood: I am sure the risk of it happening again has reduced hugely.

Q620 Chair: Are there regrets that this was not handled better at the time?

Cheryl Eastwood: Hindsight is a wonderful thing, isn’t it? You can always look back and see things that could have been dealt with differently. Certainly things that were done in 2007–08 were very poor. Your heart goes out to the young people who got the response they did. I am very sorry for the way they were treated, but they did get support after that. They had support from a number of people and they were able to give evidence, and I am very proud that within Rochdale those men were prosecuted for child sexual exploitation.

Q621 Chair: Have you left social services and social work of this kind for good?

Cheryl Eastwood: I have certainly retired and have not done any work since I left.

Q622 Steve McCabe: I wanted to ask one quick thing. When Mr Garner said that only—I think—five of the 15 were children in the care of Rochdale, how big a problem is it that an area like Rochdale has
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a population of children in care where Rochdale is not the authority responsible for them?  

Cheryl Eastwood: As Mr Garner said, it can put an extra strain on schools and therapeutic services from Child and Adolescent Mental Health, and it does mean that there are more vulnerable teenagers in the area than normal.  

Q623 Steve McCabe: A strain in the fact that they are more likely to be—I was going to say “ignored”; that is maybe a bit unfair—missed in this situation?  

Cheryl Eastwood: Not now because that information-sharing group includes private providers, schools and all the other people that will come across those children from other areas that are living in the borough. But it is an issue that the most damaged and vulnerable children are often living out of their home area, so it can increase the problem.  

Chair: Ms Eastwood, thank you very much. We are most grateful to you for coming here. Thank you.
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 look at whether 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 fortunately they decided to embark on what are now, I think, three 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 1.

**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 horrible 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:** 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 that 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 convicited 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 cosh for 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 Mirpuri, 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 parliamentarian 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
got 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
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.

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
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.
The 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—which 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 four times 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—men 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 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 that have 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 Detective 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.
Tuesday 11 December 2012

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

Examination of Witness

Witness: Sue Berelowitz. Deputy Children’s Commissioner, gave evidence.

Q672 Chair: Deputy Commissioner, thank you very much for coming to see the Committee today. Could I call the Committee to order and refer everyone present to the Register of Members’ interests where the interests of the Members of this Committee are noted?
Deputy Commissioner, you have now published your long-awaited report into child exploitation. Thank you for the thoroughness of this report and for agreeing to come before the Committee so soon after it has been published. You have given us some staggering figures: according to your report, 16,500 children were at risk of sexual exploitation and 2,409 had been exploited in a 40-month period. Does this stack up with what you said to us last time, that there is child abuse in every town and village in the country?
Sue Berelowitz: I am afraid it does. To be honest, I did not know what the figures were going to be. It would have been wrong of me or the inquiry panel to anticipate them and we came at this with a completely open mind. The figures are as they are and, if anything, they are an undercounting. They are actual figures of actual children, because we have the initials and dates of birth of each of those 2,409 children plus the 16,500. The reason I say they are if anything an undercounting is that although we had a fantastic response to our request for evidence, nonetheless, there were two local authorities and other agencies that did not respond, which included, for example, one very large metropolitan area, so it will be a undercounting.

Q673 Chair: Was that metropolitan area London?
We have had the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis in to see us, and we talked to him about Rochdale and south Yorkshire, Rotherham in particular. I questioned why there were not figures for the Metropolitan Police, and he tended to indicate to this Committee that he did not feel that the numbers justified it. He is not saying it is not happening but the Rochdale and Rotherham figures are huge in comparison to what is happening in the Metropolitan Police area. Are you surprised at that? Were they the authority that did not give you the figures?
Sue Berelowitz: Strictly speaking, because of the strict confidentiality and ethical framework around this inquiry, I should not be saying anything about which agencies did and which did not, but I can tell you it was not London.

Q674 Chair: You must have some figures for London.
Sue Berelowitz: I cannot reveal which figures relate to which region. We are in discussion with police forces around the country, and indeed I am scheduled to have a conversation with the Metropolitan Commissioner on Friday of this week. As you will be aware, there has not been the same number of prosecutions in London as there have been in other parts of the country. Of course that is of interest, and we are very keen that the Met follows through on the recommendations. One recommendation includes the Met and other police forces mapping out all the girls who are gang-associated, because they are all very high risk.

Q675 Chair: One of the comments made in the newspapers, which I am sure was brought to your attention, were Government sources in one newspaper, the Daily Telegraph, which said on 20 November that the report was, “Hysterical and half baked”. I am sure you saw that. I reacted in the same way you did because, of course, if it is a source, you do not know who it is; you do not even know whether someone said it or not. Were you surprised to see criticisms of that kind?
Sue Berelowitz: What I would say to that is these are very, very deeply uncomfortable matters. It does not surprise me that for some people they are so uncomfortable that they can hardly bear to look at them. The report is absolutely factual. We have stuck rigorously to the evidence we have gathered. I am very confident that it is sound and that it is robust, but I do appreciate that it is hard-hitting. What I can say to you and the Committee is that we have held back from publishing some of the truly harrowing accounts that we have listened to. I have listened to children telling me the most harrowing things I have ever heard in my whole professional career.

Q676 Chair: Let us deal with the race issue. Other witnesses, like Andrew Norfolk, have welcomed your report and have said that the report is actually very, very helpful in terms of the information given. However, he feels that you have missed the boat as far as race is concerned as, for example, the statistics point out that people of British-Pakistani origin are more likely to be represented in grooming. But you have been extremely clear on this. You have set your face against saying that race is a factor in respect of the grooming of young girls.
Sue Berelowitz: The single most important common denominator across all perpetrators is that they are male, which is not the same as saying every man is a perpetrator. Those are very different things. That is the most important and salient single common denominator.

In terms of perpetrators, the evidence in the report is limited because what we were sent was incomplete. Unfortunately, police forces and other agencies do not gather very detailed data around the profiles of perpetrators. That is why we have made that recommendation in the report. To give you some figures: in terms of the evidence submitted on perpetrators, in over two-thirds of submissions there was no perpetrator added to the inquiry. There was no perpetrator identification of any kind at all, so our statistics, our percentages, relate to the remainder—just over one-third—on which we did get some kind of data, but even that was incomplete. For example, sometimes we were told about nationalities and not about ethnicity, and those are not the same thing. In fact, it was only in 3% of the one-third that there was complete perpetrator data.

Q677 Chair: The Times has reported that the Education Secretary and senior Government Ministers believe that the report deliberately plays down the role of Asian abusers. You are very clear that it does not believe that the report deliberately plays down the role of Asian abusers. You are very clear that it does not believe that the report deliberately plays down the role of Asian abusers. You are very clear that it does not believe that the report deliberately plays down the role of Asian abusers. You are very clear that it does not believe that the report deliberately plays down the role of Asian abusers. You are very clear that it does not believe that the report deliberately plays down the role of Asian abusers. You are very clear that it does not believe that the report deliberately plays down the role of Asian abusers. You are very clear that it does not believe that the report deliberately plays down the role of Asian abusers. You are very clear that it does not believe that the report deliberately plays down the role of Asian abusers. You are very clear that it does not believe that the report deliberately plays down the role of Asian abusers. You are very clear that it does not believe that the report deliberately plays down the role of Asian abusers. You are very clear that it does not believe that the report deliberately plays down the role of Asian abusers. You are very clear that it does not believe that the report deliberately plays down the role of Asian abusers. You are very clear that it does not believe that the report deliberately plays down the role of Asian abusers. You are very clear that it does not believe that the report deliberately plays down the role of Asian abusers. You are very clear that it does not believe that the report deliberately plays down the role of Asian abusers. You are very clear that it does not believe that the report deliberately plays down the role of Asian abusers. You are very clear that it does not believe that the report deliberately plays down the role of Asian abusers. You are very clear that it does not believe that the report deliberately plays down the role of Asian abusers. You are very clear that it does not believe that the report deliberately plays down the role of Asian abusers. You are very clear that it does not believe that the report deliberately plays down the role of Asian abusers. You are very clear that it does not believe that the report deliberately plays down the role of Asian abusers.

Sue Berelowitz: I know that they are pretty critical. I have been having those conversations with them as well. It is deeply troubling to me that they are finding it so difficult to accept the evidence that we have, which is that people from every single ethnic group are carrying out this particular type of sexual violence against children. We have absolutely incontrovertible evidence about that.

As I talk to you, I have in my mind a very large sheet of paper that I saw when I was visiting a police force recently. It had photographs of over 100 victims on that piece of paper, with almost the same number of perpetrators. Given the demographics of that part of the country, what I can tell you is that virtually all of those victims were white and virtually all of those perpetrators were white. That is an ongoing investigation so I cannot say much more about it. That is the picture I am getting all around the country, that the perpetrators reflect the local demographics.

I will go so far as to say that, although people make their statements—I believe from good intent—from the evidence we have gathered, I do believe that it is actually dangerous to hold fast to that position, because what we know is that victims are falling through the net, when people hold fast to a position that victims are only white and perpetrators are only Asian.

Chair: Yes. We will explore that a little bit further with a couple of contributions from colleagues on this point.

Q678 Mr Winnick: It is said that there are those who are eager to maximise the notion that most are Asians, which you rightly deny and challenge. There are those who do so for purely racist motives, which we all know and condemn. There are those who would say that, from the best of motives, just as you said your critics do from the best motives, some people want to minimise that people of Asian origin are not necessarily the main culprits. What would you say to that?

Sue Berelowitz: My remit is to promote and protect children’s rights. My starting point in everything is the best interests of children. It is not in the best interests of children to try to hide or minimise anybody or any group that might pose a risk to children. I can assure you, and all the Committee, that we have been totally rigorous in facing up to the realities of everything that we have heard and seen. This is an entirely evidence-based inquiry and, therefore, the report is entirely evidence-based. If I believed that this was something that was being perpetrated by one particular community against another particular community, I would say that. The reality is much more serious and more complicated than that.

Q679 Mr Winnick: You have anticipated the question I was going to ask. I am not going to ask you a different one. You have made it clear that if those of Asian origin were in the majority you would not have any hesitation in condemning them.

Sue Berelowitz: No.

Q680 Mr Winnick: One further question; perhaps I have put it before but I do believe it is important. Whether it is a white, Asian or black population, would it not be the case that the overwhelming majority of people condemn these criminals? So no doubt Asians would have no hesitation in condemning the criminals who happen to be of Asian origin, just as whites condemn those who happen to be white. Would that be the position?

Sue Berelowitz: That is completely correct.

Q681 Steve McCabe: Would it be easier for people to accept that there are a variety of models of exploitation? Rotherham may have been an example of one where it was predominately about Asian men and white girls. We should not draw the conclusion that is the totality. There is actually a variety of models involving all races and ethnic groups across the country?

Sue Berelowitz: That is exactly what we are saying in the report, yes.

Q682 Nicola Blackwood: Ms Berelowitz, I want to pick up on a couple of the comments you have made. You commented that your report is entirely evidence-based, and that you have been going around and identifying models that are perhaps not in the public domain yet because they are ongoing investigations. The problem is that you have also said that for over two-thirds of cases there is no perpetrator identification, and in only 3% of cases is there complete perpetrator identification. How is it possible to make conclusive statements about perpetrator identification if there is no data about perpetrator identification but the report is based on evidence?
Sue Berelowitz: What I can say conclusively—which is why we are being very clear in the report about sticking to the figures we have—is that, from the evidence we have, we know that the perpetrators reflect the local demographics. That comes from conversations. We gathered our evidence in a number of ways; there was a call for evidence and we had a lot of narrative evidence coming through from that. There was the data collection. There were the 14 site visits and the evidence gathering days, when people came and gave oral evidence to us. Some of that is—

Q683 Nicola Blackwood: It is different kinds of evidence. So it is oral evidence and narrative evidence, rather than police databases, and those kinds of evidence that you speak of when you say “evidence-based”?

Sue Berelowitz: Yes. The figures we have come from the hard evidence sent, for example, from police databases.

Q684 Nicola Blackwood: That is the two-thirds and the 3%?

Sue Berelowitz: Yes. Also talking with victims themselves, you say, “Can you describe the people who are abusing you?” I will give you another example, in terms of victims. When I was meeting in a large metropolitan area they produced a very big pack on victims. They were all group-associated victims, all white girls in care. It was beautifully produced. At the end of reading it all through I said, “What about victims who are not white and are not in care?” and they said, “We are not looking for those”. We have been finding that kind of evidence all over the place.

Q685 Nicola Blackwood: I think that the problem is that, until that hard data is available, it is very difficult to argue against evidence, such as we heard last week from Andrew Norfolk. He speaks of 17 prosecutions, which have gone through the courts, which are in the public domain, of which there are 56 convictions, 53 of which were Asian. That is the sort of evidence that you speak of when you say “evidence-based”?

Sue Berelowitz: Yes. The figures we have come from the hard evidence sent, for example, from police databases.

Q686 Michael Ellis: Ms Berelowitz, thank you for your work. I do not envy you the very difficult and often, as you have described it, challenging and harrowing—I have no doubt—work that you do. You may have heard in the media about the Communications Data Bill. I realise it is not solely within your sphere of responsibility; in fact, I know it is not. We have heard evidence about child online exploitation and how important it is to try to defeat these paedophile rings, and the need for communications data in that regard. Would you agree with CEOP about that?

Sue Berelowitz: CEOP will know more about that that I do, and I am sure they are right in what they are saying.

Q687 Michael Ellis: Thank you. You have been investigating localised child grooming for over two years. What I wonder is, are you satisfied with the changes that have taken place in that time? I appreciate you may think there is more that needs to be done, but are you generally satisfied with those changes?

Sue Berelowitz: Yes. I should say that so far we are only beginning year two now, so we have done one year. Even within that space of time what I can say is that I have seen a significant change. From October 2011 through to where we are now, in that awareness has substantially increased. For example, fewer people are talking about children as prostitutes than there were before.

Q688 Michael Ellis: Do you think language is really important?

Sue Berelowitz: It is terribly important because people then see the children as the agents of their own abuse and do not think they are worthy of being protected.

Q689 Michael Ellis: It is quite recent that that change has come in. Police would regularly refer to “child prostitutes” and it is not the right terminology.

Sue Berelowitz: It is not only the police. I have had chairs of safeguarding boards talk to me about children as prostitutes.

Q690 Michael Ellis: Really? So how will you monitor the implementation of your recommendations—this is key—and how are you going to follow that these things are being done? What mechanisms do you have?

Sue Berelowitz: We are just in the process of doing that now. Because of the Commissioner’s powers, we have a power to require those in statutory agencies to respond to our recommendations. Those letters are all being put together at the moment; to Government, to directors of children’s services, Chief Constables and chairs of safeguarding boards, with the specific recommendations for them being sent out. We will be sending out a template with a return date. I expect that by the end of May next year. I will be checking everybody. We will see it through.

Q691 Michael Ellis: So you are alive to these issues, you are going to monitor them?

Sue Berelowitz: Yes.

Q692 Michael Ellis: Do you have sanctions available to you should there be a failure to implement your recommendations?

Sue Berelowitz: No. Regrettably we do not. What we do is carry a lot of moral authority and I would say we exploit that moral authority, I hope to the best effect.

Q693 Michael Ellis: Yes. For example, you could utilise the media in that regard.

Sue Berelowitz: If need be, but what I think works more effectively—because the media is a last resort,
in terms of naming and shaming—is to go to the person in charge and tell them in no uncertain terms how important it is that we expect a result.

**Michael Ellis:** I am sure that is right. Thank you very much.

**Q694 Nicola Blackwood:** All along the line in the discussions you had, you found problems of co-ordination between agencies and intelligence falling between the cracks—perhaps a child disclosing to a GP or a school teacher and that information not being put together properly. Do you think that this has stemmed, historically, from confusion about data protection laws, and do you think that that is still going on?

**Sue Berelowitz:** That is definitely one factor impacting on people not sharing information. That is most significant for health agencies who readily quote the requirement to maintain confidentiality, for example, the Caldicott guidelines and so on, as a reason for not sharing information. It is my view—and we have taken counsel’s opinion on this—that that represents a misunderstanding of the Data Protection Act, and that where people have a concern that a child is being hurt, in some shape or form, that it is indeed their duty to report that information on. It is a major problem.

In my view, from the evidence we have gathered, it is definitely getting in the way of children being protected. I know where the best practice is taking place. What makes for best practice is that the agencies are sharing information on a regular basis, and working in an integrated way to make sure that all the dots are joined up.

**Q695 Nicola Blackwood:** Are you finding areas where they have co-located units to deal specifically with this issue of breaking down these barriers?

**Sue Berelowitz:** Yes.

**Q696 Nicola Blackwood:** Do you find that there are concerns within the social work teams, and other teams, about giving information over to the police for fear of what action will taken on information?

**Sue Berelowitz:** I have not found that so much with social work teams. There are barriers around information sharing between schools and social work teams, in both directions—as I say, particularly with health. In my experience, the police are very good at sharing information but others may be more reluctant to share with them. It is not so frequently that social workers are failing to share with the police. In a sense, it may be that social workers have not identified the information that they hold, rather than they know they are holding something and they refuse to share it. I think it is more that sometimes they are not recognising the value of what they hold.

The other issue around information sharing is that youth offending teams are huge repositories of very, very important information around sexual exploitation. We found a lot of information held by them that simply was not held by anybody else, and often they do not seem to have mechanisms for sharing information between YOTs and the other services. Again, we are encouraging them very much to get out and do that.

**Q697 Nicola Blackwood:** Have you noticed that there are any moves towards adopting some kind of agreed method for recording the ethnicity, perhaps sexual orientation, or disabilities of victims and perpetrators particularly, so that we can address this issue of lack of data in this regard that has been identified in your report?

**Sue Berelowitz:** Yes. There is a clear recommendation in the report, so it is one of the things I will be following up to see whether that has, indeed, been done. I do expect the police and the other agencies to be developing mechanisms for doing that. It will be very good to see consistency across the country.

**Q698 Nicola Blackwood:** Are you talking about ACPO or CEOP?

**Sue Berelowitz:** Well, I am talking to all of them actually. I cannot give the answer at the moment on who is going to be leading on that. I guess I would expect ACPO to lead on that given that they are the national body for representing the police. We want the same consistency on recording with the local authorities, social services departments, with the health—and I include A&Es in that, for example—sexual health clinics, because many different people are getting different pieces of the jigsaw puzzle. If they all record consistently then put the information together, generally you are going to get better records.

**Q699 Nicola Blackwood:** Who do you think should be responsible for collating that information at a local level and then at a national level?

**Sue Berelowitz:** Oh, at a local level what I am saying is that LSCBs need to identify one person to be the coordinator because the danger otherwise is that lots of people think they might be responsible but are not, then it will not happen.

**Q700 Nicola Blackwood:** There is a lead person in the LSCBs. Who should be leading in terms of data collection and making sure that there is consistency in recording and ramifications of that?

**Sue Berelowitz:** Well, different agencies will need to be recording different things.

**Nicola Blackwood:** In terms of collating to get a proper picture of what is going on in that area?

**Sue Berelowitz:** Well, that is why I said it is the safeguarding board. So in respect of the safeguarding board, being a multi-agency entity, it would not matter whether it was the police or social care who took the lead because if they are all required to work in partnership through the safeguarding board it is the coordination and the consistency that matter.

**Q701 Nicola Blackwood:** That should be reported up to CEOP or ACPO?

**Sue Berelowitz:** Well CEOP is taking the lead on the protection of children from a police perspective. So, it would be good if CEOP held the information. ACPO has more of a coordinating role as far as I understand. I think at the moment, in terms of DfE, I would be very pleased to see DfE taking a very active
role in being the national lead within Government for all of this.

Q702 Karl Turner: The Committee is interested in the court process in relation to victims and has heard evidence from a number of witnesses. They describe the issues that victims face in giving evidence against their attackers. I want to know whether you intend to look at this issue and, I suppose, what the problems are from your perspective.

Sue Berelowitz: Yes. It is a very, very troubling area. I am already in discussions with the DPP about this and he is acutely aware of the issues. I have, in fact, done a presentation of that at a conference for the Crown Prosecution Service. So we are working with the DPP on this. I think the struggle for him is to identify how to, because he is certainly sympathetic, take this forward without intervening in—fair trials, really.

In my view, something does need to be done because there was no doubt at all that children are being victimised through the court process. We have some very big trials coming up, you know—you have nine defendants, nine barristers, and one child being cross-examined by nine barristers is an untenable situation. Something does need to be done. I commenced that process and will be continuing to have those discussions—indeed, I intend to go and sit in on some of those trials myself during the course of the year so I can see first hand what the impact is.

Q703 Karl Turner: Thank you. There is clearly a very definite effect on a victim’s mental health, having given evidence for so long. What is in place to protect them in terms of psychological support, if anything, and could you suggest what could possibly improve the situation?

Sue Berelowitz: Well, the victim’s mental health begins to suffer a long time before they get to the trial process. I have already referred to the harrowing nature of what I have heard, but I only have to listen to it; they have to live it. It is hard to see how children can survive psychologically given some of the experiences that they have had. I have no doubt that they are in need of well-serviced and well-targeted psychological services. Some of them get that, but the reality is that our services are patchy around the country. They are better in some areas than others, and it just would not be possible to say with any certainty that the children are getting what they need. They often get their psychological help from other sources, interestingly enough. I have spoken with some young people who have come through these experiences where they have been supported in an ongoing way by the police. They have done the most extraordinary work in befriending them and sticking by them. I am thinking of three young women I met with recently, who have all been supported by the police for several years. They said the thing that made the biggest difference to them was that they knew that person was going to stick by them whatever happened—that they could phone them at midnight, two in the morning, any time of day, over the weekend and they would see them regularly as well as being available to them. They always had somebody there who is just there for them and genuinely cared. We do not always need something wildly fancy, although I do know of some young people, for example, who are now diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, emerging psychosis and so on as a result of their experiences.

There is a combination of things. The first thing is to do a good assessment, but also just to treat these young people like human beings because often they simply have not been treated like human beings. That is the thing they say to me most consistently. They want somebody who cares for them and about them, and that makes the biggest difference. Of course, you also need the assessment to know whether a child has an emerging, diagnosable condition that needs treatment by a psychiatrist. Both of those are very important. Yes, it is patchy at the moment and I am sure it needs to be improved.

Q704 Chair: On your site visits, you found that 70% of the cases that you saw related to gangs as opposed to localised grooming. Do you think grooming is now established as something that happens through gangs, with individuals being passed from person to person?

Sue Berelowitz: Well, one of the interesting differences between gang-associated and grooming-associated sexual exploitation is that there is very little grooming in a gang situation. Children are in such fear of gangs anyway, they do not need to resort to grooming. If you expect somebody to be available for sex, they just have to do it. You do not bother with the grooming process. One of the few occasions in which we came cross grooming in a gang-associated context was in a situation in which two girls met over the Facebook site. One eventually, as it turned out, lured the other—it appeared that she was simply inviting the girl to her part of town to meet, “Let’s finally get together” but in fact she was lured. The girl who had invited her over was not there at the appointed meeting place, but there were eight boys. They picked the child up, took her to the local park and raped her and then another group of boys came and took her to another part of town and she was raped again. She was raped by about 16 boys that afternoon. There was an element of grooming over the internet but it was more about luring. In a gang-associated context actually there is very little grooming taking place.

Q705 Chair: We have had evidence from Lancashire police and South Yorkshire police and the difference between the two policing authorities is quite remarkable. Lancashire prosecuted 100 individuals last year and until this year South Yorkshire had not prosecuted anybody. Your report highlights the good practice and those police authorities that need to improve. You have touched on this with Nicola Blackwood, how they share this information. Are you satisfied that they have the message now?

Obviously, this started with Andrew Norfolk’s articles—your reports, the Committee’s hearings, et cetera, but has everyone got the message? I still think that there ought to be more people on this subject. There are eight officers dedicated in South Yorkshire’s
grooming issues but 30 officers deal with Operation Yewtree. There is a big difference there, is there not?

**Sue Berelowitz:** It is a very big difference. Well, it goes back to the question about how widespread is the understanding now, in a sense really, and what has changed in the last couple of years. Clearly, more people have got the message. Have they got the message loudly and clearly enough? I think it is still an open question and it is one of the reasons why I will be pursuing chief officers of all the agencies to which our recommendations are targeted.

**Q706 Chair:** In terms of those resources—eight against 30. The Savile allegations go a long way back—I am not saying they are not important; they clearly are—but you have some live cases of grooming going on as we speak and there seems to be only eight officers in South Yorkshire.

**Sue Berelowitz:** Yes, I can only say what you have probably heard from Lancashire already. Clearly, when you put in the right amount of resources and also work in a multi-agency way—as you will know, in Lancashire they have integrated teams—it does make an enormous difference. As far as they are concerned, if they only carry out enforcement after a child has been abused, they have failed. Their aim is to intervene at the point at which a child is being targeted. Now, clearly you would want everybody to be working in the same kind of way and delivering the same best practice. We are focusing year two of the inquiry on best practice and we will be disseminating those messages out with a view to trying to push everybody to focus properly on it. May I just add something? I am just in the process of writing to all police and crime commissioners around the country, sending them a copy of the report and highlighting to them the importance of this area and of putting the right resources in to support it. Again, it is just getting in through that door as well.

**Q707 Mr Winnick:** In view of your work and the media publicity, I think you would agree that, whatever the criticism, Mr Norfolk’s articles were very useful in *The Times*, and recognising undoubtedly that this sort of terrible position has gone on, I suppose, for centuries, how confident are you that with more pressure, more publicity and more awareness we will see a reduction in this criminality?

**Sue Berelowitz:** Well, I think the reality is that if all the agencies do their jobs effectively what we will actually see is an apparent increase because you will see more victims and offenders being identified. That will appear to be an increase.

If there is a sudden diminution in the few number of trials that there are, that would worry me greatly; I do not think that would be an indication that things were decreasing. I have many years’ experience, unfortunately, in the field of child sexual abuse in an intra-familial environment and I know that trying to combat sexual abuse of any form is an ongoing battle. Being realistic, I do not think we will ever see the end of this. I would like to see a significant diminution—

**Q708 Mr Winnick:** Are you confident that there is a likelihood that that will occur?

**Sue Berelowitz:** I am confident of that, as long as people heed the messages, take heed of the warning signs, put in the resources and do not somehow think that in a year or two it will magically have gone away—because it will not have.

**Q709 Chair:** One final question on this in respect of the work that has been done in Rochdale. We were alarmed to hear evidence that, because of cuts in social services budgets, one particular team called Sunrise was being affected. Are you looking at the effect of changes to local councils and social services in respect of this issue?

**Sue Berelowitz:** I think that would come up during the course of our work in year two where we are looking at this. What I would say already, however, is that in another city—it was not Rochdale—there has been a really superb joint-agency child sexual exploitation unit that has done wonderful work over about seven or eight years now. As a result of budget reductions in the various departments, significant reductions were made in that unit, including the loss of the manager and all the knowledge that she had garnered over the years. I wrote to the Director of Children Services at the time because I was so concerned about that. It is a very, very worrying development. As per a previous question, this is not a time to be reducing resources on these things. It is a time for really focusing resources because without that we will absolutely not see any diminution at all.

**Chair:** Deputy Commissioner, thank you very much. On behalf of the Committee, I thank you for all your excellent work in this area. Please keep us informed of any developments you think are relevant to the Committee’s inquiry.

**Sue Berelowitz:** I will be pleased to. Thank you very much indeed.
Tuesday 8 January 2013

Members present:

Mr Keith Vaz (Chair)

Nicola Blackwood
Mr James Clappison
Michael Ellis
Lorraine Fullbrook

Dr Julian Huppert
Steve McCabe
Mark Reckless
Mr David Winnick

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Martin Kimber, Chief Executive, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, and Joyce Thacker, Strategic Director of Children’s and Young People’s Services, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, gave evidence.

Q710 Chair: Ms Thacker and Mr Kimber, thank you very much for coming to give evidence. The Committee is conducting a far-reaching inquiry into the issue of child grooming, and obviously Rotherham’s name has been mentioned in respect of a number of national articles and indeed in evidence that has been given to us. Ms Thacker, you have been in your current post since 2008, I understand, as the Strategic Director of Children’s and Young People’s Services.

Joyce Thacker: That is right.

Chair: Mr Kimber, you are the Chief Executive, so you have overall responsibility. Of course, it is Ms Thacker who has day-to-day management of this issue, but you will be aware of some of the issues involved, I am sure, in your position as Chief Executive.

Martin Kimber: You are correct, Chairman.

Q711 Chair: Ms Thacker, why has Rotherham failed so dismally to deal with the issue of child grooming?

Joyce Thacker: I do not think I would fully accept that we have failed dismally to deal with the issue. I think there are some historical issues here that we have managed over time to have an improved service. When you look back at practice from, say, a decade ago, things have substantially improved in that period of time. I would not necessarily agree with you that we have failed dismally to deal with this as an issue.

Q712 Chair: Let us look at the evidence. We have received evidence that the council identified 600 victims during the previous 10 years. In terms of what the police have done, only eight men have been arrested for offences against four children. In 2002 the Home Office research project found in fact that there were hundreds of girls who risked exploitation, and in 2010 an independent report described the localised grooming offences prosecuted in Rotherham as being at the top end of seriousness. We are talking about hundreds of victims, of vulnerable young girls who have not been protected, because, at the end of the day, what people are looking for are prosecutions, are they not?

Joyce Thacker: Prosecution is the icing on the cake, absolutely, but I think prevention is the key issue for me particularly. Prosecutions are very hard to achieve in child sexual exploitation. As a form of child abuse, it is probably one of the most difficult to secure convictions. That is not to say that we should not do that, but, looking back, when we talk about victims we are talking about young people who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation, not necessarily victims of sexual exploitation. They are two very distinct things.

Q713 Chair: But do you accept the charge that is made against Rotherham that in fact you have not acknowledged publicly the existence of this problem? You have a lot of internal reports that have been conducted, but you have not published any of those reports. Is that right?

Joyce Thacker: I would say that in 2006 we held a major conference in Rotherham where one of our MPs spoke as a keynote speaker. There were nearly 200 delegates at that conference; many local people and journalists were present as well. That, in 2006, was a key event in our activity.

Chair: Yes. With the greatest respect, we are not concerned about conferences. We are concerned about protecting young girls, one of whom will be giving private evidence to this Committee later. We are looking at the Risky Business Intelligence Report for South Yorkshire—the council, of course, ran the Risky Business organisation or funded it—where it linked three members of a family to 61 girls. Of those 61 girls, 43 were said to be ex-girlfriends of one or more members of the family and 13 were said to have been raped, sexually assaulted or threatened by one or more of them. There was another example in March 2008 where a young 12-year-old girl was found in a car with a bottle of alcohol with a member of the same family who was then aged 22. There are countless examples. We have had evidence from the police and from a journalist from The Times about the problems in Rotherham, but you are telling us that you do not think this is a problem.

Joyce Thacker: No, I do think it is a problem. I am not denying that it is a problem, but I think the fact that you are trying to say that we perhaps have covered it up or that we have not dealt with it sufficiently is not the same thing.

Q714 Chair: You will send this Committee a copy of all reports that you have held internally that you have not published on these issues?

Joyce Thacker: I think you have a report that I have never seen. You are talking about the Home Office report that I have never seen.
Q715 Chair: No, the reports of Rotherham Council. Presumably, when you found out that there were 600 victims during the last 10 years, when you were appointed in 2008, with your vast experience in Keighley and Bradford, you must have decided to look into this matter very carefully indeed. You must have had an inquiry. There must have been a report. Where is that report?

Joyce Thacker: The work that we have done is looking at, for example, the Serious Case Review of Child S where we commissioned an external report into that. We commissioned, through the Safeguarding Children Board, an external review of Operation Central. That would have to have the permission of the Chair of the Safeguarding Children Board. If the Chair is agreeable to that, I am happy for you to have a copy of that. That is not my gift. It is the Chair of the Safeguarding Children Board.

Q716 Chair: No, we will write to ask you, because we were concerned that it took Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Education, to write to you to ask you to publish the report on Laura Wilson, who was 17 years of age when she was repeatedly stabbed and thrown into a Rotherham canal in 2010. Six years after issues were raised with your council, it took the Secretary of State to write to you and your council to ask for it. This Committee wants to see all the internal reports that you have about child grooming. We will write to you, and we would like them to be sent to us because we have the power to call for papers.

Joyce Thacker: Could I just come back at you on Mr Gove’s issue? We did publish the report. What Mr Gove was asking us to do was to publish the full report. We had published the report at that stage, a redacted version.

Chair: But not the full report until he intervened.

Joyce Thacker: No, we did not publish the full report. It was our right as the Safeguarding Children Board to have a redacted version. That is what we published.

Chair: The Committee wants to see all these reports.

Q717 Mr Winnick: I am not sure if you have mentioned it, but there has only been one successful prosecution in Rotherham for offences related to localised child grooming. That is the information we have received. If that question has not been asked by the Chair—I have just come in—is that the correct position?

Joyce Thacker: It is the correct position, Mr Winnick, absolutely. It is a deeply disappointing position. We have worked with the police and secured a number of prosecutions on another operation, and the Crown Prosecution Service decided not to proceed with that. It is disappointing when we cannot proceed to prosecutions.

Q718 Mr Winnick: The general impression that we have heard on the abuses that have occurred is that those involved or alleged to be involved have been able to get away with vile activities, which we all agree are disgraceful and vile in any civilised community, without sufficient pressure from the authorities. That includes the local authority and the one in Rotherham. What would you say to that?

Joyce Thacker: As I mentioned at the start, we are particularly interested in disruption activity as well with perpetrators or alleged perpetrators. We spend a lot of time doing attrition visits and issuing abduction notices. We try to make life hard for people who we think are interested in young girls for inappropriate purposes. We spend a lot of time doing that. Where a prosecution is not likely to be successful, that is the tactic that we take.

Q719 Mr Winnick: One of the features in this whole ugly and disgraceful business is the way in which minicab firms and drivers have been involved. How far was the council aware, either of you, perhaps Mr Kimber, of these minicab firms operating in the way that I have described?

Martin Kimber: From about 2010 it became clear that it was one of the features of grooming.

Mr Winnick: Only from 2010?

Martin Kimber: From about 2010, that it was one of the features. It featured in intelligence reports beforehand, but the pattern of activity did not become clear until that point. The council has strengthened its internal partnership working arrangements since, as well as its external partnership working arrangements. For example, we are now fully engaged with the licensing committee responsible for giving licences to taxi drivers. Where there are any allegations or issues relating to potential for child sexual exploitation then licences will not be issued. I think that is something that is an improvement point that has been brought forward, as Mrs Thacker said, in recent years.

Q720 Mr Winnick: Has the authority taken any action in taking away the licences of these minicab firms?

Martin Kimber: Yes. The action has been taken in two ways. First of all, it is one of the criteria that are looked at in deciding whether to grant a licence at all, and, secondly, when licences are reviewed, and indeed some licences have been removed as a consequence of those allegations.

Q721 Mr Winnick: Can you tell us how many licences have been removed?

Martin Kimber: I am afraid off the top of my head I cannot give you that answer, but I am very happy to write to you and provide you with that information.

Q722 Mr Winnick: Mr Kimber, am I not right that Denis MacShane, a Member of Parliament until very recently, got in touch with your department and asked for a report on what was happening?

Martin Kimber: I have to say I am not aware of that. I can check that for you.

Q723 Mr Winnick: That is the information we have. The final question I want to ask you: now that you are appearing before us, is there any self-criticism? Is there any feeling on the part of the two of you, bearing in mind the very senior positions you hold in this job, that much more could have been done to stop what was happening?

Martin Kimber: I think it is clear when you start looking at the evidence and you indeed listen to the
You would like to record your apology?

Chair: I would certainly apologise to young people and families where they have been let down. I do not think that that is ever as a consequence generally of individual failure. It is nearly always systemic failure. I think it is recognised now that the best way to tackle child sexual exploitation is by agencies working far more strongly together—shared responsibility and shared accountability. We have just heard issues relating to prosecutions. The council has a role to play in delivering successful prosecutions as part of tackling child sexual exploitation, but it is not entirely within our gift, and I think what recent evidence is telling us is effective multi-agency responses is the way to tackle child sexual exploitation. A single agency by itself will never be successful.

Martin Kimber: I think there is evidence coming forward now—I heard the evidence given by the Deputy Children’s Commissioner, for example—that sexual exploitation has been a very difficult topic to have a conversation about. It is very clear now that people are far more aware of sexual exploitation occurring, of the pointers to that and the potential responses to that. Therefore, it is inevitable that when you are casting your eye backwards, as indeed we all are trying to learn lessons from history, that you will have a sense of failure as a consequence of not knowing then what you know now.

Chair: Thank you. That is very helpful.

Martin Kimber: I am not sure I would agree with the proposition that nothing was done. There are a number of examples of local authority, police and partners working together to, firstly, try to identify sexual exploitation. Again, part of the evidence that you have heard is that, unless you look for it, you are unlikely to find it. I think in Rotherham there is a history of the council looking for child sexual exploitation to try to tackle it. That would be the first point I would make. I think the second point I would make is that...
Q731 Nicola Blackwood: Ms Thacker, I was a little concerned by your comment in your opening statement about prosecutions being icing on the cake and you distinguishing between prosecutions and prevention, because obviously prosecutions serve a very important deterrent effect and are part of prevention. I am also trying to understand why, when other areas are managing to have successful prosecutions, Rotherham is not. I understand that you have had one successful prosecution in 2010 in which five men were prosecuted and three others were not successfully convicted and you have had two operations in which they did not go through to prosecution. Is that correct? That was reported in The Times.

Joyce Thacker: We had one where there were no people charged and the next one where we had people charged but the Crown Prosecution Service did not feel it was sufficient to go through to a trial.

Q732 Nicola Blackwood: Can you explain why that was? Was it because of concerns about credibility, concerns about evidence? What was the failure in the investigation?

Joyce Thacker: The failure in that was a range of things as you have just described; about the credibility of the witnesses, which I think was despicable.

Nicola Blackwood: Who made that judgment? Was it the CPS? Was it the police?

Joyce Thacker: The CPS.

Nicola Blackwood: It was the CPS. Are you able to give us any details about that?

Joyce Thacker: I think you will find that when Mr Crompton wrote back to Mr Vaz he has given some information in that feedback to Mr Vaz, so it is in there, but we could certainly give you that information again.

Q733 Nicola Blackwood: Other areas are finding that they are managing to overcome these problems because these are problems that have emerged over the last few years, as you have identified correctly. Since 2003 it has emerged that it is difficult to get credibility of witnesses, that the CPS have problems and so on, but other areas are overcoming this. This does not seem to be happening in Rotherham. Multi-agency working has been identified, and—as Mrs Fullbrook mentioned—you have been exercising multi-agency working, but the problem is that there does not seem to be any fruit coming out at the other end. You still seem to have a lot of victims and you still seem to have no prosecutions. There is nothing to show for all the activity. Why?

Joyce Thacker: I have just described that it has been very difficult getting cases to prosecution.

Q734 Nicola Blackwood: What is more difficult in Rotherham than in Lancashire or in Oxford, where we are about to have a prosecution, or in anywhere else where we are experiencing exactly the same problems that you are experiencing? You have all of the systems in place and yet it is not working. What is the problem?

Joyce Thacker: I would say that we have looked—

Chair: Just to give you the facts, in Lancashire there were 100 prosecutions the year before last. In South Yorkshire there were no prosecutions.

Joyce Thacker: I do understand that. I have been reading all the evidence carefully that came from the different contributors and I am pleased, I am delighted that other authorities are getting such level of convictions. As I said at the start, it frustrates me when we do not get that level of convictions because these people need to be brought to justice, as you absolutely say, as a proper deterrent, but I cannot stop at that. I have to make sure girls are safe now and, while I would ideally like prosecutions wherever possible, I have to make sure that disruption is then going on. If I can’t secure prosecutions—or our contribution to securing prosecution—at the end of the day it is the police who will submit that evidence to CPS.

Q735 Nicola Blackwood: But what do you think the problem is? Do you think the problem is the attitude to victims within the police? Do you think the problem is a failure to collect the correct evidence early enough in the investigation or a failure to engage early enough with the CPS and build the correct evidence along the way? Do you think that the CPS attitude within your particular area towards the victims is inappropriate? Please tell the Committee what you think the problem is.

Joyce Thacker: I think it is a range. It is all of those things you have just said. I look with envy at the fact that in the north-west CPS are going to be co-located, for example, one day a week with their specialist teams. That would be good to happen in South Yorkshire. That would be a positive thing to do. We need to look at more creative ways of getting evidence.

Q736 Chair: Why is it not happening? It may be a very good idea, but why is it not happening now?

Joyce Thacker: It is the only place in the country it is happening. It would be good if we could follow that lead. We are members of a national working group that is the platform—

Chair: In the words of Nicola Blackwood, it is still not resulting in prosecutions. Are you blaming the police for failing to prosecute?

Joyce Thacker: No, I am not.

Q737 Chair: Who is to blame in all this? We have had your conferences in Rotherham. You have had your good practice, but, in answer to Nicola Blackwood, it is still happening. It would be good if we could follow that lead. We are members of a national working group that is the platform—

Chair: You have worked at Barnardo’s. You have worked in Keighley. You have worked in Bradford. You are on £130,000 a year in this council job.

Joyce Thacker: I just would say that I have worked in evolving practice over a number of years. It is only as recently as 1998 we were talking even in Barnardo’s of abuse through prostitution. It is only in 2009 that we have moved to exploitation, so we have all come a long way in our thinking. I am not an
expert. There is no such thing as an expert out there in the field, but there is some good practice out there that we need to make sure we are adopting quickly in places like Rotherham. The information that was given out by the police was a South Yorkshire focus, and I think there are creative things we can do that we are modelling now, which will hopefully lead to some prosecutions in the near future.

Chair: All right, but you cannot be sure of that.

Q738 Mark Reckless: Ms Thacker, I believe we would be better off as an independent country outside the EU. Should that preclude me from fostering?
Joyce Thacker: I am sorry, what’s….?
Mark Reckless: I believe we would be better off as an independent country outside the European Union. Do you think that should preclude me from fostering children?
Joyce Thacker: I am sorry; I do not know what this has to do with sexual exploitation.

Q739 Chair: Are you not the Strategic Director of Children’s Services for Rotherham?
Joyce Thacker: Yes, I am.
Chair: The point that Mr Reckless is trying to make, but it is a very subtle point that you may not have grasped, is: were you responsible for the decision to remove the children from the gentleman who is a member of UKIP?
Joyce Thacker: I was responsible for the decision to remove children from foster carers, yes.
Chair: Was it that particular case? That is what he is referring to, but he is trying to be polite in referring to it. I am being very blatant. You made that decision and he wants to know why you made that decision. Was it to do with the fact that they did not support a number of improvements but, in particular, the changing practice, there was an Ofsted inspection of Rotherham in August of last year that drew attention to a number of improvements but, in particular, the improvements Rotherham had made around the care system. Is it good practice to remove children from otherwise happy, secure foster placements because of the political views of the foster parents?

Joyce Thacker: I can’t comment on this case.
Chair: Mr Kimber, it is a yes or no.
Mark Reckless: I believe we would be better off as an independent country outside the EU. Should that preclude me from fostering?
Joyce Thacker: Absolutely not.
Mark Reckless: I am able to comment on the specifics of the case, Chair.
Chair: We understand that, but on the principles—
Mark Reckless: What I would say is that if the authority…..
Chair: I am sorry; I do not know what this has to do with sexual exploitation.

Q741 Mr Clappison: Should it be a factor, or is it a factor, that is taken into account in any way? I am not asking about this particular case. Is it a factor that is taken into account?
Mark Reckless: In deciding whether people are suitable as foster carers?
Mr Clappison: Yes.
Mark Reckless: No.
Chair: That is your “absolutely not” repeated? It is a no?
Mark Reckless: I think I have said that on three occasions.

Q742 Chair: You have indeed. Thank you very much for coming in. Can I just say in conclusion that the Committee is very concerned about the record of Rotherham as far as child grooming is concerned. We are very disappointed to have heard some of the evidence we have today and previously about Rotherham. We look forward to receiving those internal reports and indeed we look forward to receiving your vision for the future as to how you are working now as opposed to five years ago, because we accept that some of this is historic, but what is not historic is the fact that last year there were absolutely no prosecutions in South Yorkshire for child grooming whereas, as Ms Blackwood has said, there were 100 in Lancashire, and we can see good practice in terms of the evidence we have received so far. I will be writing to you again, and we may well be calling other witnesses from your council.

Mark Reckless: Chair, in the context of prosecutions, I think your comments have been helpful. I would just like to end with the point that, in the context of changing practice, there was an Ofsted inspection of Rotherham in August of last year that drew attention to a number of improvements but, in particular, the improvements Rotherham had made around the subject of its response to child sexual exploitation. I will be very happy to let you have that document as well as all the others.
Chair: That would be extremely helpful. Mr Kimber and Ms Thacker, thank you very much for coming today.
Tuesday 8 January 2013

Members present:

Mr Keith Vaz (Chair)

Nicola Blackwood
James Clappison
Michael Ellis
Lorraine Fullbrook

Dr Julian Huppert
Steve McCabe
Mark Reckless
Mr David Winnick

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Emma Jackson, and her father, Mr Jackson, gave evidence in private.

Q743 Chair: Thank you very much for coming, Emma. Is this a member of your family?

Mr Jackson: I’m her dad.

Emma Jackson: Yes, my dad.

Q744 Chair: Oh, right. I promise you that what you saw just now is not going to be repeated for you. This is very informal. It is just an opportunity to talk to you, and we are just going to put various questions—Nicola Blackwood, my colleague from Oxford, James Clappison from Hertfordshire and David Winnick for Walsall, and indeed Michael Ellis has now returned. We are only going to be about 15 to 20 minutes. We are really grateful to you for coming down here.

Emma, you have obviously suffered terrible abuse in your life, and I gather that you actually lived in Rotherham?

Emma Jackson: Yes.

Q745 Chair: To some extent now we really regret you not coming in before we had the Rotherham people, but we will be having more people from Rotherham, so don’t worry, some of the points that you put to us we will certainly be putting to them.

Can you tell us a bit about your history? How old are you at the moment, for example, and when did it start?

Emma Jackson: I am 23 now. I was groomed at the age of 12, and that started in Meadowhall, which is a local shopping centre. I used to go on the weekends with my friends. Back then was the place where children went on a weekend and they hung out. They have the children’s arcade, and we used to go in there. I got targeted by young boys who were a couple of years older than me, so they were not grown men.

Q746 Chair: How old would they have been?

Emma Jackson: They would have been 13, 14, and I would have been 12. This went on where I would see them every Saturday for about a year and this fellow started to introduce older brothers or cousins or friends who were about 16, 17, 18. Some of them had cars. At that age—I was coming up to 13 then—I was a teenage girl, and I quite liked the idea that some of them were a bit older and that they had cars, because that is teenage girls. You start wanting a bit more freedom. Your parents start to give you a little bit more freedom, and you do things that you should not do or that your parents tell you not to do. You still do, and that is kids.

Chair: I have a 15-year-old daughter. I know exactly what you mean.

Emma Jackson: You tell them not to do something and they will do it.

Chair: Mr Clappison, indeed, has a teenage daughter.

Emma Jackson: Then it started where they introduced older people to us and we started to go into Rotherham town centre to hang around instead of Meadowhall. I had turned 13 at this point. Then when we started hanging around in Rotherham town centre and we were there, we were seeing these men every day, and by now they were men. The younger boys had disappeared, and it was men.

Q747 Chair: Men of what age?

Emma Jackson: In their 20s. They started to get older as time went on; some were in their 30s.

Q748 Chair: From the time you started to meet them to the time you got to the 30-year-olds, was there any activity that you were doing with them—any sexual activity? Was there any abuse, any grooming, going on?

Emma Jackson: When I was just seeing these men at Meadowhall, no. As soon as it moved into Rotherham town centre I was actually befriended by one of the men who was talked about in the report, who had a lot of—you know, that family.

Q749 Chair: Yes, the family I mentioned in my questions?

Emma Jackson: Yes, and that is when my sexual exploitation started. I was actually sexually assaulted in front of other men and in front of a girl. I did not really know or understand that I had been sexually assaulted because I come from a really good family. I have always been loved and cared for and supported. I was taught about paedophiles, but these men did not fit into what I had been taught. They were not old.

Q750 Chair: Did they look like kind of normal people?

Emma Jackson: Yes.

Chair: As opposed to very old men with hats and coats who wandered round in the middle of the night?

Emma Jackson: Yes, and they are quite attractive. Even though you knew they were older, it was as though you were sat with somebody who was your age because they would have the same interests that I did as a 13-year-old girl.
Q752 Chair: Sure. At that stage, you did not know this was wrong? You thought it was normal? 
Emma Jackson: Yes. I felt really uncomfortable with what had happened and I really upset me, but none of the men or anybody else made out that it was abnormal. It was made out as though that is relationships and that is sexual intercourse and that is life, and you just get on with it.

Q753 Chair: When did you feel that actually this was not normal and you needed to go to a social worker or somebody else or your dad or your mum or someone like that? When did you feel that? How old were you then?
Emma Jackson: I was still 13 at that point, because from then on I was being raped every week on a regular basis, I also started to be sold to his friends and his brothers.

Q754 Chair: You knew this was going on? You became property?
Emma Jackson: I did not know I was being sold. By that point he had turned quite violent towards me also.

Q755 Chair: What was his name?
Emma Jackson: xxxxxx and his brothers, xxxxx and xxxxx.

Q756 Chair: Do they still live in Rotherham?
Emma Jackson: They moved away for a bit, but I think they are back now.

Q757 Chair: Have they ever gone to jail?
Emma Jackson: They have but not for this. They have gone for drug offences.

Q758 Chair: Who did you tell first? When you found out it was wrong and you felt that you were being an object, who did you go to first?
Emma Jackson: Well, the first person I actually told was my mum because the night before he had hit me and he tried to set my face on fire. I had said to him that I was going to tell somebody what he was doing to me because it was wrong, and he sent two men up to my house to come and kidnap me. My neighbours actually saw them and phoned 999 because they thought we were being broken into. Then the police came and they were there five minutes, then they went. I went up to bed and the next day when I came home from school my mum was sat waiting for me because she saw there was something definitely not right. She said, “As a mum I know and as a parent I know that.” I just blurted out to her that I was being raped, and she phoned 999 straight away.

Q759 Chair: Then what happened?
Emma Jackson: The police came out. There were PCs who came out and they asked me—
Chair: How many?
Emma Jackson: Two, a man and a woman. They asked me if I knew who had done this, so I said, “Yes” and I gave their names. When I told them the names, they said that I had got involved with some very dangerous people and the Serious Crime Squad needed to come in and deal with this, they could not.

Q760 Chair: Really? That was sensible.
Emma Jackson: Yes, and I brought them downstairs and they took them away in evidence bags. Then they lost them.

Q761 Chair: They lost them? They lost the evidence?
Emma Jackson: Yes, the police lost my evidence. It was a rape charge, but when it came down to it was my word against his. They also could not offer me any protection, even though these men were really dangerous. They were actually at that time on bail for kidnapping a witness and breaking his jaw and holding him hostage because he was going to court to be a witness against them for another crime.

Q762 Chair: Was the council ever involved in this? Did you have a social worker?
Emma Jackson: Yes, I had a social worker. I used to attend Risky Business, and I had a youth worker. Education was aware of it. The NHS was aware of it, and Rotherham council was, because I used to have strategy meetings.
Chair: With the social worker?
Emma Jackson: Yes, with all—
Chair: They knew about all this? They knew about the xxxxx They knew about the rapes and all this?
Emma Jackson: Yes.

Q763 Chair: What did they do?
Emma Jackson: Nothing.

Mr Jackson: It was us as parents who got social workers because we did not know who to go to when this happened. We did not realise that this went on. When you have never been involved with police or social workers you think, “Well, who do I turn to?” Obviously, we turned to the police first, and then we turned to the social workers at Rotherham.

Q764 Chair: Did you feel a bit vulnerable? I would be terrified if I knew that the person I was complaining about had broken somebody’s jaw and kidnapped somebody and was trying to kidnap my daughter. I would be terrified. Actually, I may not even complain, I would be so worried. Were you worried about it?

Mr Jackson: We were worried, but the thing that was in our favour was that we did not actually live in Rotherham. We lived eight miles out of Rotherham, so we were not living on the doorstep of where these perpetrators lived. Where we lived was a mining area. These perpetrators were Asian guys and they stood out like a sore thumb in our village if they came into the village, so we were more, I would say, protected than actually being in the centre of Rotherham living on the estate.

Q765 Chair: Mr Jackson, are you clear that this was actually Asian men?
Mr Jackson: Yes.
Q766 Chair: Who were perpetrating this against white girls or, Emma, were there Asian girls or were they all white girls?
Emma Jackson: When I was being sexually exploited I never saw any Asian girls. It was all white girls. But I work in sexual exploitation and I have worked in sexual exploitation around the UK, and they do target Asian girls, they target black girls, they target white girls, they target Chinese girls. It just seems whoever they can get access to.

Q767 Chair: Who is “they”? These are these Asian men, or are they—
Emma Jackson: They are the perpetrators.
Chair: They are perpetrators.
Emma Jackson: Depending on which parts of the country you go to depends on—

Q768 Chair: It could be a different area, no Asians involved, some areas, Asians involved, is that right?
Emma Jackson: Yes, but what we find is—
Chair: But in the Rotherham area it was very clearly Asian men and young white girls?
Emma Jackson: In the Rotherham area, and also knowing and working for Rotherham council as well in their sexual exploitation service, we do not have a white perpetrator. All we have is Asian perpetrators.

Q769 Chair: Emma, you have heard the evidence today from Rotherham council. We were not impressed with Rotherham council as well in their sexual exploitation service, we do not have a white perpetrator. All we have is Asian perpetrators.

Q770 Chair: They seem to be in a world of their own. They are having conferences, giving out leaflets, but this seems to be going on and nobody seems to be doing anything. Is this right or is it just what we think? Is that the case?
Emma Jackson: No, that is right.

Q771 Chair: Why? When they have all this money to do something, why aren’t they doing something?
Emma Jackson: I can’t see what their issue is by their not tackling it. Because someone is committing a crime, then you stop them, especially if they are committing crimes against children and abusing children and you know about it. You do whatever you can to stop that. But it seems as though it is easier to not, and it is as though they do not want to tackle it because if they start tackling it then we are going to find out how big the problem is and is it opening a tin of worms.

Q772 Chair: Is it a big problem?
Emma Jackson: I think it is in Rotherham.

Q773 Chair: Is it still happening today? If we went to Rotherham town centre would there be—
Emma Jackson: Yes.
Chair: Today?
Emma Jackson: Yes.
Chair: Tonight?
Emma Jackson: The areas where this happens, where the abuse takes place, are in central Rotherham and in the areas that are mainly Asian areas. I spend a lot of time in the Asian areas, and such as Joyce Thacker might not see it but because I spend my time there I see it.

Q774 Chair: Because you know what it looks like?
Emma Jackson: I see it, yes, and it is happening all the time. People do talk about it as though it is normal life now. People do name people and say, “He has sex with children. He is having sex with so and so”.

Q775 Chair: People know this? They know the names, they know the people, but nothing happens?
Emma Jackson: Yes.

Q776 Nicola Blackwood: What kind of attitude did you encounter from the police and the social services as a victim when you first came forward?
Emma Jackson: It was as though I was lying because I had an issue with these people, and as though they had not really done anything that bad to me and I was just complaining and kicking up a fuss for no reason.

Q777 Nicola Blackwood: Even though you provided evidence?
Emma Jackson: Yes. The police officers actually said to me—one of them, my child protection officer, said to me, “If it is any consolation, you are not the first girl that has been abused and raped and you are definitely not the last”. Then one of the CID officers who was in charge of the case said to me, “If you go back to these men, we just think that it is little white slappers running around with Asians”, and that was their attitude.

Q778 Nicola Blackwood: What about the social workers? Was it any better there?
Emma Jackson: My social worker just seemed not to even be on this planet. It was like she did not have an opinion at all on anything. In fact, she gave one bit of advice, and that was that these men had said I owed them £500 for alcohol and drugs and they would have to come and kidnap me and take me away for a few days so I could pay my debt off. The social worker advised my parents to meet the men and pay them £500.

Q779 Nicola Blackwood: In all these multi-agency meetings did anyone in those meetings in any of those agencies offer any proper help to you?
Emma Jackson: No, social care closed my case.

Q780 Nicola Blackwood: How long did it take for that to happen?
Emma Jackson: A few months. Social care closed my case because I come from a supportive family and they said that they could not protect me any more than what my family could. The police said that there was not enough evidence, nothing could be done, and then actually “non-crimed” what I had reported. They sent me a cheque out to cover the cost of the clothes that they had lost that were evidence.
I had to leave education at 14. They excluded me because I was involved in sexual exploitation, and my last school report actually states that I was a child
prostitute. Then they also did not want me on the premises because I was seen as a danger to other children and staff because if these men came to get me, then they could harm the children and staff also. Health was quite good. I had a lot of support from the GUM clinic. I had a lot of support from gynaecologists and from the children’s department. If anything, they were the best service. It actually got to the point where it was that bad my parents had to move me out of the country to stop the sexual exploitation because the authorities were not doing anything. The sexual exploitation was not stopping, because these men were still coming.

Q781 Nicola Blackwood: You have now been working in this area, and you worked at Rotherham for a while.

Emma Jackson: Yes.

Q782 Nicola Blackwood: Do you think that those attitudes are still there or do you think that it is getting any better for other people?

Emma Jackson: I think it is more talked about now. I do not think that how we deal with it has got any better and people still have the attitude that, “She is a problem child and she drinks, she smokes, she takes drugs. She wants to have sex with loads of men. If that is what she wants to do, then leave her to it. She is making a choice. She is voting with her feet”.

Q783 Nicola Blackwood: What do you think it would be now? Do you think that you would get a better hearing than you did back then?

Emma Jackson: I think in a way I would because it is more talked about, so more people understand it. More people have heard of it and they know that it is a crime. But in certain ways, probably in how I would be treated by the authorities, no, you know, and if they would take it seriously.

Q784 Mr Winnick: As the Chair said, we most appreciate your coming along. We have witnesses of senior officials, social services, police and what have you. As someone who has experienced this terrible business that you have gone through, it is very valuable for us in trying to make an assessment and recommendations accordingly. What would I like to ask you is this, Rotherham council, rather like other local authorities, say, in effect, “Well, we were not aware of the problem really before 2010”, and, therefore, it is their excuse for no action being taken. What do you say to that?

Emma Jackson: They have been very aware of this for a number of years. They were aware of this even before I was sexually exploited because they were having meetings about it then. I know that from working for the council. I just think that they have chosen not to tackle it because it was easier not to. I think also the fact that a lot of these girls, these children, are from care or what the council describe as dysfunctional families—although I am not really sure what that means because we are all a bit dysfunctional at some point in life at things—they just see that is how they are going to end up anyway. You know, is there anything else that they are really going to do? They are going to end up as teenage parents, so just leave them to it. I think it has been easier to do that.

Q785 Mr Winnick: These criminals, because obviously they are criminals and if they have not been brought to justice they certainly should be, in your area and your experience they were Asians. You were saying that such crimes can be committed by anyone—white, black, Asian—as indeed they are. Would you take the view that the Asian people that you have met, not the criminals but ordinary people leading lawful lives and all the rest of it, would be quite shocked by what occurred and they would not find any kind of alibi just because the criminals are Asian? Would that be your view?

Emma Jackson: Yes. The Asian community in Rotherham know this is happening, and they are absolutely appalled by it. They want these people out of their community like anybody else would. They do not want their children around these people. But I think also what has happened—and not just with the Asian community but with everybody in Rotherham who is a young person or in their early 20s—is it is spoken about and it is almost accepted in a way because it has been going on that long. It is just normal. It has been going on that long, and been left to go on, that we have normalised it. That is just part of growing up; that is what happens.

Chair: Thank you.

Q786 Mr Clappison: You are quite clear that when this was happening you were still a child, weren’t you?

Emma Jackson: Yes.

Q787 Mr Clappison: You were only 13, so that would have been evidence to all those who were supposed to be dealing with it. The council said to us earlier that they were now disrupting this activity; they were concentrating on disruption. Do you think it has been disrupted?

Emma Jackson: No, I think actually you should probably ask for Rotherham council’s figures on how many abduction notices they have sent out, because I do not think they are disrupting. They class things like pulling them up because their tax has run out on the car as disrupting them from abusing children and selling them, but that is not stopping them from abusing a child.

Q788 Mr Clappison: If we were to go down to the Meadowhall shopping centre or Rotherham town centre, this would still be going on?

Emma Jackson: Yes.

Q789 Chair: I gather you won compensation against the police for their failure to investigate your case?

Emma Jackson: Yes.

Mr Jackson: No, we took it to—we did not get compensation but—

Emma Jackson: We won criminal—

Chair: Criminal injuries?

Emma Jackson: Yes.
Mr Jackson: Right, but when this happened to Emma, I actually got my local MP involved, which was Kevin Barron at the time, and still is our local MP. I knew Kevin because I used to work with him in the coal industry. He was very, very good. He wrote to Rotherham police because we did not feel that it was being investigated correctly. We asked for meetings with Rotherham police, which was Chris (inaudible—5.32.10) at the time, and she refused a meeting. I also wrote to David Blunkett, and I have a letter, not from David—

Q790 Chair: Was he Home Secretary then?
Mr Jackson: Yes, he was the Home Secretary then. I did not get a reply from David, but I had a letter from Mr Hedges, who was the South Yorkshire Police Commissioner or Chief Constable at that time, saying that, “No stone will be left unturned, and we will get these people”. That never happened.

Q791 Chair: Are they still wandering around?
Mr Jackson: No. We have had a safeguarding board meeting every quarter. We have not met as a sub-group for the last three quarters.

Q792 Chair: The witnesses from Rotherham council said that the multi-agency approach, which is now the way they are doing things, happened nine months ago. Apparently, it did not. You said that it started in December, only in December this year.
Mr Jackson: Well, can I just say that I was the lay member on the Rotherham safeguarding board up until a month ago.

Chair: Oh, really?
Mr Jackson: Yes. They approached me and Emma’s mum to come on the board in 2011. I know safeguarding is not just about sexual exploitation—it is about other things—but we tried to work with Rotherham and we found it incredibly difficult. I can tell you now that what Mr Kimber said was a complete lie.

Emma Jackson: The posts for the two social workers—
Mr Jackson: They were not advertised until September of this year.
Emma Jackson: They did not get the jobs until December.
Chair: Really?
Emma Jackson: Yes.

Q793 Chair: We need to write to them because that is misleading the Committee to have said nine months and then—
Mr Jackson: We used to have a sexual exploitation sub-group meeting every quarter. We have not had one of them meetings for the last three quarters.

Q794 Chair: In Rotherham?
Mr Jackson: In Rotherham.

Q795 Nicola Blackwood: You have not had a safeguarding meeting for the last three quarters?
Mr Jackson: No. We have had a safeguarding meeting. We have a safeguarding meeting every quarter, but we have a sub-group. The sub-group is obviously off the main safeguarding board. We used to have a sexual exploitation sub-group meeting every quarter. We have not met as a sub-group for the last three quarters.

Q796 Chair: This is very serious and I was not very impressed with the Rotherham people. I think that we should actually get them back, not them but write to them and ask them what the position is. There are other people involved in Rotherham.
Mr Jackson: When I was on the safeguarding board we had the case with xxxxxx, and I actually challenged the board and said, “If xxxxxx is not being sexually exploited, why does it appear in the report?” There was quite a lengthy element of the report about sexual exploitation. If she was not being sexually exploited, why was that in the report? I could not understand why and we asked that question. I know they talked about Ofsted in Rotherham, but the Ofsted report that came out actually stated that everybody on the board must actually agree in Rotherham because it was never minuted that nobody disagreed.

Q797 Chair: Did you go to any of the councillors there?
Mr Jackson: When they had the—
Chair: Did you go to a councillor called Shaun Wright? He was the chair of Social Services.
Mr Jackson: Well, they arrested 18 taxi drivers in Rotherham.
Chair: For sexual exploitation.
Mr Jackson: For this? Right.

Emma Jackson: This was last year.
Mr Jackson: Last year. Now, when we were on the board, my wife was on the board and she asked the question, “What are we doing with these taxi drivers?” “Well, we haven’t done anything yet.” “Well, have they been suspended? Have their licences been suspended?” “No.” My wife said, “Well, why haven’t they been suspended if they have been arrested and what about the children all these people are picking up from school?” Because they were picking kids up from school and also children with disabilities, like in special schools.

Emma Jackson: They were actually on bail for—
Chair: This was when, last year?
Emma Jackson: Yes.
Chair: Eighteen taxi drivers?
Mr Jackson: Eighteen taxi drivers.

Q798 Chair: They were not suspended from their licences?
Emma Jackson: No.
Mr Jackson: No. I asked for a meeting as a ratepayer of Rotherham, not as a board member because I had to be careful how I approached it, and I spoke to—Rose McNeely was the mayor and we had a meeting with her and the head of the licensing committee. They said that they were going to get this sorted. I also had a meeting with Warren Carratt. He was fairly high up in children’s services. He is now a team leader in one of the other areas in Rotherham. They said they are going to work with us and they were going to get these people off the street and get them prosecuted. That has never happened.
Mr Clappison: We have to follow that up.
Chair: We will follow it up. Emma, Mr Jackson, thank you very much. You have come a long way, but thank you so much for coming down. We are very grateful. We will make sure that we keep you informed of this inquiry. Thank you.
Emma Jackson: Thank you.
Tuesday 29 January 2013

Members present:

Keith Vaz (Chair)

Mr James Clappison
Michael Ellis
Lorraine Fullbrook
Dr Julian Huppert

Bridget Phillipson
Mark Reckless
Mr David Winnick

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Ann Cryer, former Member of Parliament for Keighley, and Kris Hopkins MP, Member of Parliament for Keighley, gave evidence.

Q799 Chair: Mrs Cryer, welcome back. Thank you very much for coming to give evidence to the Committee. We have also invited Mr Hopkins at short notice to join you, since he is your successor, to see whether anything has changed since you last raised this very important issue. For you, the recent articles, indeed the inquiry by this Select Committee and the general interest of so many, including the Deputy Children’s Commissioner and others, must be almost a total vindication of what you have been saying to Parliament and to the public since you first raised this issue, in this Committee and outside Parliament in 2003. Are you glad that everyone has now seen the light and understands the big issues? Ann Cryer: Yes, I have mixed emotions because, yes, I am pleased people are recognising that what I was saying was right, but I am also very upset that after all these years—12 years, 11 years; I am not sure—we are still getting these cases. They are coming in fast and furious at the moment in various towns and cities, even Oxford, but certainly in the north. I thought when I raised these cases with Bradford and West Yorkshire and young men were sent down that that was an end to it. I thought, “A shot across the bows: we will not hear any more of this; it will be finished”, and here we are again.

Q800 Chair: Do you think that therefore this is now on the increase, or do you think that the numbers have been stabilised? Because we have had figures, as you know, from the Deputy Children’s Commissioner that show that in her view there were 16,500 children who were at risk and 2,409 had been sexually exploited over a 14-month period, which sounds to us to be phenomenally high figures. Ann Cryer: Yes.

Chair: Do you see this increasing since you first raised it, or is it now stabilised and on the decrease? Ann Cryer: It would appear to be on the increase, but I am only going by what I have read about what you are doing and what the papers are talking about. Are we dealing separately with the online grooming, which is quite separate?

Chair: We are not. You can certainly bring that in as well. Ann Cryer: Yes, because the two are quite separate areas. I understand there are far more kids being groomed via online than the sort of cases that I dealt with, with the Pakistani community in Keighley, I think it is horses for courses, and I think we should be dealing with them both separately, but they should be both dealt with. We must not turn our back on it.

Q801 Chair: No, but if you were to look back at when you first raised it and what we have uncovered since then in all the various inquiries, if you were to pinpoint an agency, was it the police or the CPS or local councils that failed to act? We have established that in different areas it is different agencies, but which in particular would you like to say was responsible? Ann Cryer: I would not like to say. The saddest thing is—and I think this is what we are learning—that there has to be in this sort of thing inter-agency working, and that was not happening then. Now, the West Yorkshire Police, Bradford local authority, social services, schools, hospitals even—because abortions were taking place—none of them were working together. None of them were giving information, and I feel pretty convinced that at that time there was a fear of being called racist because it came just after the Stephen Lawrence—

Q802 Chair: We will come on to that in a second. Mr Hopkins, thank you for giving evidence at such short notice. You have succeeded Mrs Cryer as the Member of Parliament for Keighley. Do you still see these cases either come into your constituency, or do you have evidence of it still continuing in your constituency and in the area? Kris Hopkins: First, I pay credit to Ann’s work: she went in pursuit of those individuals and much of the work and much of the lid being taken off this issue is down to Ann’s absolutely rigorous pursuit of it, and I would just like to put that on record.

Ann Cryer: Thank you. Kris Hopkins: There was a question about whether it is increasing, and I think to some degree it is highlighted and people are having confidence about coming forward because the police are going in pursuit of people. It is very difficult to measure whether there is an increase or decrease, but, to give you an idea of the scale, across Bradford district at this moment in time 30 people have been arrested in the last two months. There are ongoing cases. There is a very detailed ongoing investigation. On agencies working together, I have absolutely no doubt at all that the police, certainly the police who work in my area—I will just name-check Chief Superintendent Angela Williams and her team—know what is
expected by the law and know what is expected from politicians as well. There is no political correctness; I do not disagree with Ann, by the way. We and other leaders in the district want the perpetrators of this vile activity brought to justice.

**Q803 Michael Ellis:** Can we just explore this issue of race? Mrs Cryer, when you spoke out in 2003 and you discussed the issue of localised grooming, I think you just said in an answer to the Chairman that there was a concern that you might be called racist. Could you elaborate on that a little?

**Ann Cryer:** I did not have a terrific concern, because if I had had a terrific concern about being called a racist, I probably would not have done it, but I did not allow it to get in my way. It would have got in my way of taking care of and doing right by some very vulnerable and very young girls. I am talking about girls aged 11 to 13, and it was in 2002 when the mothers came to me. But I got the impression it just did not make sense, the lack of activity, particularly by Bradford social services and West Yorkshire Police, so I formed the opinion that they were terrified about being called racist. I have three children who are half-Indian, three grandchildren, and another grandchild who is half-African. Yes, it would have upset me if anyone had called me a racist, but I was not going to let that get in the way of protecting children who were not much different in age to some of my grandchildren.

**Q804 Michael Ellis:** That is very courageous, and I commend you for that. Do you think that the issue was overshadowed at the time by race when it came into the public domain?

**Ann Cryer:** I think you would have to go back a little earlier than that. There was the Stephen Lawrence case, and Doreen Lawrence was so brave in raising these issues. The police were being accused of being politically correct—sorry, of not being politically correct but keeping quiet about the Lawrence case. If you remember, it took years before anyone was brought to court.

**Michael Ellis:** Mrs Lawrence did a wonderful job in bringing it to its fruition.

**Ann Cryer:** Yes. She was the other side of the sort of thing I was doing, and I really admired her for it. Therefore, I can to a certain extent understand the reluctance of social services and West Yorkshire Police in being worried that they were going to get really given a very hard time if they started to raise this question of grooming.

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**Q805 Michael Ellis:** Can I just ask you about the way that the matter has been dealt with more recently? One might argue that the renewed focus on localised grooming is down to a series of articles in The Times. Does it concern you that it seems to have come through the media in that way and the media can talk about these issues in a frank manner? Do you think that there is an element of caution still from other quarters about bringing these matters to public attention?

**Ann Cryer:** The Times has been very exercised in talking about these things and doing articles. I am a well-meaning Guardian reader—

**Michael Ellis:** Someone has to be.

**Ann Cryer:** By and large, it is the only paper I read much of the time.

**Michael Ellis:** But The Times did some very good work on this subject.

**Ann Cryer:** Yes, it did, and they were not too worried about being called politically incorrect. The Guardian I think does have anxieties about that, and therefore I think it is a shame, in my view, that when I was arguing these points 11, 12 years ago that I did not get support from papers like The Guardian. They have changed. They are doing it now. They have had some excellent reports on the girl who was killed by her parents—I think that was in Warrington—and the case of the Rochdale nine. They have done some excellent reports in The Guardian. I cannot fault it for that, it has just taken a long time to get there.

**Q806 Michael Ellis:** Mr Hopkins, do you think the concerns are the same today as they were 10 years ago or not?

**Kris Hopkins:** I think the response is quite telling. When I recently spoke out about this, I had all the people who did not like what I said from the Pakistani community and all the people who did like what I said from the white community. There are a lot of reasons for that. Some of it, as I think Ann said, my clumsy language that was used at the time. That could have been part of the reasoning. There are two elements to the communities that I represent. One is the white community, which needs confidence that something is being done and the victims and the children, the families, as well as the wider community, and the other bit is the other community coming to terms with what is happening inside their community. That is very, very difficult for them, and I genuinely feel deeply sorry for the vast majority of very good people in that community.

**Q807 Chair:** You are very clear, Mr Hopkins, you think this is the British Pakistani community who are targeting young, white girls? Are you clear on that, or—

**Kris Hopkins:** That is what I have said in the House and I am sticking by that. I think as court cases come forward, people will be able to make their own judgments.

**Q808 Chair:** Mrs Cryer, you were quoted on 6 January in The Times of actually referring to the community. You said, “Young girls in short skirts and skimpy tops are seen as easy meat by some Asian men”. You specifically refer to the village of Mirpur. Presumably you also believe this is one particular community that is involved in this targeting another.

**Ann Cryer:** It is the only community I know, because nearly all the Pakistanis in Keighley—there are a handful of Bangladeshis as well—about 20% of the electorate is from Mirpur. Therefore, the mothers who were coming to see me 12 years ago about their daughters being groomed and exploited—it was all by Mirpuri young men. It was very, very difficult,
because the BNP was in the ascendant at that time and I was scared stiff that these mothers who were coming to me may well be sympathetic to the BNP.

**Chair:** Of course. There are always political judgments to be made, but you are very clear on the origins. I am going to bring in Mr Clappison and Mr Winnick now.

Q809 **Mr Clappison:** I can remember from 10 or 12 years ago when Mrs Cryer was raising these matters they were not as readily received at that time. There had to be a certain amount of effort, which Mrs Cryer deserves a great deal of credit for, in having the courage to put these matters into the public domain. I think it is fair to say from what the Committee has heard in recent times that there is a lot of variability in reactions to this up and down the country. Some places, such as Bradford, Mr Hopkins tells us, are taking this more seriously. In other places, we are not seeing as much action. What do you think is the cure for that if we think of places that are not a million miles away from Bradford and Keighley that we have seen hearing evidence about.

**Ann Cryer:** You are asking me?

**Mr Clappison:** Yes. It is the same pattern of behaviour, broadly.

**Ann Cryer:** I think to this day there is a certain misunderstanding within the Mirpuri community. I think because they take great pride in their girls and how their girls are very careful in the way they dress and are always covered in some way, then they see the other side of the situation in white girls as young as 12 or 13, where their cleavage is almost meeting the hemline. I do not think these lads understand that this is just part and parcel of fashion. It is these young girls following fashion. It is not that they are throwing out an invitation to them. I think somebody somewhere needs to get that over to them: that there is a misunderstanding. This is not what these girls are about; they are not asking for it, as they say. They are just following fashion. They are dressing in the same way that their friends dress. It is a difficult—

Q810 **Chair:** Who should get that message out to them that this is not an invitation? Who should do it: the parents, the community, Government, the local authority, the police? Who should send out this message?

**Ann Cryer:** All of them. Particularly the schools, I think. I think particularly schools could be very useful, but also the possibly non-elected leaders of the community, the leaders at the mosque, the gatekeepers and so on. They all have a role to play in this, in explaining to these young men that they have it wrong.

Q811 **Mr Winnick:** Those who are involved in such activities are degenerate and criminal elements, and the sooner they face justice—some have already fortunately faced justice—are brought to court and dealt with, the better it will be for all concerned. But I want to ask you this question, and also Mr Hopkins, insofar as the culprits in the cases that have been publicised are of Asian origin, would you accept that the overwhelming majority of people in the Asian community would look upon the activities that I have just described as being outright criminal and vile, with the same horror as we do? Would you agree with that, Ms Cryer?

**Ann Cryer:** Yes. I think they do, because this subject is coming up again and again; people are talking to me about it. It might be taxi drivers, or it may be just friends of mine in the Asian community; they just hate it.

**Mr Winnick:** The Asian community at large?

**Ann Cryer:** The Asian community just hate it because it is bringing shame on their communities, their Mirpuri community. It is bringing shame on them, and they are very embarrassed about it. They regard these young men as being completely beyond the pale, completely beyond their community. I think it is unfortunate that perhaps they are also thinking that they are beyond their influence. I wish they would not think that. I wish they would take it as a challenge.

Q812 **Mr Winnick:** Just in the same way that if the culprits were white, that would be the reaction of white people. If the culprits were Jewish, that would be the reaction of Jews and so on. You accept that?

**Ann Cryer:** Yes.

**Mr Winnick:** Mr Hopkins?

**Kris Hopkins:** I agree, and I think Ann talked about the shame that people feel as a consequence of people raising this issue. It is a very emotive and powerful thing to feel, but that does not mean that people should not face up to the issues. Just to comment on what Mr Clappison said, I think that all those people in those agencies have a responsibility to address some of this. But I think the most powerful voices within there—or they need to be the most powerful voices—will be women in those communities, so the mums, grandmas, future mums, the girls in those families need to be empowered. I have to say my only real question mark is around the current leadership, the gatekeepers and the self-elected individuals. You know, they are good people; they are trying to do it. They are trying to do the right thing, but I am not quite sure if they connect with them. An example would be that a while ago I challenged a local community around education. I said to them, “What are the mosques doing about education?” The mosque elders called me and they said, “Kris, you are deluding yourself. We probably only connect with about 25% of the populace.” Sometimes we look at the wrong people to solve the problem, and I have done that as well.

Q813 **Chair:** Who should be sending that message?

**Kris Hopkins:** The piece of work which I am going on at the moment—I spoke to the Home Secretary, I am going to see Eric Pickles—is about trying get women empowered in that community, young leaders, to really become the voice of that community and really become the challenge to the behaviour of men.

Q814 **Mr Clappison:** I think that is a very good point. Ann Cryer, when you have been dealing with this issue, and you have dealt with officialdom and agencies who were dealing with these cases, did you find that any assumptions were made about the
victims, about their character? Were any particular assumptions made about them at all?

Ann Cryer: No. I think it has been happening since then. A lot of the stuff I have read about—I think that is definitely the case that they have been regarded by the agencies as being unreliable witnesses and so on. But certainly at the time I was taking it on it was a bit different, because all the girls that I was dealing with—it was their mothers who came to me. In other words, they were not in care. They were still living at home with parents, and it was their mothers who came to see me. Eight in all came to see me, and we battled through. It was very good of them to go on with it, because clearly if it had got out in any community, it would have been very, very embarrassing for them. But they struggled on. We got two minor changes in the law that meant that going to court and getting prosecutions would be easier and it was partly their ideas that brought that about. David Blunkett was Home Secretary at that time.

Q815 Chair: If the Committee went out one evening in Keighley, would we be able to see the kinds of scenes that we have been told about in places like Rochdale and Rotherham, with young men, or even older men, being surrounded by young white women? Is that what we would see? Where does this happen: out in the open, or is this in the shadows, hidden? Have you seen it yourself?

Kris Hopkins: What I was going to say was I do not want to comment. The reason why I do not want to comment is that I think there is lots of evidence about to come in certain court cases at the moment, and I do not want to prejudice those cases. I want the evidence to be heard in court and people to have a proper judicial system in which to be heard. I am just going to refrain, with respect, from commenting on that.

Q816 Chair: Sure. Ms Cryer, would we be able to see this in parts of the country if we went to have a look or is this in the shadows?

Ann Cryer: I never saw anything. When the mothers came to see me and told me about what was going on with their girls, it was an absolute shock to me. I had no idea it was going on. I had been the MP for over three years then, and I didn’t know a thing. Then once it got publicity, I started to get good friends either in the Asian community or who were in the caring professions coming to me and saying, “Didn’t you know this was happening?” I said, “No, because you did not tell me.” It was one of those things that was not talked about much. As I say, these women, these mothers, were very brave, and eventually one of the reasons we were able to go to court with some evidence that had been stopped before was they started to allow hearsay evidence in certain cases; not in every case, but in this sort of case hearsay evidence was admissible because of the campaigning of these women, with my support and with David Blunkett’s support.

Chair: Ms Cryer, Mr Hopkins, these are obviously very difficult local issues for you, and you have both spoken up very bravely on these issues in support of the victims, those who are the most vulnerable. On behalf of the whole Committee I thank you for the good work that you are doing. If you have further evidence to give to us, we have not concluded our inquiry so please do not hesitate to let us have it in writing or speak to one of the members of the Committee. We would be most grateful to receive it. Thank you very much for coming.
This is the Committee’s inquiry into evidence.

What is also worrying is the way that these cases are witnessed includes a disproportionately larger number of Muslims and Asians, and that is very worrying. Nevertheless, I think it is a very serious matter for us, first of all, to recognise that the Muslim community makes up a very small percentage of the UK population and therefore if we were to look at the whole scale of this community due to drug supply, due to organised crime and as a result of that many girls becoming child victims of abuse.

Can I start with you, Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra? You have seen the statements that are made in the public domain by various individuals, politicians and newspapers that this issue of child grooming seems to be an issue for the Muslim community. It covers a lot of communities but in particular the concern is that members of the Muslim community, in particular the British Pakistani community, are tolerating or allowing this kind of behaviour. What would you say to that?

Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra: I think it is very important for us, first of all, to recognise that the Muslim communities that make up the Muslim community in the UK are very diverse and therefore the attitudes that these components of the community have towards this particular issue also will be diverse. We also have to bear in mind that the Muslim community makes up a very small percentage of the UK population and therefore if we were to look at the whole scale of this kind of abuse right across the various communities we would find that perhaps the component that includes Muslim perpetrators will be minuscule and minute. Nevertheless, I think it is a very serious matter for us as Muslim communities to recognise that this kind of behaviour is not only bringing a bad name to the faith of Islam or to the Pakistani community or the Asian communities but I think it brings a bad name to humanity as a whole. So we need to acknowledge the fact that the cases that have come to light that have been in court and the sentencing that we have so far witnessed includes a disproportionately larger number of Muslims and Asians, and that is very worrying. What is also worrying is the way that these cases are reported.

Q817 Chair: This is the Committee’s inquiry into child grooming. Can I refer all those present to the Register of Members’ Interests where the interests of Members of this Committee are noted? I welcome Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra from the Muslim Council of Britain and Mr Karmani. Thank you very much for coming here to give evidence. I am not sure whether you have been following the Committee’s deliberations over the last few weeks and months. The inquiry that we set up last year, following the deliberations over the last few weeks and months because the Committee has found more evidence that is relevant to its inquiry.

Can I start with you, Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra? You have seen the statements that are made in the public domain by various individuals, politicians and newspapers that this issue of child grooming seems to be an issue for the Muslim community. It covers a lot of communities but in particular the concern is that members of the Muslim community, in particular the British Pakistani community, are tolerating or allowing this kind of behaviour. What would you say to that?

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Q818 Chair: Yes, Mr Karmani, is it a problem for the British Pakistani community? In the cases we have seen in Rochdale and Rotherham the number of members of the British Pakistani community have outnumbered those from the white community quite substantially and you have been very vocal on this point.

Alyas Karmani: That is right, yes. I think it is important to frame it as a societal problem. In our work at STREET we have identified that this is an issue that cuts across all communities and all people of all backgrounds. In particular, in young men fundamentally in British society we feel there is a culture of violence against women that is becoming a norm, and that is prevalent among some Pakistani males as well. I think there is an acceptance that there is a challenge, that there is a major problem, but where things become problematic is when that is seen as a collective label on the whole Pakistani community. A community that we want on board and we want to engage with proactively so we can prevent problems in the future feel very much under siege because this is yet another label that they are having to deal with after a whole decade of being, they feel, unfairly labelled in many other ways. The lessons that we can learn from terrorism and the Prevent agenda is that we do not want to create another collective label in terms of the Pakistani community.

Q819 Chair: Are we unfairly labelling them, given the statistics? Alyas Karmani: I think so. We had a case just last week in West Yorkshire where two individuals from the Pakistani community were convicted. There is widespread revulsion against these two individuals. I have consulted with members in those particular communities. They said, “These individuals have no commonality with our values, with even any basic human values. They are beyond pond life. They give pond life a bad name.” In that regard, when the Pakistani community is then expected to somehow challenge that behaviour where they feel they have nothing in common with that behaviour, that it is nothing to do with them, it is an overall societal issue, I think that is where it becomes problematic. However, having said that, equally I think it is important that intra-community we do recognise that there are problems. There are problems in our community due to drug supply, due to organised crime groups, and as a result of that many girls becoming
involved in pimping and prostitution by those groups, so that is a reality that is out there that we still have to take responsibility for.

Q820 Chair: I shall put to you two views from different parts of the political spectrum and ask you to comment on them. Baroness Warsi, Minister of State in the Foreign Office, has said that some Pakistani men view women as second-class citizens and white women as third-class citizens. Jack Straw, the former Home Secretary and Foreign Secretary, said that some Pakistani origin men view white teenagers as easy meat. Do you agree with those statements, Shaykh Mogra?

Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra: If that is a factual representation of the sentiments of the people and, at the same time, we condemn them and that is something that we abhor. We would wish that the religion is not tainted by the actions of these people and, at the same time, we condemn them and that is the attitude that she has found on the ground.

Q821 Chair: It is a fact that in all groups, religion can have these kinds of attitudes. Only recently we have celebrated Mother’s Day, we have had International Women’s Day and the message from the pulpit is very clear that the position of females and of women is a very high position, a very lofty position, where Muhammad—peace be on him—within the teachings of Islam has said that, “The best of you are those who are the best towards women,” and he said, “I instruct you to treat women kindly. Paradise is at the feet of your mother.” So we find that Islam as a religion requires Muslims to be respectful of the female.

Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra: No, what I am saying is if that is the reality that she has found on the ground being expressed by these Muslim people then they are totally misguided, they are doing the exact opposite of what Islam requires of them. They have used their community or their positions to further their own evil actions and their own personal desires, which are totally forbidden. If you look at the laws of Islam about intimate relations and gender relations, sex outside of marriage is forbidden, so what they are doing really, if I were to use the Arabic term, is haram. From start to end every single action that they have carried out is haram, which is forbidden, and they have gone totally against every teaching of the faith, and that is something that we abhor. We would wish that the religion is not tainted by the actions of these people and, at the same time, we condemn them and their actions.

Chair: It is a factual representation. So they are right? Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra:—then I would say that this is grossly wrong. I am really totally at a loss to see how people who profess to be from the Muslim religion can have these kinds of attitudes. Only recently we have celebrated Mother’s Day, we have had International Women’s Day and the message from the pulpit is very clear that the position of females and of women is a very high position, a very lofty position, where Muhammad—peace be on him—within the teachings of Islam has said that, “The best of you are those who are the best towards women,” and he said, “I instruct you to treat women kindly. Paradise is at the feet of your mother.” So we find that Islam as a religion requires Muslims to be respectful of the female.

Q822 Chair: So you disagree with Baroness Warsi and Jack Straw?

Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra: No, what I am saying is if that is the reality that she has found on the ground being expressed by these Muslim people then they are totally misguided, they are doing the exact opposite of what Islam requires of them. They have used their community or their positions to further their own evil actions and their own personal desires, which are totally forbidden. If you look at the laws of Islam about intimate relations and gender relations, sex outside of marriage is forbidden, so what they are doing really, if I were to use the Arabic term, is haram. From start to end every single action that they have carried out is haram, which is forbidden, and they have gone totally against every teaching of the faith, and that is something that we abhor. We would wish that the religion is not tainted by the actions of these people and, at the same time, we condemn them and their actions.

Q823 Chair: You mentioned statements from the pulpit. What is the community doing to try to stop this happening, very briefly? Shaykh Mogra?

Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra: We need to continue preaching the message that I shared earlier with you about the requirements upon Muslims by Islam. We need to try to reach beyond the congregations and the worshippers who attend the mosques. Clearly we don’t reach everyone and we have to begin to utilise more methods and ways of reaching out to them. I have been utilising social media to try to reach further out. Wherever we have had an opportunity, been given the chance by print media and broadcast media, we have managed to put the word out, and I have asked your colleagues to circulate some of the writings that I have had the opportunity to publish through the Sun newspaper.

Chair: Unfortunately we have just had them so we have not had a chance to study them in detail, but I can assure you we will.

Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra: Thank you.

Q824 Chair: You mentioned statements from the pulpit. What is the community doing to try to stop this happening, very briefly? Shaykh Mogra?

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Chair: Unfortunately we have just had them so we have not had a chance to study them in detail, but I can assure you we will.

Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra: Thank you.

Q825 Chair: Mr Karmani, how do we get the message out from the community?

Alyas Karmani: I think the most important thing is you have to connect with those people who are most at risk, and unfortunately they are not part of the mainstream, so sometimes our mosques and our community leaders are not really engaging at that level. They live in underground and ungoverned spaces, and that is where initiatives have to go. They have to be in what I call the no go areas where a lot of CSE takes places, where the traffickers are, where...
the groomers are. Who is actually in that space? A lot of third sector organisations, third sector youth engagement outreach and detached projects like STREET operate in that particular environment, and we have had a massive challenge. We have been saying to a lot of Local Safeguarding Boards that we want to do that work on streets with gangs and with young people at risk but the resources have not been there to facilitate that and allow us to do the work that we can do to create prevention and safeguarding.

Q826 Mr Winnick: These are shameful, disgusting crimes as, Mr Mogra, you and your colleague obviously have admitted, like all decent people up and down the country. When there is an accusation because some of the culprits are of Muslim origin, do you see a connection with anti-Semitism in the sense that when from time to time all people have villains, all religions and so on, there may be one or two people convicted of shocking crimes who happen to be of Jewish origin and this is used by those who hate Jews? Do you see a connection in that way between the Muslim community and anti-Semitism? Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra: That is one of our major concerns. Whenever any criminality is reported and the criminals happen to be Muslims, their faith and their religion is almost always publicised and published, so it is always, “Muslim man mugs woman on the street” but no other religion is ever mentioned. This gives fuel to racist people, the far right and the like, to use that as yet another stick with which to beat Muslims.

Q827 Mr Winnick: As with Jews?

Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra: As with Jews. If we look back at the tragic history of the Jews and what happened to them, this was exactly the process of demonising a community, maybe because of the actions of one or two but also the continuous demonisation of a community as misfits, as troublemakers, enabled people to see them as less than human, which led to tragic loss of life in the Holocaust.

Alyas Karmani: If I can add to that just quickly that one of the resources we use is a Goebbels propaganda film called The Eternal Jew and in this we have a racial caricaturing of Jewish people but also their identification as sexual predators that were preying on white Aryan women. It is interesting that that parallel was there in the Nazi Germany era, and again it was used as part of that kind of vilification process.

Q828 Mr Winnick: When Muslims understand what tormented Jews have gone through and Jews understand what tormented Muslims have gone through over centuries, that is a step forward, I must say. You have referred, Mr Mogra, and your colleague, to the feeling of revulsion when these crimes were discovered. Would it be right to say that in Rochdale and other places where these culprits have been apprehended, tried and convicted according to the rule of law, the vast majority of Muslim people in those communities do have a feeling of revulsion and shame that some of their fellow Muslims—at least as far as origin is concerned—have been involved in such terrible things?

Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra: Absolutely, and this is always the case where decent people, law-abiding people, people who genuinely respect and value their faith, of any faith, feel disgusted when their co-religionists misbehave in this way. For us in the UK it has been a very troubled time since 9/11 and then after the tragic events of 7/7 where it is our own who have perpetrated heinous, murderous crimes against humanity and we end up being blamed collectively for the actions of a few.

Q829 Nicola Blackwood: One of the strands of emerging evidence for the Committee during this inquiry is the real difficulty with victims coming forward and really seeing themselves as victims of child sexual exploitation, but the Office of the Children’s Commissioner also found that sexual exploitation of black and ethnic minority children was even more likely to be under-reported. Do you think that that is likely to be the case? Are you aware of young Asian girls or boys who are being sexually exploited who do not feel that they come forward within the community, and what do you think can be done to address that?

Alyas Karmani: I think so. We fed into the Children’s Commissioner inquiry and we fed in that we felt Pakistani girls, South Asian girls, were actually more vulnerable. That is why it is problematic having a stereotype that only white girls or girls in the care system are being targeted, because groomers target anyone who is vulnerable. Due to issues around honour, and in particular if a South Asian girl, a Pakistani girl, is being groomed—and we have many cases of Pakistani girls being targeted—then she is even less likely to be public about it. The groomers know that, so therefore she is more likely to continue with that and to be controlled by that particular grooming group. In the same way we identified with the postcode gangs that we worked with that there is a code of honour within the gang that girls who were being sexually raped by other gang members could not be public about it because they would be grassing and snitching on the rest of the gang. Also the girls are being criminalised, so by holding drug money or firearms and weapons and things like that also creates a barrier for them to become public about it because of the criminalisation.

The other thing is there is a major threat that if the girls do become public then they are alienated and ostracised by their own families and by the whole community as well who, rather than identify them as victims, see them as the ones who have committed crimes as well. For those reasons, Asian girls, Pakistani girls in particular, and Bangladeshi girls sometimes, are more vulnerable and they are even less likely to come forward. How can we engage? I think the most effective way is connecting. The way that we do it is by working with young men who are potential perpetrators and groomers and trying to channel them away from that kind of negative lifestyle.

Q830 Nicola Blackwood: You do not accept the statements that have been made by some that Asian
perpetrators, Pakistani perpetrators, see the young Asian girls as out of bounds, as somehow a protected group who they will not target?

**Alyas Karmani:** It is not true at all. I have cases all the way from the 1980s, and currently the Muslim Women's Network UK are collecting cases. We have about 30 cases so far of South Asian girls who have been groomed by South Asian gangs and other gangs.

**Q831 Nicola Blackwood:** When you say that the girls won't go public about it, do they tell their families, do they tell people within the community? Who are they not telling? Are they not telling anybody?

**Alyas Karmani:** They can't tell anyone, so unfortunately they have this strange dependence on their actual groomers. Part of the problem is if you come from a socially conservative community where you don't talk about sex and relationship issues, which is the case of a lot of the socially conservative Muslim communities, then sometimes girls are even more vulnerable because they do not understand how predatory males are. We have identified a particular pattern where young boys in school are grooming South Asian girls who have identified as vulnerable. I remember one individual talking about the fact that a couple had gone through a divorce, they realised the girl was vulnerable and then they targeted her because of that vulnerability. No one does it. One of the workshops we have is with girls and it is basically teaching them about how men are predatory. I know it is not the most romantic way of looking at sex and relationship issues but they need to be aware of the challenges, the fact that men are players and they need to be predatory and will use, and "This is what an abusive relationship looks like and this is what you do." However, we are not getting out there enough with that kind of workshop and that intervention.

**Q832 Nicola Blackwood:** That is prevention work. What is being done to develop women's leadership among women's groups within the community and things like that across the country?

**Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra:** We are encouraged by the fact that we have a growing number of confident British Muslim women who are organising themselves into different organisations. Only a few weeks ago we had a very interesting meeting with four key women's organisations within the UK on this particular issue and we are all rallies together now to see how we can ensure that we can use the women's voice and the access that they could have with these young children and young girls to try to get them to be able to report this kind of behaviour and the approaches that are being made to them. A national conference is being planned where we hope to invite imams, mosque leaders, community leaders, and these women's organisations will play a leading role within that day in making presentations and explaining the case to the community.

**Q833 Nicola Blackwood:** What kind of a relationship do you think these different groups could have with statutory agencies? If the girls do not feel that they can go forward but might feel that they can speak to the group as an intermediary, perhaps there is a route through to getting the support that they need from those agencies.

**Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra:** These groups have already made contact. At that meeting we even had representation from the NSPCC, so connections are already being made and networking is ongoing. We have begun to identify individuals and organisations who can be of use. Part of the planning is also to provide training to community leaders, to imams, to teachers so that they can identify and look for tell-tale signs of where this kind of abuse might be taking place.

**Q834 Nicola Blackwood:** What about linking into the multi-agency hubs so that you are linking into the centre of where the support is going to be coming from in different areas?

**Alyas Karmani:** I think the big challenge is around capacity, where you have individuals who do have the competence and can work in multi-agency groups. We do not have the resources or the capacity really to do so. I think it is vital that we develop community intermediaries who can then be a conduit between the grassroots and the statutory agencies. At the moment, if you ask a young person who has been exploited would they go to the police or social services, they would probably run a mile, so we need to have those intermediaries in place. With the first sector being undermined quite considerably by public cuts, we have lost all those potential community players who could play that intermediary role. Also it is important when they are at the table that we actually listen to them. I find in a lot of multi-agency work that we do, in some cases we have a positive and constructive role, we are really valued at the table. In other cases, we are just seen as rubber-stamping what the statutory agencies want. So it is also about being assertive at that table. It is not just about being there to rubber-stamp.

**Q835 Michael Ellis:** Shaykh Mogra, I note in an answer to questions put by Mr Winnick a few minutes ago that you agreed with his parallel with the Jewish community and instances of anti-Semitism. In that context, does the Muslim Council of Britain acknowledge the national Holocaust Memorial Day?

**Shaykh Mogra:** Absolutely, and I was privileged and felt very honoured to have been invited to the Holocaust Memorial Day UK commemoration at the QE Centre here in London and asked to light a candle and offer a prayer. This is something we have to share as human beings. The pain and the loss of a fellow human being goes right across the board regardless of faith or ethnicity.

**Q836 Michael Ellis:** Thank you. I am interested in the fact that you used these historical examples of anti-Semitism in your teachings as far as Islamophobia is concerned and incidents of hatred based on your faith. Is this something that you find resonates with your community in this country, that
they can understand the issues as a result of this parallel?

Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra: We take a multi-level approach. One is to enable the communities to recognise the pain of others, to recognise that Islam requires us to feel the hurt of that loss. At the same time it is also to make them alert to the fact that if we do not challenge the stereotyping that is ongoing about the Muslim community in the UK then we could end up being the kind of community that is an unwanted community, that is seen as trouble, and therefore one that needs to be eliminated. We are trying to put that message across very strongly.

Q837 Michael Ellis: To help you with that message, I wanted to ask you about media reporting in this country and particularly on the race aspect. I notice, as the Chairman alluded to you sent us just before the session into effect, that you write a column periodically in the Sun newspaper. I commend the Sun for that and for giving you a voice. Do you find that brings with it some correspondence that you can help communicate with people the issues that the Muslim faith faces in this country?

Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra: I wish I had the opportunity, and many other theologians and scholars of this country had the opportunity, to have columns in all of our newspapers where we have access to the wider communities to put our message across. When you get a handful of Muslim people misbehaving and involved in criminality that is automatically seen as, “Okay, that is what Islam is and that is what Muslims do,” but having access to this kind of readership and listenership we are able to challenge that and say what they are doing is the exact opposite of what the faith teaches. I am really grateful to the Sun for giving me those opportunities.

Q838 Michael Ellis: How often do you write in the Sun?

Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra: Sadly, that column has now been taken off and I wish it would be brought back again.

Q839 Michael Ellis: I think you have sent a message to the newspaper in respect of that. As far as the child sex offenders are concerned in this country and the models of sexual abuse that the Committee has been examining, the model of grooming has received a particularly large amount of media attention. Do you think there a risk that the nature of media reporting in this area has distorted perceptions of the Muslim community in this country as to the real nature of child sexual exploitation? In other words, do you think that the media reporting on the race aspect has been unduly hostile?

Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra: I think so. I think it has been hostile whenever the criminality of a Muslim has been reported. We have been calling for an approach that is looking at the crime not at the multiple identities of the criminal and the perpetrator. We have used the same argument with regards to terrorism. Terrorism has no religion, has no ethnicity; it is a crime against humanity and we have to treat it as a crime. Here it is also the case that grooming is a crime regardless of the perpetrator or the victim’s multiple identities. If we begin to limit ourselves and look only at colour and creed then I am afraid we will be doing more harm than good.

Q840 Michael Ellis: Mr Karmani, do you have anything to add to that comment?

Alyas Karmani: The way that the media has handled the issue has actually detracted from the real issues around sexual violence, which is about gender, power and control. It has distracted us from the many other models of grooming that exist. Localised street grooming in areas where there are large Pakistani populations is a model and there is a particular pattern around that model of drug supply, organised crime groups and pimping. In Exeter and Harrogate there is a model as well. It is slightly different, with different perpetrators, different actors and different methodologies, equally as reprehensible. So the point is that we have distracted from what the core issues are. An indicator of that for me is the fact that I get so many people asking me about this, that or the other, which are cases where there are no risk issues and we are failing to look at where the risk issues actually are. So I think we recognise that this is a subset within a subset of overall acts related to sexual violence.

Q841 Mr Winnick: We have had directors of social services, children’s services and those who were in such occupations until recently. The questions we put to such personnel—and this arises from previous questions asked today—is why no action was taken when it should have been obvious that this sort of exploitation of young women was taking place. Do you find that very difficult to understand?

Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra: It is shocking. I can understand that we need to be sensitive towards the many different communities that make up the UK but I think there comes a time when you have to call a spade a spade and we cannot allow political correctness to get in the way of justice and the protection of the vulnerable. I am sure that if the law enforcement agencies were to use the right language and the right approach you would be able to call a spade a spade without making a community feel responsible for the actions of some of them. I have read reports, indeed when I wrote those pieces for the Sun, of where social services and even some police forces were reluctant to tackle issues because of the ethnic background of the criminals and the perpetrators, and we cannot allow that to continue. Once the law is broken those criminals have to be brought to task regardless of their faith or their ethnicity.

Q842 Mr Winnick: This term “political correctness” has been used by those who find some excuse to say that anti-discrimination laws are wrong, but if there were social workers, professional people and the rest, sometimes in leading positions, who used that as a reason—“We mustn’t do this, we mustn’t do that because the people concerned happen to be Muslim”—would that not be an abdication of responsibility, and certainly there is no excuse
whichever to adopt such an attitude, and a betrayal of the women involved?

Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra: It would be an abdication and we do not want to see this. If the perpetrator is a Muslim, treat that perpetrator and that criminal as you would treat any other criminal. They should not get any preferential treatment or anywhere to hide behind the name of Islam or of Muslim.

Q843 Mr Winnick: Do you agree with that, no hesitation because someone happens to belong to what is described as an ethnic minority?

Alyas Karmani: I fully agree, absolutely. One of the things I often hear is that we just want fair and equal treatment, we don’t want special treatment. I think it is key that there should not be this panadera to a particular community, but there is also another key stakeholder and player in this whole process. I identified, certainly in West Yorkshire, that key elected members from certain communities were also part of that sense of denial that there were issues taking place and wanting to handle it too much with kid gloves and with an over-sensitivity, which also then created a barrier for the statutory agencies to intervene. So I think they are complicit with that whole process in terms of creating a politically correct culture. The overwhelming view is that they are criminals and they need to be dealt with as such.

Q844 Mr Winnick: As a private citizen, if you were aware of some offence of this nature, or indeed any offence, would you have any hesitation in letting the police know? Would you hesitate simply because he offended, would you have any hesitation in letting the police know if you were aware of some offence of this nature, or indeed any offence?

Alyas Karmani: I am not sure if we atheists have a code, but that is very interesting to know.

Shaykh Mogra: It is very obvious. I am struggling to find an answer as to the reasons why they might be doing this. Although, clearly we need to be more forceful, I guess, as imams in our preaching to spell it out to them that, “This is what the Koran calls on you to do and where you see a wrong it is your duty as a human being, as a Muslim, to make sure that that wrong stops and the victims are protected from further victimisation.”

Q846 Chair: Mr Karmani?

Alyas Karmani: Yes, in some sections there are. I think it is hard for any community to accept that we have groomers and sexual abuse in our community. If you are more socially conservative, then there is perhaps a bit more of a denial or less of an openness to address these issues. I think there is a wall of silence when it comes to sexual abuse intra-community in hard-to-reach socially conservative communities. Having said that, I have noticed, certainly in the last 10 years, that there is a real concerted effort to want to address these issues head on, in particular some of the root factors.

Q847 Chair: Really? There are a number of people who—

Alyas Karmani: Absolutely, yes. We run a programme called No Need for Weed, which is about substance abuse and links with sexual exploitation, and we are running that in mosques, and mosques have said, “Come back, we want you to do more sessions.” So I think there is a recognition that there are issues that they want to address and it is just about equipping those people to do that more effectively.

Chair: Very helpful. Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra and Mr Karmani, thank you so much for coming and helping the Committee with our inquiry. We are most grateful.
Examination of Witnesses


Q849 Chair: Thank you both very much for giving evidence and thank you for sitting through the last session. You know what the Committee is interested in. We are interested in getting to the full facts of what is happening as far as child grooming is concerned and we have received a great deal of evidence from community groups, as you have just heard, from social services departments, from the police, from the Deputy Children’s Commissioner. A lot of people have given the Committee a lot of evidence and tomorrow we will be hearing from the Minister responsible in his evidence to this Committee. My question to you is this, Sheila Taylor, is this on the increase or have we now reached a plateau as far as the internet facility that allows people to groom young girls?

Sheila Taylor: As there is no previous measure of how many victims we have, that is difficult to answer in terms of knowing whether it is more prevalent now. Certainly in the last two years we have seen a wide range of professionals from a lot of disciplines understanding child sexual exploitation symptoms and signs and therefore being able to identify it more comprehensively. That has led to us identifying a whole wealth of young people who are involved in sexual exploitation.

Q850 Chair: If I put a straight question to you, is this on the increase? We know we do not know the depth of this. We have heard that it could be as many as 16,500 children. The Deputy Commissioner told us in evidence it was every town, every village, every city in the United Kingdom, which is quite a lot of places and quite a lot of young people. Do you think it is on the increase or has it plateaued?

Sheila Taylor: Personally I would believe it was on the increase. The access to young people through the internet and social media means that there is a prevalence of young people coming through that. We know there are thousands of young people who access the internet and those social media sites and there are a large number of cases where the young person is approached. I have a bit of a difficulty with how we address some of it in terms of street grooming, localised grooming and grooming per se, because grooming is only the approach to the offence.

Q851 Chair: Yes, indeed. Martine Osmond, I think you have made comments about social media sites, or maybe you have not but you are aware of them and you are aware of the growth of the internet. Do you think that we are dealing with a phenomenon that just cannot be controlled, that this is going to increase because of what Sheila Taylor has said, the access to the internet facility that allows people to groom young girls?

Martine Osmond: I don’t know I would say that it can’t be controlled, because I think that is too pessimistic. I think there are things that we can do locally and nationally. We need to educate parents around their children’s use of technology. Technology is here. It is not going to go away and it is only going to continue to grow, so we need to educate parents around how their children can safely use the internet. We also need to understand, I think, that many of the victims have indicators that we need to begin to recognise, and low self-esteem is a big one of those. We need to educate professionals and the community around how to best protect the young people that are going to be using the kind of technology that you are talking about.

Q852 Chair: Do you think the internet companies should do more? We have had them before this Committee to give evidence. They feel very much bound by the principles of freedom of speech and they don’t want to intervene and they don’t want to stop sites, whether it is sites of radicalism or sites that promote pornography and allow people to groom children. Do you think they need to do much more?

Martine Osmond: Yes, I am sure they can do more, and businesses as well. We are just looking at online grooming, but I think hotels and big chains and tattoo parlours all can do more to be aware of this. We know of some particular sites where the groomer will take the young person, give them technological tokens, take them into a private room and then begin to groom them. Once they are in that private room it is very difficult to trace. So, yes, I think providers can be doing a lot more.

Q853 Mr Winnick: There has been a view—perhaps totally unjustified but I would be interested in your opinion—that since the Minister at the time, Tim Loughton, left there has been less involvement by the Government in child sexual exploitation as an issue. Do you think there is any justification for that view?

Sheila Taylor: The round table meetings still happen, the stakeholder group meetings still happen and we continue to work with the Minister’s team on how we can best promote this issue and get effective response. I suppose my concern is that the new Minister has a wider portfolio of responsibility, therefore will that mean a lesser focus, but he has already stated that it is a priority for him and I know, through the team, that he is very concerned about this issue and wants to work with it. So I think what is of larger concern to me is the reduction in resources that is coming forward and the impact that has on all of those agencies to fully tackle CSE, because that is having an impact.

Q854 Mr Winnick: Because of the cuts?

Sheila Taylor: Because of the cuts, yes.

Q855 Mr Winnick: How far do you believe, Ms Taylor, that the cuts, which of course are taking place in virtually all Departments, will mean that this particular problem you are so deeply involved in will be undermined in some way?

Sheila Taylor: What we are seeing quite often is that in cases that are prosecuted against—and I am not just talking about those that are in the public domain, I am talking about all of those that go through the court
process that don’t reach the public and the media in the same way—sometimes because of resources there is perhaps a lack of ability, on capacity grounds, to explore whether some of those different groups all link together and how widespread all of this is. They are questions that we really need to explore and I do think the resources hamper some of that activity.

Q856 Mr Winnick: The meetings with the Minister in question are going ahead?

Sheila Taylor: The meetings with the Minister in question still go ahead and they are well represented by a team of Ministers there and those people in the field of child sexual exploitation that have a stake in that issue.

Q857 Mark Reckless: Do you accept that has been a tendency to refer to exploited girls of perhaps 13 or 14 years old as consenting to sexual activity and in consequence people have not taken the actions that they should?

Martine Osmond: Absolutely. It is a big area that we feel needs tackling, which is around raising awareness and changing attitudes. You are absolutely right, we often see statements such as the young person is streetwise, the young person is promiscuous, the young person has made a choice—you talked about age 13 to 14; it can be younger as well, boys as well as girls—and there is a lack of understanding around the nature of exploitation. The emphasis is placed back on to the young person as to whether they want to go ahead and make a disclosure. Often young people feel let down and, as you said, often it is because the attitude that has come from professionals has been a negative one. We will sometimes get referrals, for instance, where it will talk about a young person and it will describe them, maybe even aged 11, as sexually active since they were aged 11. We would not view that in those terms. We would view that as abuse.

Q858 Mark Reckless: When you say a negative attitude from the professional, is that an attitude that the professional in some sense looks down on this young person and comes to negative conclusions about them because of their activity, or are there circumstances where you have a professional who takes the view, notwithstanding they are below the age of consent, that somehow it is properly a matter of choice for them and not their business to interfere?

Which of that does it tend to be?

Martine Osmond: I think it can be both, but there is a lack of understanding about the nature of sexual exploitation. All too often professionals will take what the victim is saying at face value. As we know, victims often do not see themselves as being victims so they will use terms such as boyfriend-girlfriend relationship and some professionals can feel uncomfortable. I think, unpicking that, whereas we are very clear from the off that to us it is about a healthy and equal relationship and so we don’t go down those lines of seeing it as it is the young person’s choice. Nevertheless, I think you are right, sometimes professionals are also quite dismissive of adolescent behaviour and will see it as, “This is typical adolescent behaviour,” when clearly it is not.

Q859 Mark Reckless: When you say you see it as a healthy and equal relationship, for you is that the issue rather than whether it is below the age of consent?

Martine Osmond: No, we are always clear in terms of what is the legal age of consent, but if we are talking about a 15-year-old who is in a relationship with a 15-year-old we will be realistic with that young person. While we are explaining the law, we will be realistic with that young person around healthy and equal. That would be the emphasis.

Q860 Mark Reckless: When children remain as looked after children in many circumstances but are over the age of consent, so between their 16th and 18th birthday, how great is any problem of exploitation relationships for that group and what degree of focus can there be for those somewhat older teenagers?

Martine Osmond: I think that is a very good question, because to us they are still children. You said it yourself, 16 and 17-year-olds are still children and that is very much how the Children’s Society would view these young victims. Again I think the difficulty will be that some professionals will view them as able to make their own choice. I think it is even harder for 16 and 17-year-olds in some senses to be seen as victims and therefore to receive the support that they clearly need.

Q861 Mark Reckless: Ms Taylor, do you have anything to add on the subjects I have been discussing with Ms Osmond?

Sheila Taylor: Yes, one or two points there. Our legislation says that a child cannot consent to their own exploitation and that the question should not be whether they are consenting but what are the consequences to them if they say no. That is something that we don’t measure. What we should be looking at is the fear and retribution that creates a dependency on the exploiters, which is similar to Stockholm syndrome and it is virtual imprisonment without bars. We also need to look at the fact that boys are far less likely to be recognised and seen as consenting far more readily than perhaps we might question some of the young women. The other added complication is that certainly through the health arena we assess young people on Gillick and Fraser competency to their ability to consent but that is a direct conflict with child sexual exploitation where you cannot consent. That also gets you over that 16 to 18 because you cannot consent to child sexual exploitation or trafficking under the age of 18. Well, trafficking at any age but certainly you cannot consent to your own exploitation and that is up to 18. The third thing would be do we ask the right questions to find out whether that young person is really consenting or not, and I would say that in many cases we don’t.

Q862 Mark Reckless: The final question from me, if I may. Do you feel that this is a cultural issue that needs better education of professionals, or are there
circumstances in which the professionals do not have the powers that they need? For instance with a child’s home, if a child was going off, do the people running that home have the powers they need to prevent that child going off with the people who may be exploiting them?

Martine Osmond: One of the things that we would like to see is a statutory duty that all children that go missing receive an independent interview, the kind of interviews that we conduct whereby we will ask a child from their own viewpoint why they have gone missing and we will assess the risks from both where they have run from and to. That would enable local authorities to be able to look at the picture and spot the indicators, because we know there is a huge link between running away and sexual exploitation. It would enable the kind of professionals that you are talking about to begin to understand what that young person is going through and, more importantly, it gives the child a voice to talk about what is actually going on, particularly if it is done by the third sector. We conduct those interviews. We know we get a much better response from children and young people because we are not wearing a statutory badge. That is not to discredit statutory badge but children and young people find it much easier to talk to the third sector.

Q863 Nicola Blackwood: One of the strands of evidence that has come out very strongly during the inquiry has been the problem of co-ordination between local agencies and the fact that even though there was all of the information that would have been needed to identify that a young victim was experiencing child sexual exploitation, such as that they were going missing regularly or were experiencing regular bouts of chlamydia or something, in fact none of these agencies were talking to each other so they were not putting the full picture together. Has this been your experience? Do you think that the situation is improving?

Sheila Taylor: I think as we bring more sexual exploitation co-ordinators into LSCBs to co-ordinate it, so the information is all in one place, is really key to some of this. I might go back to a piece of work that I did in Derbyshire in 2008 or 2009—I can’t remember which year—that resulted in an operation called Operation Zinc. Safe and Sound Derby, who were a third sector organisation where I was the chief executive at that point, pulled together the information out of 81 cases. The reality of that situation was that all of that information had come from the young people, parents, children’s services, the police, education, youth offending and health and we appeared to be the only one that put all of that information down on one spreadsheet, if you like, to present a whole caseload. That demonstrated how much information people have if they share all of it, even the very small nuggets of information. That makes it very clear to me that you do need a sexual exploitation co-ordinator in each area to be able to pull all of that information together in one place. It is only then will you highlight what each agency needs to do and the real picture and the real difficulties that that young person has in exiting that exploitation and managing it.

Q864 Nicola Blackwood: The impression that we have had is that the performance of different LSCBs on this issue has been variable. Some areas are very good, outstanding, and others feel that this is not a problem. “We don’t have this sort of thing happening here.” Do you think that with the coverage that Rochdale and other cases have had people are starting to wake up and now the standard is rising everywhere or do you think that there are still places that we should be worrying about? How do you think we can resolve that issue and have consistent support everywhere?

Sheila Taylor: There is definite movement. There is definite improvement. If we look back at three years ago we did not have CSE co-ordinators in place, so there is definite movement and definite improvement. We need to share the improving practice that those CSE boards have developed across others. There are very definitely areas who say, “We don’t need to deal with it because it is not in our area,” and it is very clear that it is because we have third sector organisations in those areas identifying it but no strategy or command to manage.

Q865 Nicola Blackwood: Could you point on a map and say, “These places are doing a good job and these places are not doing a good job and need to be challenged?”

Martine Osmond: If we plot our dedicated services that are engaged with the national working group on a map then we seem to follow largely—and this is rather a sweeping statement—the corridors of main traffic, so the main motorways and so on. I would ask whether or not the project developed because there was an issue there or whether they identified the issue because they started a project.

Q866 Dr Huppert: Following on from what my colleague was asking, ultimately we have to make some recommendations rather than just ask questions and I am not quite clear what it is that you think we ought to be suggesting in this space. On the one hand you said there need to be named people, on the other hand you said there may be some improvement in some areas and not others. What would you ideally like this Committee to recommend that would make a really big difference?

Sheila Taylor: There is a full list of agencies that we should be engaging with and quite often when we go to areas and look at it they have a whole host of the agencies engaged but not all that we would perhaps recommend, so I think it is an overall recognition of whose duty crosses over with this. Sometimes it is those we don’t think about, like ambulance and paramedic who are often the first on the scene. I would recommend that we do have a CSE co-ordinator in each place so that the full picture from all the agencies—

Q867 Dr Huppert: When you say “each place”, what sort of scale?

Sheila Taylor: Each LSCB. I would call for more movement from the health authority on this. We are seeing that quite a lot of areas are moving forward but don’t have the same representation from health, and
that is very difficult because it crosses quite a lot of health boundaries. For example, it crosses sexual health clinics who don’t talk to accident and emergency who don’t talk to CAMHS and various things. There is a report coming out from us in the next few days that is a grassroots report done by Dr Paul Kirtley on our behalf, exploring a whole wealth of people who have found difficulties in their particular department of health. Also we have not developed our therapeutic care for children. It is not where it needs to be. We have just developed a home with advanced childcare, which has four young people in, where it is more of a treatment centre for child sexual exploitation. It is showing really good therapeutic intervention, where they are all back in mainstream education or apprenticeship, no missing incidents.

Q868 Dr Huppert: That is a longish shopping list, and it would be helpful if you could send us a copy of that report.

Sheila Taylor: Yes.

Martine Osmond: I would agree with everything that has just been said. Could I also add that I have talked about a statutory duty for independent interviews to be provided but also we would like to see all LSCBs having a multi-agency subgroup to tackle children that go missing and CSE so that information is collated and shared. I would echo Sheila’s point in particular about support for young people. We have to support children and young people that are being abused in this way. It should not just be conditional and linked to whether they make a disclosure or not or whether there is a conviction or not. There should still be support placed around that young person.

Q869 Michael Ellis: Could I ask about the role of the criminal justice system again, just to take a step back and speak about that? One hears an increasingly loud voice of those who understandably focus concerns on the manner in which the criminal justice system deals with these types of allegations, but of course it is right to say that it is juries who find defendants guilty or not guilty, as the case may be. Do you think it is reasonable for the Crown Prosecution Service or the prosecuting authorities when considering these matters to consider them using the professional aspect of whether or not they think they can secure a conviction? After all, it does no favours to anyone, nor would it serve any reasonable purpose, to prosecute a case that is not likely to lead in the end to a conviction, after all the trial and tribulation to the victim of going through court proceedings. If you feel that things could be done better by the criminal justice system, could you tell the Committee what you think could be improved?

Sheila Taylor: The experience of young people going through the court process, especially when it is multiple offenders, which it usually is, is horrific. Some of the young people have expressed a statement similar to it was worse going through the court process than it was actually going through the exploitation. That clearly is unacceptable. The court process does seem weighted in favour of defendants, and I know they have a right but quite often the rights of the child are not listened to during that process. We do need these cases to be tried by representatives from the Crown Prosecution Service who understand child sexual exploitation in front of judges and magistrates who are trained in child sexual exploitation.

Q870 Michael Ellis: You don’t think that happens now?

Sheila Taylor: No, it doesn’t happen now.

Q871 Michael Ellis: What do you think could be done to improve the courtroom experiences? Ultimately in any adversarial system witnesses have to be challenged and that is unpleasant, so how do you think it could be improved? Do either of you have any suggestions of how you think it could be improved?

Sheila Taylor: I think we should be engaging with intermediaries. At the moment, court intermediaries are often used with children who are very young in that court process and does not take adolescents into account quite readily. I know that I would struggle to answer to any rape charges and serious sexual offences charges in front of eight, nine, 10, 11, 12 barristers, all passing notes to one another to feed a line of inquiry that assists all of them. We do need trained personnel, we need the use of intermediaries, we need the special measures for young people, and if we possibly can we should not be taking young people through the court process anyway. We should be using that third-party evidence as much as we can and not subjecting them.

Q872 Michael Ellis: Do you have any observations to add?

Martine Osmond: I echo a lot of those thoughts but I would add in the case in which I was involved, which is obviously where my experience is, we did support, young people did feel quite supported. We placed a big emphasis on making sure we got that as good as we could, so each young person had a sexual offences liaison officer with them or another identified appropriate adult with them right the way through the court proceedings.

Q873 Michael Ellis: Do you think that could make a big difference?

Martine Osmond: Yes. There was a very clear multi-agency response right the way from the beginning of the investigation up until the court case and there was a lot of preparation done by agencies such as ours that knew those victims and knew what was going to get the best evidence out of them. There was about three months worth of work put in preparing professionals for exactly how to best approach the victims to achieve the best evidence.

Q874 Chair: We have a supplementary from Nicola Blackwood, but I want to ask you, Martine Osmond, about the race issue, which you heard us talk to the previous witnesses about. You were involved in Operation Mansfield where the vast majority of the perpetrators, I think all of them, were white and not of Asian origin.

Martine Osmond: They were, yes.
Chair: Do you find it distracting when the race issue is brought into the area of child grooming? Do you think it is a factor?

Martine Osmond: As you have said, I can only comment on the case that I was involved in where the victims were all white European and the perpetrators were white, and I work in an authority where there is low BME. From our point of view, what concerns me is that it detracts somewhat from the wider issue of abuse. We are talking about online grooming, we are talking about groups and we are talking about individuals, and every area will see different themes and different patterns but the message is the same, it is abuse and it is a child protection issue.

Q875 Chair: On Mansfield, were you disappointed that only one person was successfully prosecuted in the end? You obviously worked very hard on that project and provided a lot of support and help. 10 were prosecuted; I think only one was successfully convicted. That is not a very good success rate as far as the criminal justice system is concerned.

Martine Osmond: Yes, one was cautioned and one received a 10-year sentence. There was some disappointment and at the same time I think we recognised again—this is a national theme as well—victims find it incredibly difficult to come forward and make disclosures, because they are absolutely terrified of the perpetrators and because they feel that professionals in the past have let them down, because of some of the attitudinal stuff that we talked about earlier.

Q876 Nicola Blackwood: I just wanted to take you back to the comments that you made about the court process and you said that victims come out the other end saying that it is more horrific then the sexual exploitation in the first place. You work with a wide range of victims up and down the country. Do you think that that is putting off victims from coming forward and going through the process? Do you think that is one of the reasons why we are finding it hard to take cases through to court?

Sheila Taylor: I am not so sure that the young people know what the court process has in stock for them. I don’t think they are that informed about the court process, although some are. I think what we don’t focus on so much is the fact that these young people are not credible witnesses and they are not credible witnesses quite often through the mechanisms of child sexual exploitation; they have been encouraged to take large quantities of alcohol and so on, their story is not straight, they are in fear of retribution and various other things. There are a whole host of things that make it difficult for young people to come through.

Q877 Nicola Blackwood: Do you think if more expert witnesses were used in court in order to explain the nature of the abuse and the reason for these behaviours that would assist?

Sheila Taylor: Often it is bad character reference that is put forward by the defence. We do need to see those as symptoms of child sexual exploitation rather than incredible.

Q878 Nicola Blackwood: Are you aware of the DPP’s recent statement about his concerns about the CPS tests being inappropriate for this particular category of victim and perhaps leaving victims unprotected under criminal law? All of the things that you would usually use as a credibility test for a witness don’t really work for victims of child sexual exploitation. Are you encouraged by that? Are you feeding into that process of review?

Sheila Taylor: We welcome that acknowledgement from the CPS and the process that they are now going to look at. We do have a place around the table and we are working quite closely with some of the team there on those, so I think it is really important that we do address some of those things.

Q879 Nicola Blackwood: My question is do you think that amending the test and addressing that initial entry barrier of taking the cases into court will be enough or do you think that more needs to be done?

Sheila Taylor: We need to enhance the special measures that the young people—

Q880 Nicola Blackwood: The section 28?

Sheila Taylor: Yes.

Nicola Blackwood: What in addition to that? You don’t know?

Sheila Taylor: Not on the hoof. I would have to sit and think about that.

Q881 Nicola Blackwood: You sit and think about that and maybe send it to us in writing, both of you, given your experience, thinking of things like maybe specialist courts, having individual ushers, ISVAs, expert witnesses, the things that you think would really make the difference in terms of prosecutions, bearing in mind the comments of Mr Ellis that we still have to have regard for innocent until proven guilty and defendants’ rights.

Sheila Taylor: Yes, I understand that. Can I just make an observation on something that you said earlier to Martine about the race issue distraction?

Chair: Yes, of course.

Sheila Taylor: We work with over 300 police officers and are engaged with the national working group from 41 of the forces. A little while ago we found that quite often police were able to recognise the model of sexual exploitation because of how it was profiled in the press so then they would go and look for that because they could see it and they knew how to scope it and how to find it. However, because we don’t see the same representation in the press from other cases—and I am particularly thinking of one with a Slovakian background, another one with a Romany traveller, another one with a Irish traveller background and a whole host of other backgrounds—people feel a bit lost about how to investigate and how to go on. We add all of that mix together for the police and we hold a police forum where we highlight all models of child sexual exploitation.

Q882 Chair: Do you think the model of the British Pakistani man exploiting the young white girl is over-egged?
Sheila Taylor: I think we know how to spot it. I am not saying there is not a difficulty there. There clearly is something there that we have to—

Q883 Chair: Although, there are other models that we don’t spot?
Sheila Taylor: That we don’t have the media attention on so therefore we don’t look for them. A professional, especially stretched in this current climate, does not look for the different models because they don’t know how to scope them and how to look for them. That is what we do in the National Working Group. We help people to explore the wider issues to child sexual exploitation.

Chair: That is most interesting. Thank you very much for that observation. Sheila Taylor and Martine Osmond, you have been extremely helpful. You are in fact our last witnesses. Although we will have the Minister in tomorrow as our last ministerial witness, you are our last witnesses today. As Nicola Blackwood has just said, if there are any issues that are pertinent to what you have been asked today please come back to us, but come back to us very quickly because we want to get the report out and our recommendations made. Thank you very much.
Wednesday 20 March 2013

Members present:
Keith Vaz (Chair)
Nicola Blackwood
Steve McCabe
Mark Reckless
Chris Ruane
Mr David Winnick

Examination of Witness

Witness: Mr Edward Timpson MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (children and families), Department for Education, gave evidence.

Q884 Chair: This is the final session of our inquiry into child grooming and exploitation. We are delighted to welcome the Minister for Children to the dais. Can I, on behalf of the Committee, congratulate you most warmly, Minister, on your appointment? This is the first time you have appeared before the Home Affairs Committee. Are you enjoying the job?

Mr Timpson: Yes. I am six months into the job, and I am obviously delighted to have a portfolio that—by design rather than accident, I hope—starts to draw on some of my personal and professional experience before coming to the House. As you will know, Chairman, I am also currently in the throes of the Children and Families Bill, which is setting out a lot of the Government’s reform agenda around adoption, special educational needs and vulnerable children in the care system, as well as other areas, to try to support families. It is good to get the opportunity to, I hope, put some important legislation on the statute book. But, of course, I have a wide remit, and that includes coming to see you to talk about some of the important issues the Committee is wrestling with.

Q885 Chair: You do, and you seem to be ideally qualified, given your former chairmanship of the all-party group and your membership of one of our sister Select Committees. Can I put to you a statement made by your predecessor, Tim Loughton, on 16 January to the Education Select Committee? He said that the children’s agenda in your Department had lost out to the work they are doing through their “reclaiming social work” model to try to bring agencies closer together and to get better outcomes for children who come into contact with children’s services. Of course, the speech he made to the IPPR back in November set out in great detail his analysis of the difficulties that are still faced in some areas.

Mr Timpson: Yes. I am six months into the job, and I am obviously delighted to have a portfolio that—by design rather than accident, I hope—starts to draw on some of my personal and professional experience before coming to the House. As you will know, Chairman, I am also currently in the throes of the Children and Families Bill, which is setting out a lot of the Government’s reform agenda around adoption, special educational needs and vulnerable children in the care system, as well as other areas, to try to support families. It is good to get the opportunity to, I hope, put some important legislation on the statute book. But, of course, I have a wide remit, and that includes coming to see you to talk about some of the important issues the Committee is wrestling with.

Q886 Chair: Thank you for that, but going back to what Mr Loughton said, he was not criticising what was happening when he was there; he was saying that he regarded this as being a declining priority for the Department since he left. You disagree with him; you still believe this is a priority for your Department. Is that right?

Mr Timpson: It is a priority for my Department. I have set out to the Department that it is in my list of priorities. What I was seeking to do in my previous answer was demonstrate that there is still a strong element of work being done on this, and not just by me. The Secretary of State is also taking an interest in this, and that goes beyond just the remit of academies and school reform.

Q887 Chair: Let us move on. You have probably noticed the fact that we have spent a lot of time taking evidence from various groups and individuals. We were very impressed by the report published by the Deputy Children’s Commissioner, who looked at this issue. However, there has been criticism in the press from the Government or Government sources. On 20 November, The Daily Telegraph said that a Government source told the newspaper that in the Government’s view the report was “hysterical and half-baked”. It seems that a number of newspapers were briefed by what they quote as “a senior government source.” The Daily Mail said on 20 November: “It is difficult to overstate the contempt the Government has for the methodology and analysis in this report.” Do you agree with those statements, or do you say that this was done without the approval of Ministers, and in fact you welcome the report the commissioner made?

Mr Timpson: I do welcome the report the commissioner made. In fact, I was at its launch at the CEOP headquarters in London and was able to state my thanks to the Deputy Children’s Commissioner for the work that she has done and continues to do in the second year of her report and analysis into child sexual exploitation. The derogatory comments to which you referred are not ones that I share. They are...
Q888 Chair: That is very helpful, because she gave us some pretty stunning figures. She said that 16,500 children were currently at risk of sexual exploitation and that 2,409 had been sexually exploited in a 14-month period. Do you think that this is on the increase, or have we reached a plateau as far as the number of children being abused is concerned?

Mr Timpson: The first thing to say is that we would all recognise, Chairman, that even one is too many. The analysis that the Deputy Children’s Commissioner has undertaken is in many ways starting to show the glaring gaps that have existed for far too long in understanding the prevalence of child sexual exploitation across the country. It is difficult to say at this stage, while there remain gaps in that knowledge, understanding and data, whether the prevalence is at about the level that Sue Berelowitz has put forward in her report or whether it is on the increase. What this does do is reinforce the view that the Government—my predecessor, Tim Loughton—took in setting up the action plan on child sexual exploitation.

Q889 Chair: So you cannot tell us today whether you think it is on the increase or not? You just accept the figures?

Mr Timpson: We know it is a serious problem and we need to do more to address it. There has been some good progress. That has been acknowledged by Barnardo’s in its latest report, “The Tangled Web”, which is a follow-up to “Puppet on a String”. “The Tangled Web” report is from January this year and said that both at national and local level there has been good progress, but clearly, from the continued cases that we hear about, a lot of work still has to be done. The work that this Committee is doing, and the recommendations that I am sure will flow from this inquiry, will very much assist in the work that we take forward.

Q890 Chair: One aspect that has run through our inquiry has been the issue of race. You commented when the report was published, and these were your words: “We should not let those cultural sensitivities or that political correctness get in the way of ensuring that we follow the evidence where it leads”. Do you think that that has not happened in the past? Do you think that there have been cultural sensitivities, and therefore, on the basis of what you have seen over the last six months, that people should have been more proactive in dealing with the issues, and they have not done so because of cultural sensitivities?

Mr Timpson: Various communities themselves, the police and other agencies recognise that there has not always been the robust investigation in every situation that there should have been. I believe there is a common consensus that, as you have quoted me saying, we should not let any cultural sensitivities or political correctness get in the way of following the evidence, wherever it leads. I know that you have had evidence from a number of members of different communities who have accepted that.

We also need to acknowledge that this cuts across many communities, and we therefore need to have a very pragmatic approach, looking at any evidence that comes to light, following that evidence, and gathering intelligence so that we get better at preventing these crimes in the first place. We need to get away from the suggestion that we have to concentrate all our efforts in one particular area.
Mr Timpson: My focus is on finding where any sexual exploitation of children is taking place, wherever that may be and whoever is responsible, and on bringing those people to justice.

Mr Winnick: Absolutely.

Mr Timpson: And on protecting victims, and supporting them where we can. I have set out what I believe we have to do, which is to get away from any cultural sensitivities or political correctness and to get to the bottom of what is going on in our country. Some important work is happening, but there is a huge amount that we still have to do. You may, perhaps, think that approach is simplistic, but I think it is the most effective way of cutting through many of the issues there still are around child sexual exploitation, so that we can concentrate on what we think is the most important aspect of all of this, which is protecting vulnerable children.

Q893 Mr Winnick: Absolutely, Minister. No one could possibly disagree with a single word of that. But let us take as an example what happened in Torbay in Operation Mansfield, which perhaps is similar to you: one person was convicted and one was cautioned, and the one who was convicted received a substantial prison sentence, and rightly so. It so happened that they happened to be white, but if someone said, “Look at the whites; how disgraceful and disgusting,” our reaction would surely be to say, “Who do these people who committed these crimes represent? The white community can hardly be held accountable.” Is that not the same for any community? Where there are villains, whether we are talking about Pakistanis, Hindus, Jews, Christians or people of no religion, they should not be seen as representative in any way of the religion they were born into or the community that they belong to.

Mr Timpson: My focus is on finding where any sexual exploitation of children is taking place, wherever that may be and whoever is responsible, and on bringing those people to justice.

Mr Winnick: Absolutely.

Mr Timpson: And on protecting victims, and supporting them where we can. I have set out what I believe we have to do, which is to get away from any cultural sensitivities or political correctness and to get to the bottom of what is going on in our country. Some important work is happening, but there is a huge amount that we still have to do. You may, perhaps, think that approach is simplistic, but I think it is the most effective way of cutting through many of the issues there still are around child sexual exploitation, so that we can concentrate on what we think is the most important aspect of all of this, which is protecting vulnerable children.

Chair: Thank you.

Q895 Chris Ruane: The Children’s Commissioner report recommended the removal of all reference to child prostitution in legislation and Government guidelines. Is this happening?

Mr Timpson: I responded to the Deputy Children’s Commissioner’s recommendation in a letter that I believe is on our website, if you care to visit it. It sets out that we agree with the recommendation, and will do all that we can to remove the word “prostitution” where it is inappropriately used in any guidance, legislation or other documentation. That has already taken place in relation to the guidance on safeguarding children and young people from sexual exploitation, to exemplify that exact point. Clearly, there is some legislation where, because it is an Act of Parliament, it would need the Act itself to be revised, and we need to look at how that process could be carried out, but we are undertaking work to look at a thorough search through various documentation guidance, to see where there may be references, and where we are able to change those references. We will continue to look closely at every opportunity to do so.

Q896 Chris Ruane: That should be quite an easy thing to do, though, with computers these days. You put in word search, and—

Mr Timpson: We’d like to think so, Mr Ruane, and hopefully that will resolve some of the effort to try to establish where there may be what we now deem to be references that are not reflective of what we want society to understand; but that work is under way, and I am sure that as we move through the second year of the Deputy Children’s Commissioner’s report, and as she moves on from prevalence to an analysis of what action is required, we will be able to provide further reassurance that that work is starting to hold water.

Chair: Thank you.

Q897 Nicola Blackwood: Minister, one of the problems that has emerged quite clearly in this inquiry
is that there is a reluctance among different agencies to share data because of fears relating to data protection and confidentiality, but obviously where criminal offences are an issue there are exceptions to data protection. May I ask what work is ongoing to make sure that those public agencies are being reassured and informed about those exceptions under data protection?

**Mr Timpson:** I suspect I share your frustration at the fact that on too many occasions, agencies give data protection as an excuse as to why they cannot share data. There is no shortage of data. There is a huge amount of information out there, but it simply is not being shared properly, expeditiously and in a way that will improve practice on the ground. We must remember that most data can be shared legally; it is simply that practice has got in the way, and we need to try to break that down. The University of Bedfordshire is developing a data-collecting tool, which has now gone out to LSCBs and others agencies so that they can disseminate it to explain how they can break down the perceived barriers to sharing data. That is an important development.

Data sharing is exemplified in other ways. For instance, just before Christmas, the Department of Health announced that it had set up a child protection data-sharing system with children’s services, so if a child in care goes missing—children in care who go missing are the group most vulnerable to sexual exploitation—that information will be shared between health and children’s services. If a child comes into A and E, it will be flagged up that they are a child in care and therefore probably more vulnerable to some of the crimes that are committed.

There is also the co-location of services, which we see, for instance, in Lancashire with the Engage programme. By co-locating those services and having as in Nottingham, multi-agency safeguarding hubs, the police, the health service, education and children’s services are all within the same building, so that there is much less prospect of each service’s data being different and not being passed from one agency to another. Those are all ways that we know are effective; we just need to make them work much more widely.

**Q898 Nicola Blackwood:** Yesterday, we heard evidence from Sheila Taylor from the National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People. One of her proposals was to ensure that every LSCB had a CSE co-ordinator. What work is ongoing to ensure that proposal is taken forward, or is indeed effective?

**Mr Timpson:** In January, I held a round-table discussion with LSCB chairs through the Association of Independent LSCB Chairs, which we helped to fund. It was chaired by Sue Woolmore, who does an excellent job. I impressed on them the need to take heed of the warning signs of child sexual exploitation, which were identified by Sue Berelowitz in her interim report. The working group that was set up, to which we are also providing some funding, set as a priority child sexual exploitation, which has led to each region of LSCBs appointing a lead on child sexual exploitation to co-ordinate the action that is happening within LSCBs.

**Q899 Nicola Blackwood:** How many LSCBs will there be in a region?

**Mr Timpson:** It depends on the region, but I can find you the figures.

**Q900 Nicola Blackwood:** Greater Manchester has 10 LSCBs, and they each have different data-collecting mechanisms. If there is a problem with data sharing between LSCBs and there is one CSE co-ordinator across the 10, you would still have a data-sharing problem, even though there is one CSE co-ordinator for all 10, so I wonder whether that would resolve the problem. We had evidence from Greater Manchester police to say that that was their problem, as opposed to the problem in Lancashire. Lancashire could tell us very quickly what their CSE convictions were, but Greater Manchester could not at that point, because its data collecting mechanisms were not harmonised across its LSCBs in the region. It is just trying to understand how we can resolve the problem, because of the uneven performance among LSCBs.

**Mr Timpson:** Absolutely. There are some very effective LSCBs, but I am afraid there are still too many LSCBs and local authorities that have yet to grasp the enormity of the work that needs to be done. You mentioned Greater Manchester and Lancashire, and I know that Greater Manchester are working with Lancashire to try to understand how they have managed to get much further towards a harmonisation of their data. The CSE lead in LSCBs will be an important person to help drive that in a wider area than just each individual LSCB area.

**Q901 Nicola Blackwood:** What enforcement mechanism do you have at the DfE for an LSCB, or an LSCB area, that you do not think is actually trying hard enough, or doing the job of protecting these very vulnerable children?

**Mr Timpson:** There are levels of intervention that we can make within a local authority and in the role of the LSCB. Clearly, part of that is me impressing the point on them, face to face, by going round the country and establishing with them what their priorities should be, and monitoring that performance as part of the overall ability of a local authority area to provide strong child protection and safeguarding services.

There are examples around the country where we have taken a far more robust approach to intervention when we are not satisfied with the work currently being done, or when we are not satisfied with the pace of change after a notice of intervention, or after some other form of intervention has been requested of them as an absolute necessity. These are ultimately the tests that all local authorities and LSCBs should be setting themselves. Can we be satisfied that all children in our area are being protected? That includes child sexual exploitation. We have had some good advance on that, but there is still too much inconsistency and we need to keep a strong focus on it.

**Chair:** Indeed. Final question.
Q902 Nicola Blackwood: Do you think you could provide the Committee with the information about which LSCBs are still requiring intervention and which ones are now performing well?

Mr Timpson: It will be in relation to local authority children’s services areas, and certainly children’s services, because the LSCB is an important component of making sure that we are improving, for instance, multi-agency working on the ground and therefore the performance of local authorities. How each local authority is performing is in the public domain, but I am very happy to provide that information to the Committee.

Nicola Blackwood: That would be helpful.

Chair: Yes, that would be helpful. David Winnick.

Q903 Mr Winnick: We were rather surprised, Minister, when we heard evidence from senior people who had been involved in children’s services that no action had been taken at the time when allegations were made about child abuse and the rest of it. Do you think that in the new climate where, clearly, there is far more arising from the allegations against the late Jimmy Savile, there is a greater awareness now among professional people? I am sure that most carried out their duties in a proper way, but where that did not occur, the abuse carried on and those responsible were not brought to justice. Do you think there is a different atmosphere?

Mr Timpson: As I said before, Mr Winnick, this has been under the radar for too long. Whether there has been a shift in awareness, there has clearly been increased activity on the ground to both understand the problem and seek to tackle it. The Education Select Committee heard evidence from Sue Berelowitz, who acknowledged that there has been a greater and more serious focus on this problem, but it is still early days. If we are going to embed this and ensure that it sustains beyond an initial burst of reaction to the problem, we need to continue, and I hope that the Committee’s report will help achieve this. A clear prioritisation of child sexual exploitation is one of the clear must-dos of all local authorities—police, health and other services—so that we do not lose the important momentum that we have managed to start to gain.

We also have to remember that we must not take our eye off the ball as regards children, safeguarding and protection more generally. The majority of abuse goes on in a familial environment, so yes, we need to keep a strong focus on child sexual exploitation—that is absolutely essential—but we must also remember that there are ways that we can improve the child protection system more generally that will also benefit children who may be at risk of exploitation.

Q904 Mr Winnick: We heard evidence yesterday from two witnesses concerned with dealing with and challenging child abuse, and they made one or two points that have some relevance to your position. As I understand the situation from the evidence given to us, your predecessor had a more narrow remit, dealing more with child abuse, whereas you have wider responsibility beyond the subject that we are now discussing. Is that the position?

Mr Timpson: No, that isn’t the position. I have a very similar remit to my predecessor, but I also have some extra responsibilities around children with special educational needs, for example, and in fact the Office of the Children’s Commissioner also falls within my portfolio.

Q905 Mr Winnick: Which your predecessor didn’t have.

Mr Timpson: Which my predecessor didn’t have, but there are also elements of my brief that my predecessor did have that no longer fall directly within my portfolio. In relation to child protection and child sexual exploitation, there has been a direct handover in the Department, from my predecessor to me.

Q906 Mr Winnick: The two witnesses who gave evidence were also concerned about cuts. Presumably you have no more knowledge of the Budget than we have, but is there a possibility that further cuts will happen that could affect the work being undertaken to deal with child abuse?

Mr Timpson: I am not sure that I do have any more information than you about the Budget. In relation to the budget within local authorities and how they are choosing to spend their financial settlement, we have seen over the last few years a fairly consistent and continued level of funding going to child protection and children’s services. We have seen more children going into care, so that has put additional pressure on some local authorities, but we have also seen a huge disparity—this is where the amount of savings that local authorities can achieve through better working is important. By improving their early support and help within their area, some local authorities have seen a significant reduction in the number of children who are being taken into care. Others have actually seen a significant rise.

There are ways of working collaboratively across services, and there is also the issue of how authorities commission many of their services. We are looking in particular at residential care homes—the huge cost to local authorities of placing children in a children’s home out of their area—and the commissioning process that they go through. We are working with the Local Government Association to see how that commissioning process can be improved so that they get better quality placements and better value for money, and so that children are placed much closer to their home environment.

Q907 Chair: Thank you. I have a couple of points before I bring in Mr Reckless. In our report on forced marriage, which we published in May 2011, we recommended at paragraph 27 that the Secretary of State should write annually to local authorities to remind them of their responsibilities on child grooming and on forced marriages—the disappearing children, that was the subject of our 2011 report. We have not really had a positive response from the Department about that. I wonder whether you could take that back to the Secretary of State and see whether there is scope for that to happen.

You quite correctly said that it is about reminding people of their responsibilities. Government cannot do
everything. It is happening at a local level. We tried to recommend to the Government that the Secretary of State or you wrote regularly and said, “Look, forget about cultural sensitivities. If you have got a whole lot of kids, especially girls, who are suddenly missing, inquire into that further.” That is why we made that recommendation. Would you take that away and have a look at it again? We do not want you to decide today, but it would be very helpful if you could do that.

**Mr Timpson:** I am very happy to do that, Chairman. I have set out in the evidence that I have given a number of actions that the Department is taking, which inevitably mean communicating with local authorities and local safeguarding children boards and others who are also important communicators of the work that needs to be done. I am happy to take back to the Department your wish, desire or demand—whichever we want to call it.

**Q908 Chair:** “Request” is fine. The Home Affairs Committee is quite tame. You may not know this, but this morning Chief Constable Pat Geeney from ACPO said that because of the current climate, they do not have the resources to pursue every allegation of a missing person, so they are going to concentrate only on those they regard as being vulnerable. The worry when you hear a statement like that is that people might fall through the net. Have you had a chance to look at that statement, and do you have a view on whether that is the right way to approach this sensitive subject?

**Mr Timpson:** I am afraid, Chair, that I have not seen the statement that you are referring to. My understanding, if I am correct, is that ACPO has been carrying out some pilots, looking at how it collects information around children who go missing, how it responds, and how it can target its resources most effectively.

**Q909 Chair:** The worry is that while they target, instead of chasing up all these cases, they might lose some kids in the process. As Mr Winnick put it to you, this awareness is extremely important and every lead has to be followed. The evidence must lead where the evidence leads. Our worry is that if the police are starting to cut back on this area, we will get fewer people involved.

**Mr Timpson:** One of the pieces of work that we are doing currently is on children going missing from home or care and the guidelines that exist. One of the discrepancies in the past has been a mismatch between how the police have been collecting and responding and how local authorities have been collecting and responding on those individual cases that come to their attention. We are seeking to align those pieces of guidance much more closely so that those agencies that do come into contact or are referred to through a child who goes missing are treating it in the same way, rather than how they have done it in the past. The other thing we are doing in the Department—we will be piloting it in the hope of bringing it in next year—is on children who go missing from care. They are the most vulnerable group that are relevant to this inquiry. Rather than only keeping data on children who go missing from care for more than 24 hours, we will be collecting data for all children who go missing from care, regardless of how long that period of time is, so that we have a clearer picture of where that is happening and what response is taking place.

**Chair:** Very helpful. Mark Reckless and then Steve McCabe.

**Q910 Mark Reckless:** What are you doing to ensure that children who are victims of horrific sexual abuse get the help they need to, as best as they are able, recover from that experience?

**Mr Timpson:** It is an area that has been overlooked for too long. There are two strands that come immediately to mind that we need to be better at. One is those children who find themselves having to give evidence in a criminal justice setting. We heard from Keir Starmer, the Director of Public Prosecutions, and the lead in ACPO on 6 March, from memory, about reforming and overhauling in many ways their approach to child sexual exploitation, both in terms of investigation and prosecution, but also in terms of how they treat the victim. That includes—I know the Ministry of Justice is doing some work on this—how children give evidence in court. We have the special measures in place and the guidance around that has been revised quite recently. I know that it is looking at other ways vulnerable witnesses can be protected even further, in terms of giving their evidence in a pre-recorded video setting and so on.

As someone who has practised for some part of their career in the criminal courts. I know what a daunting experience it is, even for an adult, let alone some child or young person who has been the victim of sexual exploitation. We need to do better. I have already met with the Minister in the Ministry of Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Kenilworth and Southam, to discuss it. In the child sexual exploitation round-table that I held just before Christmas, we had a particular item on the agenda about supporting witnesses in court. It is back on the agenda when we have our next round-table in June. One of the areas that we agreed would be looked at in more detail was judicial training—how judicial staff understand the victims who are coming to their attention and how they should treat them through the court process.

I am sorry that this is a slightly long answer, Chairman, but the other area is what happens after that. That is not the end of their experience; it is something that is going to scar them potentially for life. They need to have better access to therapeutic support. I know that the Department of Health has set up a child sexual exploitation health working group to look at how we can improve long-term support. Often you can have a short burst of intervention but that only holds, rather than helps to improve, the situation. They will report in autumn on how they are going to do that. There is also an aim to improve access to psychological therapies. I think the Department of Health is putting in about £54 million to try to do that. That should help boost the CAMHS service, which is too patchy in too many places.

**Chair:** Thank you. There is a final quick supplementary from Steve McCabe.
Q911 Steve McCabe: Minister, you mentioned the problem about recording children who go missing from care. In fact, I think that in almost every major case that has surfaced recently, that has been an aspect: children frequently disappearing is being accepted as normal, not reported to the police and with no recording standards. Is it your intention that there should be clear guidance to all agencies about how children should be reported as missing, and that the data should be shared? Do you have any plans to make it an obligation on the care authorities that returners should be subject to a standard interview, which is recommended in most best practice guides, but not practised by most local authorities?

Mr Timpson: On your first point, about improving the sharing of data and agencies being more uniform in how they do that, in my previous answer I set out what we are doing with ACPO to try to align it more carefully.

In relation to children who are in the care system—particularly those who find themselves being moved out of area into children’s homes, with some of the vulnerabilities they face—we will be doing something that came out of the three working groups that were set up on the back of the accelerated report from Sue Berelowitz. We are consulting on further regulation around children’s care homes, so that there is a sign-off at a higher senior level within local authorities if a child is going to be placed out of area. The placing authority and the receiving authority must have in place a much more stringent and robust process before they can agree that that placement is the most appropriate for that child.

Q912 Steve McCabe: Minister, I apologise. Maybe I wasn’t sufficiently clear. I am talking about a standard return interview for runaways, so that when they return to the place of care they are interviewed about where they have been and what has been happening. That is recommended good practice, but it seems to be rarely practised by a substantial number of authorities.

Mr Timpson: You’re right that it is recommended good practice. It is happening in some but not all situations. I am happy to look at the current take-up and whether we need to go further than we have. On the back of your pertinent question, I will go back and do just that.

Q913 Chair: It would be very helpful if you could do that. I have one final question. When do you think the Government will publish the PSHE review that you are undertaking at the moment? I think it was promised at the end of last year.

Mr Timpson: Although that is outside my wide portfolio area, Mr Chairman, I think I can say it will be very shortly.

Chair: Minister, thank you for your evidence today. You have been very open and transparent, and can we wish you a long ministerial career?

Mr Timpson: Oh dear. Thank you.

Mr Winnick: Only to the next election.

Chris Ruane: Until 2015.
Written evidence

Supplementary written evidence submitted by Sir Peter Fahy, Chief Constable, Greater Manchester Police (LCG 01)

Thank you for your letter dated 20 June 2012 requesting further information following the evidence we gave to the Committee on the 12th June.

In GMP we consider the following alternative methods both in terms of investigation and/or in order to disrupt offenders activity in respect of grooming and child sexual exploitation cases:

1. DNA testing of clothing of potential victims of CSE. Often deployed in relation to regular Missing From Home’s who are not disclosing intelligence to form the basis of a case.

2. Prosecution without a victim’s account. Use of forensics as above and any circumstantial evidence we can build; we have had successful prosecutions in this way.

3. Obtaining access to Facebook and other similar social network sites using consent to print off potential evidence when unable to obtain evidence via conventional methods.

4. Intelligence based investigation. We often undertake in depth research on small pieces of intelligence and social media conversations to identify suspects. We used a Facebook conversation and photographs posted on-line which identified a registered sex offender who was targeting one of our victims through social media.

5. Forensic examinations of mobile phones and computers play a large part of our enquiries. We often use evidence of communications to corroborate or build up circumstantial evidence where we have little “traditional” evidence available.

6. Pro-active deployment to CSE Hotspots to identify potential CSE victims and build intelligence on possible offenders. A recent deployment and protect investigation led to finding a female who had been a high risk missing person for in excess of 6 weeks.

7. Disruptions
   — Warnings under S2 Abduction Act or under S49 Childrens Act. When possible we use body cameras or taped recorded interviews to record the evidence that the warnings have been given to negate future evidential disputes.
   — Intelligence profiles to identify other offences to take action. One case led to the arrest of a male for possessing firearms and drugs. Although we couldn’t prove the CSE he received five years imprisonment.
   — Use of other agencies- UKBA for deportation, housing associations for eviction, trading standards agencies to impose conditions/closure of premises. A recent case regarding an off licence, where there was insufficient evidence for a criminal case, is likely to lead to the suspect losing his licence for selling unlawful alcohol.
   — Work with Social Care to identify issues regarding appropriate accommodation for the child.

With reference to the IPCC involvement in the Rochdale case please find below the current terms of reference for their investigation which was dated 15 March 2012.

(i) It is agreed that the term “Initial Investigation” covers the period from 2008 up to February 2010 when the PPIU took over investigation of the incident.

(ii) GMP Professional Standards Branch (PSB) will obtain and review all relevant material obtained during the review process conducted into this case by the Major Crime Review Team.

(iii) The Rochdale Division Senior Leadership Team’s involvement and decision making in relation to the initial investigation will be investigated and the report will include details of the investigations undertaken and findings reached.

(iv) PSB will further consider whether notices should be served on any officer, including members of the SLT, and whether further investigation is required. Notices will be served/further investigations undertaken where it is identified that this is necessary. No final decision will be reached without consultation with the IPCC.

(v) The Investigating Officer’s report will be reviewed and re-written in line with the above enquiries. Wherever recommendations are made, the report will provide the rationale for those recommendations. If any notices have been served, the report will reach clear findings on whether the member of staff/officer has a case to answer for misconduct or gross misconduct.

(vi) The report will also include a new section on the progress GMP has made within Child Protection arena since this case first came to light. This will include an explanation about the creation of the Public Protection Division and the Sunrise project dealing with Child Sexual Exploitation Team in Rochdale Division.

(vii) GMP will provide the IPCC with detailed monthly updates on the progress of this case until it is satisfactorily concluded.
I trust this information is useful and if you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sir Peter Fahy
Chief Constable
Greater Manchester Police
26 June 2012

Written evidence from the NSPCC [LCG 05]

The support provided to victims and witnesses by a range of agencies such as the Crown Prosecution Service, Police and voluntary agencies

1. It is important to recognise that many victims of sexual exploitation who are in care have a history of intra-familial abuse, as highlighted in the Office of the Children’s Commissioner’s (OCC) accelerated report. However, the report highlights that “despite research into child sexual exploitation suggesting this prior abuse is both perpetrated and known about, it has rarely been formally recognised or addressed by the statutory agencies”. Therefore, the provision of support for victims should be viewed within wider context of child sexual abuse as many sexually exploited children will have multiple needs.

2. The effects of child sexual abuse are broad and long-lasting, leading to social, emotional and psychological problems, and it may take substantial therapeutic work to enable children to recover. NSPCC research found that 16.5% of 11–17 year olds reported sexual abuse by an adult or a peer and 9.4% had been sexually abused. However, NSPCC there is an estimated shortfall in provision of between 51,000 and 88,000 places for therapeutic support; a huge gap between need and service provision for children who have been sexually abused, including those sexually exploited. The essential therapeutic principles for working with intra-familial sexual abuse remain for sexually exploited children, for example, trauma, betrayal, and stigmatisation, however, it is also important to take into account the specifics of sexual exploitation in therapeutic work, for example, peer pressure and culture, and physical threats.

3. As part of its new strategy, the NSPCC is pioneering new services in seven priority areas in order to reach the most vulnerable children. Providing much needed therapeutic services for sexually abused children is a key area of the NSPCC’s strategy and represents our largest area of service delivery across 18 sites in the UK. Using the latest research, as well as the views of children and adults who have received therapy following sexual abuse, we have developed a guide called Letting the future in. This allows us to work with children from the age of four who have been sexually abused, helping them to understand their abuse, explore their feelings about it and express themselves. From our experience, we know the effects of sexual abuse can be managed through cognitive therapies and through Letting the future in we are testing and evaluating a range of therapeutic approaches. This will provide important information in relation to which approaches are the most effective.

4. The NSPCC also runs a specialist child sexual exploitation service—Protect and Respect—which is a newly developed programme, building on our experience of delivering a specialist sexual exploitation service in East London for over a decade. We provide a range of intensive support to young women aged 11–19 who have been sexually exploited, including those who have been trafficked, separated, who are unaccompanied asylum seekers, looked after children and those who have frequent “missing” episodes. NSPCC practitioners work with young people to provide information on the risks of sexual exploitation and undertake an assessment of risk with the young person to develop a tailored intervention plan. We would be more than willing to organise a visit to our services for members of the Home Affairs Select Committee should that be helpful.

5. In the vast majority of cases we have worked with involving sexually exploited young people, many first became involved in sexual exploitation through pimps, normally men, who use grooming techniques to entrap them. The NSPCC submitted data to CEOP’s thematic assessment on localised grooming which showed that in most cases we dealt with between 2005 and 2010, the young people were associating with older males with whom they were in an inappropriate and controlling relationship. In a significant number of cases they were given a mobile phone, drugs, alcohol or other gifts by the offender. In many cases they did not recognise that they were a victim because of the grooming methods used by their abusers—often victims believe they are in a normal relationship and that their abuser is their “boyfriend”. It is important that services and professional groups working with children are able to identify children who are being sexually exploited or who are at risk and work with those children to enable them to recognise how the relationships they are in are exploitative and help them minimise their risk-taking behaviour.

6. In relation to support for victims and witness within the criminal justice system, it is a significant ordeal for a child who has suffered abuse to stand up publicly and give intimate details in front of strangers. NSPCC

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3. Child abuse and neglect in the UK today, NSPCC, September 2011.
research found that 35 of 50 young witnesses described themselves as very nervous or scared in the pre-trial period. Due to this, there is a danger that victims’ evidence will be withdrawn at short notice, particularly in light of ongoing intimidation and coercion by the perpetrator. Therefore, in all circumstances where children who have been sexually abused and are called on to be witnesses they should have comprehensive support and preparation for court made available to them. A thorough assessment of their individual needs should be taken to ensure that the special measures that are available are put in place to help them give their best evidence.

7. The University of Bedfordshire’s What’s Going On? report highlights that few cases come to court and victims’ experiences of the court processes are negative: “The most striking statistic was the low number of cases with convictions, reflecting the rarity of sexual exploitation cases reaching court. Support for the young person during the court process was also noted as lacking.” Further work remains to be done to achieve a comprehensive UK-wide child and young witness provision. Prevention in terms of successful prosecutions should be recognised as a critical part of any local strategy to safeguard children from sexual exploitation. With the change in responsibility for victim and witness support to Police and Crime Commissioners, it is also important that Police and Crime Commissioners in affected areas have a strategy to deal with the problem, including ensuring that support services are there to encourage reporting and to work with affected young people through the prosecution process.

8. The NSPCC’s work with child and young witnesses, a significant proportion of whom have been sexually abused, has been influential in demonstrating the value of pre-trial therapy and appropriate support in preparation for children and young people as witnesses. The NSPCC wants to see these measures uniformly available. In December 2011, the NSPCC and Victim Support embarked on a two year partnership to bring together their respective expertise in working with victims of crime and children and young people. This ground-breaking initiative will include the development of a national young witness service. In the first year, NSPCC and Victim Support staff are working together to develop a model(s) of service delivery, together with policies and procedures and practice materials, with a view to testing these in practice by the end of 2012. In the second year, there will be an extensive, recruitment, selection and training programme for volunteers and staff, so that the service can be delivered across England and Wales.

Whether front-line agencies are adequately equipped to identify victims and intervene at an early stage

9. There are many challenges in identifying children and young people who have been or are being sexually exploited. From our experience of supporting children in these circumstances, they are often fearful for their safety even after being removed from the exploitative situation. These children may find it very challenging to form trusting relationships with adults in positions of power, for example with child protection professionals. The NSPCC welcomes the commitment by Government to improve awareness among front-line practitioners and the recently published Department for Education “Step-by-step guide”. However, this must be accompanied by effective dissemination and implementation of LSCB-led training for social care and health professionals in order to recognise the signs of grooming and enable front-line agencies to identify children vulnerable to sexual exploitation and intervene effectively.

10. In light of the proposed changes to inter-agency guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children, the Government should clarify the status and availability of broader practice guidance on responding to child sexual exploitation. This should include whether this guidance will still be made available, whether it should still be used and how it will be updated. There also needs to be an acknowledgement that where Working Together lacks detail on child sexual exploitation, local areas are likely to seek to fill the gap with their own practice guidance, setting out local policies and procedures to respond to particular issues. This would be concerning if it leads to inconsistent practice across the country.

11. Although it is impossible to identify a single cause for why a young person becomes involved in sexual exploitation, certain factors appear to make children particularly vulnerable. These include experiences of childhood sexual abuse, problems related to or exacerbated by the experience of residential care, running away, homelessness, poverty, abuse of drugs and alcohol, disengagement from education and involvement in gangs. Given this, it is important that alongside primary prevention mechanisms such as awareness-raising in schools, and personal and sexual health education delivered through the curriculum, there is also targeted prevention undertaken by professionals, groups and agencies working with children who are specifically vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

The quality of data collection, data sharing and research on child victims of localised grooming

1. There needs to be better understanding about child sexual exploitation as the high profile cases of sexual exploitation highlighted by the media in recent years do not necessarily reflect the overall national picture. The experience of staff working at our child sexual exploitation project in London is that sex offenders are both male and female ranging in age, and come from all backgrounds, as do the victims. White, Asian, Black and European communities experience similar levels of cross-cultural exploitation.

2. The NSPCC welcomes the OCC’s interim report which will be published in September 2012 and the Government’s commitment to ensuring there is clearer data available. The quality of data collection needs to

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5 In their own words: The experiences of 50 young witnesses in criminal proceedings, NSPCC, December 2004.
6 What’s going on to safeguard children and young people from sexual exploitation? University of Bedfordshire, October 2011.
improve so we can understand more about the profile of adults involved, the impact of interventions, the treatment needs of victims and the extent to which these are the same or different to intra-familial child sexual abuse. The NSPCC is currently reviewing calls to ChildLine in relation to grooming for sexual abuse which will give us a clearer picture of vulnerability factors and the ways in which children are being groomed. We would welcome the opportunity to share this learning with the Home Affairs Select Committee during an oral evidence session.

3. In terms of prevention of sexual exploitation, there is also a need to better understand perpetrator behaviour—its similarities and differences with intra-familial child sexual abuse and how it is most amenable to deterrence, treatment and prevention. For instance, perpetrators of child sexual exploitation organise themselves more than those who perpetrate intra-familial sexual abuse and have some differing motivations, particularly in terms of financial gain. The NSPCC has been working with sexual abuse perpetrators over a number of years, a proportion of whom have been perpetrators of child sexual exploitation. We are currently piloting a good practice guide, based on best practice and latest knowledge in this difficult area of child protection in order to learn how to use it effectively with different types of sex offenders.

To conclude, child sexual exploitation should be seen as part of a wider child sexual abuse challenge. A cross-departmental government child sexual abuse prevention strategy would enable this to happen and would facilitate a common language in relation to all aspects of child sexual abuse. There is a need to be aware of sexual abuse and exploitation in the broadest sense in order to recognise the signs and enable victims to seek help regardless of where it may occur.

Summary

— The NSPCC welcomes the opportunity to provide written evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee’s inquiry into localised grooming. This evidence is based on our expertise in providing services for both victims and perpetrators, undertaking research and developing policy in the field of sexual abuse for over 30 years.

— The NSPCC believes that the sexual exploitation of children is part of the larger problem of child sexual abuse, the vast majority of which goes unreported and untreated, takes place in the family home or the extended family, and is perpetrated by people (primarily men) related to or known to the victim.

— While the NSPCC welcomes the Government’s action plan on child sexual exploitation, child sexual abuse within families remains a pressing problem. By focusing on the issue so narrowly, we believe the Government is doing a disservice to the thousands of children across the UK who need protection. The Government should develop a long-term strategy which builds on the current child sexual exploitation action plan and takes a holistic approach towards tackling child sexual abuse.

— Child sexual abuse, including sexual exploitation, seriously damages young people’s lives. There is a significant shortfall in the availability of therapeutic services for victims and we believe more provision is required in order to help children and young people overcome their trauma. Furthermore, more work remains to be done to achieve a comprehensive UK-wide child and young witness provision in order to appropriately support victims through the criminal justice system, and increase prosecutions.

— Given what we have learnt from our services in relation to how children are groomed for sexual exploitation, there is a need both for primary prevention mechanisms such as awareness-raising in schools, alongside targeted prevention undertaken by professionals working with children who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

NSPCC

28 August 2012

Supplementary written evidence from the NSPCC [LCG 05a]

Thank you for inviting the NSPCC and ChildLine to give oral evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee Inquiry into Localised Child Grooming. We are very grateful for the opportunity to give evidence and we hope that you found the session useful and informative.

During the session, the Committee asked if we have provided information about the practices that we have found particularly helpful when working with child victims and witnesses. We have already provided some information within our initial written submission but please find attached some further information in relation to this area. Given the Committee’s question about the need for schools to alert pupils to the dangers of sexual exploitation, we have also taken the opportunity to attach information about the new ChildLine schools service which will eventually reach every primary school in the UK and will help children understand how to recognise and protect themselves from abuse, and where to go for help when they need it.

As you are aware, we drew upon ChildLine’s new report Caught in a trap: The impact of grooming in 2012 as part of our oral evidence. We attach the final published copy of this report. One of the most concerning
findings of the report is that young people have the perception that adults will not understand how grooming has occurred and they will not be believed. Given the events of recent weeks, it is crucially important now more than ever that young people know that if they find the courage to report abuse their emotional needs will be met; they will not be blamed; and the cycle of abuse will end. We will be looking to see how we can further address these issues in the coming months.

We are extremely encouraged by the Committee’s focus on this issue to ensure more victims can be supported and perpetrators brought to justice. If there is any further information we can provide to assist with your inquiry we would be more than happy to do so.

Jon Brown
Head of Strategy & Development, Sexual Abuse, NSPCC

Sue Minto
Head of ChildLine

5 November 2012

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: NSPCC ORAL EVIDENCE

1. ChildLine Schools Service

Most ChildLine callers are children over the age of eleven years old. Younger children may not have an understanding or awareness of abuse or the support available to them to know how and when to seek help. We need a way to reach out to younger children and those who do not have access to technology to ensure they have an understanding of abuse, of how to protect themselves and how to access help through ChildLine and other sources. This is the underlying principle of the new schools service. We believe that reaching such children will be easiest in a primary school setting.

The service focuses on primary school children from five to 11 years old, with a particular emphasis on 7–11 year olds. It has already been delivered in 1,273 schools and reached 90,362 children across the UK. At the end of August the service had 263 volunteers active in schools. The ChildLine Schools Service will eventually help every child in the UK to understand how to recognise and protect themselves from abuse, and where to go for help when they need it. The aim is to visit every primary school in the UK at least once every two years.

Evaluation information indicates that 67% of children indicated that they were more likely to talk to someone if they felt unsafe, after the visit from the ChildLine Schools Service. 70% of head teachers stated that there been a change to what their pupils knew about child abuse and bullying after a visit from the service.

The ChildLine Schools Service delivery model involves two stages of presentation to children. The first stage is an assembly to a large group of pupils at a school. The assembly is delivered to pupils in Key Stage 2. In the assembly we cover:

- Definitions of all forms of abuse.
- Case Study and role play on abuse.
- Introduction to ChildLine and what happens when you call.

The second stage happens approximately one–two weeks after the initial assembly, with 50 minute classroom-based workshops to every class in years 5 and 6. These workshops reinforce the messages given at the assembly. You can watch a video about the Schools Service here which explains how the service is delivered: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=08MZdc6MT_g&feature=relmfu

ChildLine Schools Service is a volunteer delivered service. Volunteers are rigorously recruited from a diverse range of backgrounds including parents of young children, students and ex head teachers. They complete on line and face to face training, and then attend schools to observe and learn alongside other staff and experienced volunteers. Regional and national recruitment will be scaled up as the service develops and grows.

Teachers and school staff play an important role in helping to deliver safeguarding messages to children. Head teachers and teachers are briefed on the content of the workshops and assemblies. Class teachers are present at all sessions (both assembly and workshops) so that they understand the messages we give and can respond to children after the sessions if they ask questions. ChildLine posters are placed in all classrooms after the assemblies.

We would be happy to arrange ChildLine Schools Service visits within the constituencies of Committee members once the service is up and running, should that be of interest.

2. Supporting Young Victims and Witnesses

In our August 2012 written evidence, we stated that in all circumstances where children who have been sexually abused and are called on to be witnesses they should have comprehensive support and preparation for court made available to them and that work remains to be done to achieve a comprehensive UK-wide child and young witness provision. We also highlighted the ground-breaking initiative we have embarked on with
Victims Support to design and develop service models to prepare and support children and young people giving evidence in criminal proceedings.

The NSPCC has worked with young people who have been victims of sexual exploitation and have given evidence in criminal proceedings. Our experience tells us that these young people have considerable support needs and require a trusted person to be alongside them throughout the process. Confidence is built by the knowledge that their supporter will be with them whilst giving evidence and if they can use a remote link facility rather than attending the court building. Young people who have been threatened and intimidated will take these fears with them and this will make them reluctant to disclose/give evidence.

Victims and witnesses are automatically entitled to be considered for “special measures” when giving evidence in court which are intended to reduce the anxiety and unpleasantness of giving evidence. Measures include giving evidence from behind a screen or from a remote location, a supporter being available for the witness and the giving of evidence in chief by video recording. Judges can also control the way in which young witnesses are crossexamined. Intermediaries are a special measure and available to all under 18s. The role is intended to help witnesses understand the nature of questioning and help the witness to give their evidence to the court. The scheme is a valuable contribution to the criminal justice process and needs to be extended so that is available to all young victims and witnesses.

The NSPCC & Nuffield Foundation have funded considerable research in recent years (In their Own Words in 2004 and Measuring Up in 2009) to seek the views of young witnesses. The issues raised were again repeated in research published this year by CPS & HMIC. All recent research highlights issues around delay, poor questioning, poor assessment and insufficient consideration of appropriate special measures. Some of these issues are being addressed with the development of toolkits to assist advocates in questioning young witnesses (the Advocates Gateway is in consultation). However, it remains that there is no consistent national approach to supporting the most vulnerable young victims throughout the process from point of disclosure through to Court. A proposal, being considered by Victim Support, is to develop Advocacy Centres where young people can be interviewed, receive help and support in safe surroundings and also give their evidence. This would undoubtedly assist the most vulnerable young witnesses by speeding up the process and providing greater security.

3. NSPCC Assistance With Police Investigation into Jimmy Savile

The NSPCC has been asked by the Metropolitan Police to assist their investigation into allegations made against Jimmy Savile by taking calls on this issue and compiling any new information for them. As of 1st November 2012, the NSPCC’s helpline has received 190 calls directly relating to allegations against Jimmy Savile which we have passed to the police. The NSPCC helpline has never dealt with so many allegations against one individual.

In addition, in the four weeks since the allegations against Savile first surfaced, the NSPCC has also received 217 calls by people who are not making allegations against Savile, but were prompted by this media story to discuss with the NSPCC their own experience of being sexually abused as children. 91 of these calls have also been referred to the police. The NSPCC’s 24 hour helpline provides advice and support to adults who are concerned about the safety or welfare of a child.

NSPCC

November 2012

Written evidence from the Department for Education [LCG 06]

Introduction

1. Nothing is more important than keeping children and young people safe from harm. Child sexual exploitation is child abuse and is completely unacceptable in this, or any other, society. It is a serious crime and needs to be treated as such, with perpetrators robustly pursued and brought to justice.

2. Since early 2011 the Department for Education (DfE) has been working with other Government Departments and a wide range of national and local organisations to tackle child sexual exploitation. As set out below, the Department has published a national action plan (in November 2011) and a progress report on implementation of the plan (in July 2012). We have also committed to further reviews of progress in implementing the plan so that we maintain a relentless focus on tackling the issues.

7 In their own words: The experiences of 50 young witnesses in criminal proceedings, Joyce Plotnikoff and Richard Woolfson, (NSPCC) 2004:
http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/research/findings/measuring_up_report_wdf66579.pdf
10 http://blogs.city.ac.uk/advocategateway/
3. Localised child grooming is a significant form of child sexual exploitation. DIE welcomes the opportunity, through this memorandum, to address the important issues being examined in the Home Affairs Select Committee Inquiry.

BACKGROUND

4. The launch of the Barnardo’s Cut them free campaign and publication of the Puppet on a String report in January 2011 identified the urgent need for child sexual exploitation to be recognised as a form of child abuse. The campaign called for a lead minister on the issue and for a national action plan. In response, the Government confirmed that the then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families, Tim Loughton MP, would lead the development of a national action plan and this work was set immediately in train.

5. The then Minister brought together key partners (see Annex B), including other Government Departments and statutory and voluntary sector organisations, at roundtable meetings in March and September 2011 to inform policy development and preparation of the action plan. On 23 November 2011 the national Tackling child sexual exploitation action plan (“the action plan”) was published.11

6. The action plan looks at child sexual exploitation, including localised child grooming, from the point of view of the child. It sets out a co-ordinated programme of action to raise awareness; protect young people who are at risk; prosecute, convict and imprison those who exploit children; and help victims and families get their lives back on track. The action plan was developed in the light of the thematic assessment Out of Mind, Out of Sight: breaking down the barriers to understanding child sexual exploitation, published by the Child Sexual Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) in June 2011 (see paragraphs 14 and 15 below). It took account of a University of Bedfordshire report, published in October 2011, on the extent and nature of the response of Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) to the 2009 statutory guidance (see paragraph 14). The Office of the Children’s Commissioner (OCC) also launched in October 2011 its two year independent inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups (the CSEGG Inquiry; see paragraph 7).

7. In May 2012, nine members of a network responsible for child sexual exploitation in Rochdale were convicted of appalling crimes. That case raised serious concerns about the particular vulnerability of young people in residential care. On the day of sentencing, the Secretary of State for Education asked the Deputy Children’s Commissioner to report to him urgently on emerging findings from the CSEGG Inquiry. The OCC “accelerated” report, published on 3 July 2012, focused particularly on risks facing looked after children living in children’s homes and included 11 recommendations. The Government accepted all of them.

8. The Report from the Joint Inquiry into Children who Go Missing from Care issued on 18 June by the All Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and the All Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers reached conclusions which were similar to those in the OCC report. The joint APPG report went to the heart of some of the serious failings in the system of care and support for these very vulnerable children.

9. The Tackling child sexual exploitation action plan progress report (the progress report), also published on 3 July 2012, set out encouraging progress being made in implementing the November 2011 action plan. It included the immediate actions that the Government was taking to address the recommendations in both the OCC “accelerated” report and the joint APPG report. The progress report recognised that there was still much to be done, but noted that LSCBs were rising to the challenge, acting to ensure that local organisations worked together to identify and tackle child sexual exploitation. The report also highlighted work being taken forward over and above the commitments in the action plan including, for example, by voluntary sector organisations.

10. The Government understands that the OCC will publish its interim report from the CSEGG Inquiry in the Autumn of 2012. That report is expected to draw on data gathered over the first year of the Inquiry and provide evidence on the prevalence and patterns of child sexual exploitation. Full recommendations on policy and practice are expected in Autumn 2013 when the Inquiry concludes.

11. The Government will continue to develop and update the national action plan as new evidence emerges. The Government therefore welcomes the Select Committee Inquiry and will consider carefully the Committee’s deliberations and recommendations to help inform the development of policy and action in this area.

12. As requested by the Select Committee, the evidence in this paper responds to the main lines of its Inquiry as set out in the terms of reference. This evidence does not, therefore, cover the full breadth of work underway to tackle child sexual exploitation, which is set out in the action plan and the associated progress report.

SCOPE AND NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

13. The Government notes that the Select Committee is considering the quality of data collection, data sharing and research on child victims of localised grooming. The Government agrees that understanding the scope and nature of child sexual exploitation is of fundamental importance.

14. The Barnardo’s Puppet on a String report and the CEOP Out of Mind, Out of Sight thematic assessment (June 2011) added significantly to our understanding of child sexual exploitation but both documents

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11 Details of this and other source documents mentioned in this memorandum are contained in Annex A.
emphasised the need for a stronger evidence base. University of Bedfordshire research published in October 2011 looked at the extent and nature of the response of LSCBs to the 2009 Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation statutory guidance. Despite the central role of LSCBs in establishing the nature and prevalence of child sexual exploitation in their areas so that they can develop effective local strategies to tackle it, the research found that over half held no relevant data.

15. The CEOP thematic assessment stated that most incidents of child sexual exploitation go unrecognised. It rightly warned that local areas cannot conclude that it is not an issue for them if they have not undertaken a proper assessment. Although some areas did hold relevant data, it was clear that LSCBs needed to supplement it with information from all their local partners.

16. Since the publication of the national action plan, the collection and sharing of data by LSCBs and their partner organisations has improved. However, it is still not possible to give an accurate figure of the number of children affected by sexual exploitation nationally. The OCC “accelerated” report supports the evidence presented in the Barnardo’s Puppet on a String report and the CEOP thematic assessment that child sexual exploitation is widespread and more prevalent than was previously thought.

17. Emerging evidence from the OCC “accelerated” report suggests that perpetrators of child sexual exploitation are not exclusive to any one community, race or religion and that the victims—who are both male and female, although predominantly female—come from an equally diverse range of backgrounds. The emerging findings also suggest (see paragraph 53 below) that most children at risk of sexual exploitation are not looked after children living in residential care. Such children do, however, appear to be disproportionately represented in the overall number of victims. The Government understands that the OCC interim report will provide further evidence on prevalence and patterns to help make the national picture clearer.

18. The Government believes that robust, reliable risk assessments by LSCBs are fundamental to understanding the scope and nature of the problem. This is made clear in both the statutory guidance (mentioned in paragraph 14 above) and the action plan. Tim Loughton, the then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families, also wrote on 3 July 2012 to LSCB chairs and Directors of Children’s Services (copied to Directors of Public Health and all police forces) seeking their support and emphasising that:

“as a priority, all LSCBs must establish the nature and extent of the problem locally and assess how well they are responding”.

19. Details of the action underway to support LSCBs in undertaking robust and reliable risk assessments are set out in the action plan and the July 2012 progress report. This includes work already completed by the University of Bedfordshire to provide a data monitoring tool to record the prevalence and nature of child sexual exploitation. The tool, with guidance on its use, has been circulated to all LSCBs and other relevant organisations. A review of data using the data monitoring tool will be undertaken by CEOP and the University later in 2012.

20. Whilst the data that local authorities submit to DfE are different from that reported to the police, inconsistency remains when comparing like with like. Data from police forces show significantly higher numbers of children missing from care for more than 24 hours than is reported by some local authorities. On 21 June 2012, the Department wrote to all local authorities, asking them to review their data collections on children missing from care (and who might as a result be at risk of sexual exploitation) and to check their figures against those collected by local police forces. The Government has also established a working group, chaired by DfE, to develop an improved data collection system in order to give a clearer national picture of children who go missing from care. This group has been meeting regularly over the summer and, as well as examining data issues, is considering what more needs to be done to improve practice to reduce the numbers who go missing from care, and to protect children effectively when they do go missing.

21. A number of actions, detailed in the action plan, are being taken forward to address barriers to the sharing of information between agencies. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), for example, is seeking to improve voluntary arrangements between local authorities and other partners to ensure the timely exchange of information that is relevant to investigations. The Government will also be consulting later in 2012 about changing regulations so that Ofsted can share information on the location of children’s homes with the police and other relevant bodies.

The extent to which LSCBs have implemented key aspects of national guidance on child sexual exploitation

22. The central role of LSCBs in co-ordinating the work of agencies locally was clearly articulated in the previous Government’s statutory guidance published in 2009. Although the Coalition Government has concerns that the length and complexity of that document may be counter-productive, it considers that there is much in the document which is still good guidance.

23. Implementation of the guidance has, however, been patchy. The 2011 University of Bedfordshire research (see paragraph 14 above) indicated that only a quarter of LSCBs were implementing the guidance and that many had not identified child sexual exploitation as a priority issue in their area. The Government made clear in the action plan that LSCBs should take full account of the main messages contained in the statutory guidance and act in accordance with them. This was followed up with letters to LSCB chairs in December 2011 and July 2012 (see paragraph 18 above), seeking their support in tackling child sexual exploitation.
24. The progress report shows encouraging progress by LSCBs in ensuring that local organisations are working together to identify and tackle child sexual exploitation. There is still much to be done, however, as some areas are still failing to recognise and respond to child sexual exploitation as well as they should. Accordingly, a number of fora have been established to support LSCBs in mapping the needs of their own areas and ensuring that effective arrangements are in place.

25. For example, the National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People (“the National Working Group”) has set up LSCB Co-ordinators and Business Managers fora. The Association of Independent LSCB Chairs is also supporting LSCBs in tackling child sexual exploitation, including through a new Special Interest Group. The terms of reference for the Group are still to be agreed but are likely to include reviewing lessons learned; sharing good practice; and promoting multi-agency approaches.

26. In addition, the Government published alongside the 3 July progress report a new short step-by-step guide What to do if you suspect a child is being sexually exploited. This guide sets out the key actions for frontline practitioners if they suspect a child is being sexually exploited. It was developed in liaison with a wide range of organisations, including local authorities, police, health and the voluntary sector, to make it an accessible resource which complements the much more detailed statutory guidance.

Whether the current criteria for triggering involvement by social services in individual cases take adequate account of the signs of localised grooming

27. The 2009 statutory guidance and the new step-by-step guide set out the circumstances in which the involvement of children’s social care services should be triggered. Both documents contain lists of indicators of child sexual exploitation, including those associated with localised grooming. Such lists can play an important role in raising awareness of parents and professionals about localised grooming and other forms of sexual exploitation and in indicating the circumstances in which referrals to children’s social care services should be considered. They highlight going missing from home, care or education as key indicators and emphasise the importance of return interviews, following missing episodes, in informing the identification, referral and assessment of sexual exploitation cases.

28. The need to give careful consideration to the issue of “consent” is also raised in the step-by-step guide. This responds to anecdotal evidence that in some cases professionals may be accepting apparent “consent” as a reason not to refer cases to children’s social care services. The guide sets out the circumstances in which “consent” cannot apply and that this can be the case for all children under the age of 18 years.

29. Both documents make clear that cases referred to social services should be considered by a qualified social worker and that an assessment under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 (provision of services for children in need and their families) must be undertaken in all cases where child sexual exploitation, or the likelihood of it, is suspected. The assessment should reach a conclusion as to whether the child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm. Where that is the case, the social worker is expected to hold a strategy discussion involving the police, health and other relevant statutory and voluntary sector organisations to consider whether a section 47 enquiry is required. Where a section 47 enquiry to decide whether the local authority should act to safeguard and promote the welfare of a child is deemed necessary, a child protection conference would follow.

30. In line with the step-by-step guide, statutory agencies and voluntary sector organisations are expected to reach agreement on the services to be provided to the child or young person. The guide makes clear that full account should be taken of both the identified risk factors and the child or young person’s family and wider circumstances. Where the child or young person is not deemed to be in need as defined in the Act, the social worker must consider onward referral to other agencies which provide services for children and young people with additional needs.

Whether frontline agencies are adequately equipped to identify victims and intervene at an early stage

31. As described above, the statutory guidance and the new step-by-step guide for frontline practitioners set out the roles and responsibilities of individual frontline agencies. Appropriate training of professionals is also of critical importance. It is the responsibility of LSCBs and individual organisations locally to ensure that such training is in place. There are, however, a wide range of actions underway nationally to support local areas in ensuring that frontline organisations and professionals have the skills and knowledge to identify victims and intervene at an early stage.

32. The National Working Group and other voluntary sector organisations continue to promote awareness and understanding. This work is pursued through web-based communications, conferences, seminars and other training and awareness-raising events. The National Working Group alone delivered awareness raising to over 3,400 practitioners between July 2011 and July 2012. Other relevant initiatives include:

— The Children’s Society Street Safe Project in Lancashire, where a group of young people have been working together to produce an advice leaflet for professionals.

The National Working Group is a charity and UK wide network of practitioners, policy makers and researchers working with children and young people who are at risk of, or who experience, sexual exploitation.
— Barnardo’s and the Local Government Association’s joint publication Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation: Helping local authorities to develop effective responses, issued in June 2012, which sets out how local authorities can protect children from sexual exploitation.

— joint work between the National Working Group and The Children’s Society to develop the Say Something If You See Something campaign, addressing the problem of hotels unwittingly being used as venues for the sexual exploitation of young people.

33. The Government understands that the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) is developing proposals for the training of frontline police officers on child sexual exploitation. ACPO has established a “task and finish” group to consider the learning and development issues for policing identified in the CEOP thematic assessment and is expected to publish a related action plan later in 2012. ACPO is also developing a virtual library of child sexual exploitation awareness materials and considering the best way to cover child sexual exploitation in the Police Online Knowledge Area (POLKA).

34. The Home Office is also ensuring that child sexual exploitation issues are taken account of in wider related work. This includes:

— the Teenage Rape Prevention campaign which ran until March 2012, raising awareness and preventing teenagers from becoming victims and perpetrators of sexual violence and abuse;

— the provision of support to 29 areas affected by gang and youth violence under its Ending Gang and Youth Violence strategy, which incorporates work to address the sexual exploitation of gang-associated women and girls;

— the Positive Futures programme which is focused on preventing and diverting vulnerable young people aged 10–19 away from crime and substance misuse;

— the Review of effective practice in responding to prostitution, published in October 2011; and

— supporting the work of the Metropolitan Police Healthy Relationships Training (HEART) Programme to safeguard teenage girls at risk of sexual violence and help those being abused to escape their predicament. A total of 360 girls have benefited from the HEART programme and a further 180 young women will take part in it in 2012.

35. The Department of Health (DH) is working with key partners to identify where existing training and guidance for health professionals can be improved. The 2012 Foundation Curriculum for new doctors now includes competences on meeting the health needs of women and children who are victims of violence and abuse, which means that all new foundation year doctors should receive relevant training. DH has also commissioned a short film to go on NHS Choices, the online “front door” to the NHS, to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation amongst young people, parents and healthcare professionals.

36. The College of Social Work has published curriculum guides for social work education, including one on neglect, violence and abuse of children and adults which includes specific reference to sexually exploited and trafficked children.

37. The action plan highlighted the particular importance of identifying the needs of vulnerable and intimidated witnesses as early as possible in the criminal justice process. The Provision of Therapy for Child Witnesses prior to a Criminal Trial: Practice Guidance issued in 2001 provides guidance for children’s services professionals and lawyers making decisions about the provision of therapeutic help for children prior to the trial.

38. Judges and magistrates are expected to take an active role in the management of cases involving young and vulnerable witnesses. This includes ensuring that reasonable adjustments are made and special measures are implemented to alleviate some of the stress of giving evidence. Children and young people under 18 are automatically eligible for special measures. These include, for example, providing child witnesses with more choice about how they give evidence; and the removal of wigs and gowns worn by judges and lawyers. Guidance on special measures has been updated and improved and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) has been proactive in promoting this to the sector.

39. The Witness Intermediary Scheme was set up by the MoJ to implement the intermediary special measure, providing trained and accredited professional communication specialists who can communicate between the court, defence and prosecution and the witness. To date the Scheme has assisted in over 5,500 cases, many of which would not have otherwise gone to trial. The MoJ is also taking forward work to explore the feasibility of the pre-trial video recorded cross-examination and re-examination special measure which would allow witnesses to provide all their evidence early in the prosecution process.

40. The MoJ documents Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings and Vulnerable and Intimidated Witnesses: a Police Service Guide (both March 2011) provide guidance for those responsible for conducting video-recorded interviews with vulnerable and intimidated witnesses, as well as those who prepare and support such witnesses during the criminal justice process.
41. The MoJ is currently reviewing victims’ services to ensure that those affected by crime—including young victims—are supported in the best way possible. Proposals were published in the consultation *Getting it right for victims and witnesses* which ran from 30 January to 22 April 2012.

42. The Home Office has made available £400,000 per year for the three years ending March 2015 to fund 13 young people’s advocates to support young victims of sexual violence and exploitation, including from street gangs. The successful bids have now been announced, with eight organisations gaining funding.

43. DH has established a Child Sexual Exploitation Health Working Group to take forward a programme of work to highlight the particular needs of children who have been sexually exploited. In addition, the Academy of Royal Colleges has set up its own working group to consider what more the Royal Colleges can do, both individually and together, to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation, identify victims, and provide ongoing support for them.

44. DH is also working to improve education and training to increase the pool of competent forensic physicians available to victims and the responsiveness of all doctors to victims of violence, including sexual assault. Work is additionally underway to improve the development of sexual assault referral centre (SARC) services.

45. The Department for Education (DfE) continues to support a Barnardo’s project developing specialised foster care placements for victims of child sexual exploitation and trafficking (see paragraph 62). The National Working Group is also continuing to help local authorities share good practice in making provision for children and young people who are recovering from child sexual exploitation.

**Challenges in bringing successful prosecutions against those who are involved in the localised grooming of children for sexual exploitation**

46. Apart from the difficulties inherent in uncovering and successfully investigating offences, there are a number of challenges in building the trust and confidence of victims and providing support to them. Support is necessary so that they are willing and able to engage fully in the criminal justice process and present as credible witnesses.

47. In order to overcome these challenges, organisations involved in the criminal justice system, including the MoJ, Attorney General’s Office, the Home Office, the CPS and ACPO, are working together to ensure that:

- professionals have the skills and knowledge to identify child sexual exploitation and play their part in delivering successful investigations and prosecutions;
- victims and witnesses are fully supported and protected from intimidation; and
- there is a confidence in the effectiveness of the criminal justice system.

48. Some examples from the wide range of work underway to help overcome these issues and challenges are:

- A joint MoJ and police project team which is developing proposals to improve guidance, training and authorised professional practice for police officers, to enhance the protection of intimidated witnesses.
- The Home Office working to ensure that the police continue their efforts to secure prosecutions locally, supported nationally by strategic threat assessments and CEOP.
- ACPO creating a toolkit for investigators to help secure prosecutions.
- Judges and magistrates being encouraged to take an active role in the management of cases involving young and vulnerable witnesses to alleviate the stress of giving evidence. This includes ensuring that reasonable adjustments are made and special measures (referred to in paragraphs 38 and 39 above) implemented as appropriate. In cases involving multiple defendants, judges are expected to consider the scope for restricting repeat cross examination.
- MoJ providing over £15 million in grant funding from April 2011 to March 2012, through the Victim and Witness General Fund, to voluntary sector organisations to provide support to victims of serious crimes including sexual exploitation.
- The CPS developing a programme of work to improve the effectiveness of prosecutions. This includes detailed consideration of a selection of child sexual exploitation cases and identification of best practice. It will result in targeted training and the development of legal guidance on the specific issues arising when prosecuting cases of child sexual exploitation.
- New sentencing powers for dangerous offenders coming into effect later in 2012, with serious violent and sexual offenders being subject to new extended determinate sentences. Very serious repeat offenders will be subject to mandatory life sentences.

**Children in Local Authority Care**

49. The Inquiry is examining the proportion of child victims in local authority care or otherwise known to social services. The Government agrees that this is an important area for investigation.
50. On 31 March 2012 there were 67,050 looked after children, 62% of whom were provided with a service due to abuse or neglect. 9% of the looked after children were accommodated in secure units, children’s homes and hostels. Evidence suggests that children in residential care may be particularly vulnerable to child sexual exploitation (see paragraphs 51 and 52 below).

51. The Barnardo’s *Puppet on a String* report highlighted the vulnerability of children in local authority care or otherwise known to social services. In particular, the report noted that:

“some groups of young people are more vulnerable to targeting by the perpetrators of sexual exploitation. These include: children living in care, particularly residential care, those who are excluded from mainstream school and those who misuse drugs and alcohol”.

Placing children in residential care “out of area” is another important issue. That is why the Government announced on 3 July the establishment of an expert task and finish group, chaired by the DI to consider such placements and the implications for young people’s safety and care. That group is established and is taking this work forward.

52. The CEOP thematic assessment and research by the University of Bedfordshire which followed later in 2011 both found that a disproportionate number of sexually exploited young people were looked after by the local authority, before or during exploitation. CEOP found that:

“Of the 896 children in the dataset whose living situation was known, 311 were already in care at the time of exploitation and a further 43 children were moved into care following intervention.”

The University of Bedfordshire research raised concerns about the high number of young people vulnerable to sexual exploitation who are accommodated in residential care; and the potential for that vulnerability to increase without specialised training and management in place.

53. As recorded in paragraph 7 above, following the conclusion of the Rochdale court case the Secretary of State for Education asked the Deputy Children’s Commissioner to report to him urgently on emerging findings from her Office’s CSEGG Inquiry. This “accelerated report”, published on 3 July, focused in particular on risks facing looked after children in children’s homes. The report recognised that:

“The current body of literature on child sexual exploitation consistently cites children in care as being particularly vulnerable to child sexual exploitation. … However, the literature also acknowledges that while children in care account for a disproportionate number of children known to be sexually exploited, the majority of known sexually exploited children are not children in care.”

54. The Deputy Children’s Commissioner made a number of recommendations in her report which have been accepted by Government. The APPG Joint Inquiry into Children Who Go Missing from Care, referred to in paragraph 8 above, reached similar conclusions.

55. Urgent action is now underway in response to those reports, to help protect children in residential care. It includes work to:

— ensure that there is much better and clearer data about children who go missing from care, and who may then be at risk of sexual exploitation. As mentioned in paragraph 20 above, the Department is working with the police, local authorities and voluntary groups to develop a data collection system which is more meaningful and gives a much clearer picture of the numbers of children who go missing from care;

— change regulations so that Ofsted can share information about the location of children’s homes with the police and any other relevant bodies;

— improve local authorities’ scrutiny of their decisions to place children out of area and the care and support provided to children who are placed away from their home authorities; and

— address all aspects of the quality of children’s homes and develop an action plan for significant improvements.

56. The Select Committee Inquiry is also examining the circumstances under which care services report missing children to the police. The Government is committed to protecting all missing people but recognises that children are particularly vulnerable to harm and exploitation whilst missing. The Government’s Missing Children and Adults Strategy accordingly highlights the importance of this issue and provides a core framework for local areas to consider if they can, and should, do more to protect children who go missing. The Department is also considering how local authorities, carers and the police can further improve local practice to prevent children from going missing from care and protect those who do.

57. The DfE *Statutory guidance on children who runaway and go missing from home or care* (2009) advises local authorities how to minimise the risk of children going missing from care and on circumstances in which care services should report missing children to the police. It emphasises the importance of authorities working with the police, providing all necessary information so that the child can be located as quickly as possible. The Department is currently revising the guidance to give local authorities a clearer understanding of their duties and how to decide on the arrangements which are suitable for their areas. At the same time, ACPO is proposing
to issue supplementary guidance to police forces, and will ensure that appropriate advice is consistent with DfE guidance.

58. The statutory guidance requires that local Runaway, Missing from Home and Care (RMFHC) protocols are in place and that LSCBs maintain an oversight of these. The local authority’s strategy for managing “missing from care” incidents should be set down in RMFHC protocols and agreed with the local police and other partner agencies, including any local voluntary services. These RMFHC protocols should cover a range of joint-working procedures and systems including:

— agreed categories of absence and definition of missing from local authority care;
— appropriate responses to children and young people who go missing from care, including arrangements for making missing persons reports to the police;
— escalating the approach to intervention with individual children to reduce the likelihood of a child repeatedly going missing;
— agreed reporting and recording systems for local authorities; and
— effective reporting and information-sharing between the local authority, the police and other agencies.

59. The National Minimum Standards for children’s homes and fostering services require all registered children’s homes and fostering services to have explicit procedures for when children in their care may be missing or absent without permission. These procedures must be compatible with local RMFHC protocols. The statutory guidance makes it clear that children’s homes and fostering services should work with the police and the authority responsible for the child’s care to do all they can to locate them.

The degree of coordination between the Department for Education’s child sexual exploitation strategy and other policy areas

60. DfE continues to work both within the Department and with other Government Departments at ministerial and official level to ensure that:

— the links between child sexual exploitation and related policy areas are highlighted in strategies, action plans and guidance documents; and
— there is effective co-ordination of different initiatives.

61. The progress report contains many examples of this co-ordinated approach across a wide range of policy areas. They include:

— working within the Department on children who run away or go missing from home or care, and missing from education policies;
— Ministers from DfE and the Home Office jointly chairing the UK Council for Child Internet Safety, which regularly discusses ways of helping children stay safe online;
— working with the Home Office on missing children, violence against women and girls, and women, girls and gangs policies; and
— working with MoJ on intimidated victims and witnesses policy.

62. The terms of reference for the Inquiry refer specifically to the “degree of coordination between the Department for Education’s child sexual exploitation strategy and the Home Office’s human trafficking strategy”. DfE and Home Office ministers and officials continue to work closely together to ensure that appropriate links are made between these policy areas. Examples of this important joint working can be found in the following Government documents:

— Human Trafficking: The Government’s Strategy (July 2011), which notes the particularly vulnerable position of children trafficked to and within the UK for the purposes of sexual exploitation. It sets out the Government’s commitment to prevent, and safeguard children from, the threat of child traffickers and to ensure that, where child victims are identified, they receive the best support and protection possible;
— Safeguarding children who may have been trafficked—Practice guidance (updated 2011), which is a joint DfE and Home Office document highlighting the plight of children trafficked into, and within, the UK for the purposes of sexual exploitation. It sets out the roles and responsibilities of individual agencies as well as the national capability that is in place to tackle such trafficking; and
— Tackling child sexual exploitation action plan (November 2011), which recognises the links between child sexual exploitation and trafficking and the need for specialised care for victims. It included a commitment by DfE to provide a voluntary and community service grant over the two years ending March 2013 to a Barnardo’s project developing specialist foster care placements for victims of child sexual exploitation and trafficking.
CONCLUSION

63. Child sexual exploitation is very complex and it is important that every aspect is addressed. This will take time but good progress is being made in implementing the action plan and DfE recognises the vital importance of that progress being maintained in the months ahead. The Department is determined that everything that can be done is done to make children and young people safer from sexual exploitation.

Annex A

SOURCE DOCUMENTS

All Party Parliamentary Groups for Runaway and Missing Children and for Looked After Children and Care Leavers

The Report from the Joint Inquiry into Children who Go Missing from Care, June 2012

Barnardo’s

Puppet on a String: the urgent need to cut children free from sexual exploitation, January 2011

Cut them free campaign, January 2011
http://www.barnardos.org.uk/cutmthemfree

Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP)

Thematic assessment, Out of Mind, Out of Sight—breaking down the barriers to understanding child sexual exploitation, 2011
www.ceop.police.uk/Publications

Crown Prosecution Service

The Provision of Therapy for Child Witnesses prior to a Criminal Trial: Practice Guidance
http://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/prosecution/therapychild.html

Guidance on special measures
http://www.cps.gov.uk/legal/s_to_u/special_measures/

Resources to support Victims and Witnesses
http://www.cps.gov.uk/victims_witnesses/

Department for Education

Tackling child sexual exploitation action plan, November 2011
www.education.gov.uk/tackling-child-sexual-exploitation

Tackling child sexual exploitation action plan progress report, July 2012
www.education.gov.uk/tackling-child-sexual-exploitation

What to do if you suspect a child is being sexually exploited—a step-by-step guide for frontline practitioners, July 2012
www.education.gov.uk/tackling-child-sexual-exploitation

Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation: Supplementary guidance to Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2009
www.education.gov.uk/tackling-child-sexual-exploitation

Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care, 2009
www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/safeguarding/a0066653/young-runaways

Safeguarding children who may have been trafficked—Practice guidance, 2011

Statistical First Release—Children looked after by local authorities in England, 25 September 2012

Home Office

http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/crime/human-trafficking-strategy

Review of effective practice in responding to prostitution, 2011
http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/crime/responding-to-prostitution

Missing children and adults strategy, 2011
http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/police/missing-persons-strategy

Ministry of Justice

Consultation document on getting it right for victims and witnesses, January—April 2012
https://consult.justice.gov.uk/digital-communications/victims-witnesses/consult_view

The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act, 2012

National Working Group http://nationalworkinggroup.org/

Office of the Children’s Commissioner (OCC), England

Office of the Children’s Commissioner Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups
http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/info/csegg1

The Office of the Children’s Commissioner’s (OCC) early report on emerging findings from its Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups, July 2012
http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/content/publications

University of Bedfordshire

What’s going on to safeguard children and young people from sexual exploitation? How local partnerships respond to child sexual exploitation

The University of Bedfordshire Child Sexual Exploitation Data Monitoring Tool, 2011

University of Bedfordshire “Self Assessment Tool” to assess progress in protecting children from sexual exploitation, 2012

Annex B

ORGANISATIONS REPRESENTED AT CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION ROUNDTABLE MEETINGS

Association of Directors of Children’s Services

Attorney General’s Office (the then Solicitor General and official)

Barnardo’s

Blast

British Youth Council

Centre for Justice

Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Runaway and Missing Children and Adults

Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP)

Child sexual exploitation survivor

Children’s Society

Coalition for the Removal of Pimping
Comedic Relief
Department for Education (the then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, who chaired the meetings, and official)
Department of Health (official)
Derby LSCB
Home Office (the then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State and officials)
Lancashire Police
Lucy Faithfull Foundation
Ministry of Justice (the then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State and officials)
National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People
Office of the Children's Commissioner
Rape Crisis
Safe and Sound Derby
University of Bedfordshire
Youth awareness campaigner

Supplementary written evidence from the Department for Education [LCG 06a]

Q899—How many LSCBs there will be in each region

LSCBs are established by local authorities and may cover more than one local authority area. The list of LSCBs by region (attached as Appendix 1) is held by the Department for Education for operational reasons. LSCBs are not required to register their details with the Department so the information may be incomplete. The Association of Independent LSCB Chairs has details of LSCB’s contact information which can be found here http://www.lscbchairs.org.uk/Contacting_LSCBs .

Q902—Information on which LSCBs are still requiring intervention

Background information on forms of intervention

— Forms of non-statutory intervention include: the provision of external consultancy support; the establishment of Improvement Boards (with or without an independent Chair); enhanced monitoring and challenge; and, since April 2008, the issuing of non-statutory Improvement Notices which have often been used to underpin a package of intervention made up of some or all of the above.

— Improvement Notices are not legal instruments, but rather formal notices designed to tackle significant or enduring underperformance in a local authority or partnership. Issued by the appropriate Secretary of State (or Minister on their behalf), they clearly specify the issue of concern, the level of improvement required, when and how this will be assessed, and subsequent steps that may be taken if improvement is not achieved. Local authorities and partners who are the subject of an Improvement Notice are involved in discussion of the content of the Improvement Notice before it is finalised.

— More critical or enduring underperformance may necessitate the use of statutory directions. The Secretary of State is able to direct a local authority using powers in section 497A of the Education Act 1996 (as applied to children’s social care by section 50 of the Children Act 2004) to take whatever action is deemed expedient to achieve necessary improvement.

— These intervention measures are considered in cases where Ofsted inspections identify inadequate practice and serious concerns about practice in relation to safeguarding, adoption and looked after children. The measures do not specifically relate to practice on child sexual exploitation.

Local Authorities directed using statutory powers or Improvement Notice as at 4 April 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Directed using statutory powers</th>
<th>Issue Date</th>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cornwall</td>
<td>02/12/09</td>
<td>Social care (Safeguarding (S) and Looked After Children (LAC))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doncaster</td>
<td>12/03/09</td>
<td>Children’s services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham</td>
<td>18/03/13</td>
<td>Children’s Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement Notice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnsley</td>
<td>27/11/12</td>
<td>Social care (S and LAC)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q912—How widely “return interviews” with children who have run away from care are implemented as standard practice.

The number of children who have return interviews who have run away from care is not collected centrally. Ofsted would consider evidence of return interviews as part of their inspection on safeguarding arrangements. The recent Ofsted report “Missing People” published in February reports that out of the 50 cases they tracked they found evidence of return interviews taking place in 11 (p14 paragraph 37). The report goes on to say (paragraph 48) that looked after children who live in children’s homes were more likely to receive return interviews than children living in foster care.

We are currently revising the guidance on children who go missing from home and care and there will be an emphasis in the guidance on the need for return interviews and to use the information gathered in them to improve services and reduce the risk of a child running away again.

APPENDIX 1

LONDON

LSCB

Barking & Dagenham
Barnet
Bexley
Brent
Bromley
Camden
Croydon
Ealing
Enfield
Greenwich
Hackney & City
Hammersmith & Fulham
Haringey
Harrow
Havering
Hillingdon
Hounslow
Islington
Kensington & Chelsea
Kingston Upon Thames
Lambeth
Lewisham
Merton
Newham
Redbridge
Richmond Upon Thames
Southwark
Sutton
Tower Hamlets
Ev 144  Home Affairs Committee: Evidence

Waltham Forest
Wandsworth
Westminster

SOUTH EAST

LSCB
Bracknell Forest
Brighton and Hove
Buckinghamshire
East Sussex
Hampshire
Isle Of Wight
Kent
Medway
Milton Keynes
Oxfordshire
Portsmouth
Reading
Slough
Southampton
Surrey
West Berkshire
West Sussex
Windsor & Maidenhead
Wokingham

SOUTH WEST

LSCB
Bath & N E Smerset
Bournemouth
Bristol City
Cornwall
Devon
Dorset
Gloucestershire
Isle of Scilly
North Somerset
Plymouth
Poole
Somerset
South Gloucestershire
Swindon
Torbay
Wiltshire

WEST MIDLANDS

LSCB
Birmingham
Coventry
Dudley
Herefordshire
Sandwell
Shropshire
Solihull
Staffordshire
Stoke on Trent
Telford and Wrekin
Walsall
Warwickshire
Wolverhampton
Worcestershire
EAST MIDLANDS

LSCB
Derby City
Derbyshire
Leicester City
Leicestershire & Rutland
Lincolnshire
Northamptonshire
Nottingham City
Nottinghamshire

NORTH EAST

LSCB
Darlington
Durham
Gateshead
Hartlepool
Middlesbrough
Newcastle
North Tyneside
Northumberland
Redcar & Cleveland
South Tyneside
Stockton
Sunderland

NORTH WEST

LSCB
Blackburn with Darwen
Blackpool
Bolton
Bury
Cheshire East
Cheshire West & Chester
Cumbria
Halton
Knowsley
Lancashire
Liverpool
Manchester
Oldham
Rochdale
Salford
Sefton
St Helens
Stockport
Tameside
Trafford
Warrington
Wigan
Wirral

YORKSHIRE & HUMBER

LSCB
Barnsley
Bradford
Calderdale
Doncaster
East Riding
Hull
Kirklees
Leeds
Executive Summary

1. Barnardo’s has been working on the issue of child sexual exploitation for over 18 years. We are glad to contribute to the Home Affairs Select Committee review of challenges faced in bringing successful prosecutions against those involved in grooming children for sexual exploitation. Barnardo’s gathers data on service users who are groomed locally and those drawn into exploitation in other ways so our submission gives our responses to the questions as they relate to the issue of child sexual exploitation as a whole.

2. This submission draws on statistical evidence from Barnardo’s UK-wide service-base of 21 services and almost 1,200 service-users. However, the points raised are specifically applicable to England as Barnardo’s understands this is the area covered by the review.

3. Barnardo’s has seen significant improvements in agencies’ understanding of and response to child sexual exploitation within the last five years. Since 2010–11 the combination of high profile prosecutions and the government’s national action plan has reinforced the attention that statutory agencies give to this abuse. Barnardo’s services and research on sexual exploitation both indicate that this increased attention has been accompanied by widespread efforts to improve local responses, through greater provision of training, development of local strategies and proliferation of multi-agency partnership working.

4. In particular, Barnardo’s has noted improvements in the support provided to vulnerable young people by the police in many areas. At a strategic level, local police forces have been central to the development and delivery of coordinated multi-agency responses in many areas. At the frontline, police officers demonstrate notably better understanding of the vulnerabilities and needs of young people who are at risk of or are already being exploited. Within the last two years, Barnardo’s has observed that greater numbers of local multi-agency teams are being established to identify and support victims and police are involved in a high proportion of these, with many teams co-located with the police.

5. Despite the greater interest in and improved efforts to tackle child sexual exploitation, Barnardo’s is aware that local responses remain inconsistent, data monitoring of cases is very patchy and specialist provision for victims is still not widespread. The limitations of local action on child sexual exploitation create a number of challenges to prosecutions.

Barnardo’s Knowledge Base

6. Barnardo’s has been working on the issue of child sexual exploitation for over 18 years, supporting victims, informing policy, raising awareness and conducting research so it is better understood. We now have 21 services across the UK (17 in England, one serving the whole of Northern Ireland, two in Scotland and one serving much of Wales).

7. Our specialist sexual exploitation services worked with 1,190 young people and children in 2010–11. These services have seen notable increases in referrals in recent years and service user figures rose by 8.4% in 2010–11. We are currently gathering data for 2011–12 but initial indications are that services have worked with even greater numbers of children who are at very high risk or actively being sexually exploited.

8. Barnardo’s specialist sexual exploitation services provide direct support to vulnerable or victimized children and young people through one-to-one sessions with a single support worker and, where appropriate, through group sessions. The children and young people are supported to recognize risks and to identify how individuals and relationships could be harming them. As our work is focused on helping them to move on to more positive experiences, these services also actively support their engagement in education, provide access to training or employment opportunities and use leisure activities such as cinema visits to re-engage vulnerable children and young people with mainstream activities. The services will also provide third-party advice and guidance to other professionals who are concerned about a child or young person but for whom a referral is not (yet) necessary.

9. Barnardo’s combines its service provision with work to inform professionals, the public, politicians and policy makers. Our specialist services provide training to professionals in recognizing the signs of sexual exploitation, developing appropriate response strategies and supporting victims. Many services also deliver awareness-raising sessions to parents and carers, and some work with parents or carers if this is in the interests...
of the service user themselves. We also train foster-carers for young people who have been sexually exploited or trafficked; this is a two-year pilot funded by the Department for Education.

10. Barnardo’s Strategy Unit carries out research with services and service users to refine our understanding of this abuse, and works with voluntary-sector and statutory agencies to promote awareness both of individual cases and the overall range and scale of child sexual exploitation. The research includes evaluation of Barnardo’s specialist services and, recently, an econometric analysis of the financial benefits (to the Treasury) of these child sexual exploitation services. The Bank of England economists who conducted the analysis (pro bono) concluded that Barnardo’s provision saved £12 for every £1 spent.14

11. The Strategy Unit works to inform policy, practice and resource-allocation by engaging closely with key government departments and representative bodies such as the Local Government Association and the Association of Chief Police Officers. Barnardo’s also has a campaign to “Cut them free” from child sexual exploitation. This was launched in January 2011 with calls for a lead minister to be appointed and a national action plan to be produced, both of which were fulfilled in 2011. The campaign subsequently called on local authorities to commit to tackling this abuse and over two-thirds (107 of 152) have. The campaign is now focused on informing Police and Crime Commissioners candidates.

THE CONCEPT OF “LOCALISED GROOMING OF CHILDREN FOR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION”

12. Barnardo’s is glad that the Home Affairs Select Committee is considering the challenges faced in bringing successful prosecutions against those involved in grooming children for sexual exploitation. Please note that our evidence relates to the broader term of “child sexual exploitation” as we gather data on our service users who were groomed locally and those drawn into sexual exploitation through other means.

13. Through our work with almost 1,200 victims and highly vulnerable children a year, we are aware that child sexual exploitation can take many forms. The manner by which victims are groomed varies greatly, from face-to-face contact with someone who comes to be thought of by the victim as their “boyfriend” or “girlfriend”, to online or phone-based contact with someone the victim may not meet in person. In the context of online or phone-based contact it is difficult to apply the concept of “localised” grooming. Even where grooming is face-to-face it may not be “local” as vulnerable young people are often encouraged to travel out of area to meet with abusers. There is also the issue of children in care being moved out of borough for care placements, and either being groomed in the new area or followed by those who were already grooming them. Abusers will also travel to initiate and conduct sexual exploitation, so the grooming may not be conducted locally to either victim or abuser.

14. Barnardo’s would ask that the Home Affairs Select Committee consider that the length of time taken to “groom” an individual victim can also be very short, and may not appear to involve much of what is understood as typical initiation of child sexual exploitation. Many of the victims Barnardo’s works with have been groomed over a significant time, but this is not always the case, and with our male service-users in particular it can be very difficult to know how the grooming has occurred. The case of an 11 year-old girl (not a Barnardo’s service-user) considered in a recent Attorney General’s Reference Case shows the process of engaging a vulnerable child or young person in subsequent sexual exploitation (grooming) can take moments:

15. On the night ... the complainant was out late while her mother was working. She lost contact with her female friend and found herself alone in Luton town centre. ... She was approached by a 16 year old boy who was well known to the complainant’s family. ... The boy threatened to tell her mother that she had been with men and then told her that she should go with him to do something for him. Without knowing what it was that he wanted of her she accompanied him ... [and] ... saw the two offenders. She was taken by all three males to the flats opposite [and raped] (Attorney General’s Reference Cases 011 and 012 of 2012.)15

What proportion of victims are in care/otherwise known to social services?

16. Social services are made aware of the young people with whom Barnardo’s specialist sexual exploitation services are working. In England, Barnardo’s services often request that the young person is also given a social worker to ensure there is ongoing support. However, only a minority of service users are referred to Barnardo’s by social services.

17. Barnardo’s has a comprehensive monitoring system to ensure it is making a difference to its service users. This Outcomes Monitoring Framework (OMF) data can be collated anonymously. Collating information on the 3,528 children and young people who have used our sexual exploitation services between January 2006 and July 2012 shows that:

— over a third had been referred by social services (1,300 or 37%);
— almost a third were in care while at our service or when referred (1,089 or 31%); and
— two-thirds of those referred by social services were not in care when referred (868 or 67% of the 1,300 referred by social services).

18. The data indicates that a significant minority of victims (almost a third) are in the care of local authorities around the time of referral (note some will go into care after referral). Another minority of victims (over a third) were referred by social services, and most of these were not in care at the time of referral. Clearly children in care are significantly over-represented among Barnardo’s sexual exploitation service users; this is consistent with other statistical evidence of children in care’s greater vulnerability to this abuse. Social services do refer many of those who are in care but this data indicates that most of those they identify as needing support are not in care—but however, social services still do not refer the majority of young people to our services. It might be expected that the overall numbers of children referred by social services will increase with the creation of more sensitive referral systems and widespread training about the signs of exploitation.

19. Barnardo’s has seen considerable variation between social services’ criteria for triggering involvement in individual cases of child sexual exploitation. Some local authorities have specific referral and assessment procedures for suspected cases but others use only the standard child protection procedures. The standard child protection procedures can be set at too high a threshold to “trigger” until a very vulnerable child is actively exploited, so the signs of vulnerability and the signs of grooming or incipient abuse may be noticed but the generic system does not facilitate response. Having a system which is designed to attend to the specific indications of child sexual exploitation enables social services to be more responsive overall and to identify and tackle individual cases at an earlier stage.

20. Barnardo’s is also aware that social services sometimes assess child protection cases in such a way that a 15-year old who is actively exploited may not receive an appropriate response because they are considered too old to be prioritized. There is also evidence of social service professionals (and those in other key agencies) interpreting exploited young people as having consented, so the activity is not identified as abuse. Barnardo’s staff (and those in other specialist services) address misunderstandings as they arise but social services should ensure that staff are well informed and use systems appropriately.

Do social service response systems take adequate account of signs of abuse?

21. In some local authorities, Barnardo’s specialist services have worked with social services to refine or update their procedures, either directly or through the Local Safeguarding Children Board. In these and other areas, social services staff have had training from Barnardo’s on identifying the signs of child sexual exploitation, as well as understanding vulnerabilities and risk factors, and planning appropriate responses. Barnardo’s is aware that such training is also being delivered by a number of other agencies and that many local authorities have now had local multi-agency training on child sexual exploitation.

22. In a review of local authority action on child sexual exploitation (conducted this month), Barnardo’s interviewed representatives from 31 local authorities, one in five of all local authorities with safeguarding responsibilities in England. Twelve local authorities were delivering or using training on child sexual exploitation and a further thirteen were scoping or developing training programmes to be rolled out within the next six months.

What support is provided to victims and witnesses by a range of agencies?

23. Barnardo’s has noted a widespread improvement in the support provided to victims of child sexual exploitation over the two decades we have been delivering services. There are many more specialist services across the UK than there were even five years ago and our own services report marked changes in how many statutory services respond to sexually exploited young people. However, it is also apparent that some agencies are improving more rapidly than others, and that all agencies need to ensure that their core staff have appropriate training, particularly to address any misunderstanding of “consent”.

Voluntary sector

24. The voluntary sector was the original and is still the main provider of specialist support to children and young people who are sexually exploited—or identified as being at high risk. There has been a notable expansion in the range of provision within the sector as specialists in other fields, such as projects working with young people who go missing, have identified the importance of and opportunities for supporting sexually exploited young people. In addition to the growth in the voluntary-sector, the last two years has seen a significant increase in the development of statutory multi-agency (sometimes co-located) teams offering specialist support.

25. However, many areas still do not have specific services. Of the 31 local authorities who responded to our recent survey of local authority action on child sexual exploitation, only half provided their own specialist services or received voluntary-sector provision. A further third were in the process of recruiting for specialist services, or were considering future provision for young people at risk of sexual exploitation. We know that Barnardo’s remains the largest provider with 21 of the 80-plus services listed by the National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People website.

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18 www.nationalworkinggroup.org (Accessed 28 August 2012)
26. For the voluntary-sector services such as Barnardo’s the focus is always on the victim, so a service will support a young person in considering whether to pursue a prosecution against an abuser and whether and how to be involved as a witness, and will then assist them in the path they have chosen. It is important of course that services are not seen to be influencing a service user who does pursue prosecution, and supporting a young person during a court case can pose significant challenges to the key worker; however, most services will—like Barnardo’s—have clear systems in place to facilitate this so that the young person can retain the supportive relationship without questions being raised. It is crucial that young people receive this ongoing support at such a time of great stress. Not only does it give them consistency with a trusted adult, which they may not have in other areas of their life, but the key worker can play an important role in helping them to navigate the court system. The service can also play a significant role in supporting young people after prosecution, especially if the case has fallen apart or the sentence is shorter than expected. It is not yet clear the extent to which these observations hold for the emergent statutory teams, especially given that many of them include the police.

Police

27. Barnardo’s has noted a substantial improvement in local police forces’ interest in and understanding of child sexual exploitation. Since 2009, Barnardo’s services have noted year-on-year improvements in local police responses to service users and to the issue in general. Increasingly, police forces where we have our services are viewed as playing a significant role if not leading role in local action and strategic responses to this abuse. Eleven of the 31 local authorities in our survey highlighted the police’s role in the local strategic response. In five areas the police had specialist facilities and procedures for those at risk of sexual exploitation. In two areas, police chaired the sub-group. In two areas, agencies working with sexually exploited children were co-located with the police. Police were identified more often than any other agency as being central to this work.

28. Improvements have been reported by our services at both the police frontline and their more strategic level. At a strategic level, the issue has been given greater attention and, in some areas, additional resources in terms of policing time to profile the local problem or to work in multi-agency teams focused on tackling this abuse. Many police forces are involved in the development of local authority or regional strategic plans on child sexual exploitation. At the frontline, police officers and support staff are demonstrating better understanding of young people’s vulnerabilities and our services report they are dealing with them more appropriately—whether being more attentive to the risks of abuse if a young person has been identified as missing or being more supportive if they are known to be exploited. A number of our services allow police to visit young people on site, if the young person agrees, so they can provide information and consider being a witness.

29. Despite the improvements noted by our services, very few of our service users have seen their alleged abuser convicted. In 2009–10, our services were aware of 137 police investigations involving service users as victims of crimes relating to sexual exploitation. Of the 130 which had concluded, only 40 were taken to prosecution (it is worth noting that the largest sub-set of cases, 12 or a third of all, were for grooming via the internet). Our service staff in England say the police typically do a lot to prepare the young person for the court case but it is the court system itself that is often seen as problematic.

Crown Prosecution Service

30. Barnardo’s has not conducted a thorough review of the prosecution experience of our sexual exploitation service users, but in discussions of policing, prosecutions and court experiences our service staff have identified decisions by the Crown Prosecution Service not to prosecute specific cases as having reduced local confidence in the value of seeking justice. Service staff do not influence young people’s decisions over whether to pursue prosecution and stand as a witness, and so individual cases are led by the young person. However, service staff have reflected to the research and policy staff about the challenge of supporting young people through to prosecution after seeing other cases end as the Crown Prosecution Service decides that a young person is not “a credible witness”. One local authority which responded to our recent survey of action on exploitation raised a similar issue, unprompted. The local authority said that the potential arising from the positive changes seen in policing had been blocked by a lack of attitudinal change in the Crown Prosecution Service, limiting the scope for positive outcomes. We have been informed that the Crown Prosecution Service is conducting a review to understand the basis of the decisions not to pursue those child sexual exploitation cases it has dropped.

Are frontline agencies well equipped to identify victims and intervene early?

31. Barnardo’s experience is that frontline agencies vary markedly in their ability to identify victims and intervene at an early stage—however, the overall standard of awareness and response is improving. Comprehensive training in recognizing the signs and responding appropriately is crucial to professionals’ ability to fulfill their responsibilities at all levels. Our recent review of a sample of 31 local authorities found that most were delivering multi-agency training or otherwise raising professional awareness of sexual exploitation. However, the local authorities also highlighted a need for external training and external resources for training, as budget austerity limits their scope to adequately resource it.

32. The review also found that the majority were developing or implementing some form of strategic activity intended to improve the response to children who were identified as at risk. Sixteen local authorities, half of the sample, had introduced Local Safeguarding Children Board sub-groups to address child sexual exploitation—10 had been formed within the last 18 months. Fourteen local authorities either had strategies on child sexual exploitation (11 councils) or were developing a strategy (three councils). Six of the 11 local authorities who had strategies already in place were in the process of updating them, or had updated them since 2011. Four had strategies spanning more than one local authority, providing consistency between neighbouring councils or authorities which operated at different levels. Twelve local authorities had developed protocols for responding to young people who may be being sexually exploited.

33. It is difficult for Barnardo’s to extrapolate from this sample (one in five of all England’s local authorities with safeguarding responsibilities) but the independent feedback from our services is that there has been a broad improvement in agencies’ recognition of and action over child sexual exploitation. However, this was improvement from a very low base and—although Barnardo’s is seeing year-on-year increases in referrals—there are still major areas of vulnerability which are under-identified. The rates of male referrals are still very low in many areas, for example, although where Barnardo’s projects have a history of working with male service users we see markedly higher referral rates which implies there is both an un-met demand and an under-recognised need in other areas.

To what extent have LSCBs implemented key aspects of national guidance?

34. Barnardo’s has worked at both a local and a national level to assist Local Safeguarding Children Boards and individual agencies in implementing the safeguarding guidance on child sexual exploitation and the more recent national action plan on tackling this abuse. As part of our national activity, we produced a checklist of actions for local authorities:20

— Put in place systems to monitor the number of children at risk of sexual exploitation.
— Create a Local Safeguarding Children Board strategy to tackle child sexual exploitation.
— Nominate a lead person with responsibility for coordinating a multi-agency response.
— Provide access to specialist service provision for children at risk of sexual exploitation.
— Review how professionals are trained to spot the signs of sexual exploitation.

35. This checklist was launched in August 2011 and supplemented with regional events to discuss how to design and deliver a strategic response and to manage individual cases. One year on, we contacted all local authorities to ask about their activity in the light of our guidance and the broader implementation of the government’s national action plan. As discussed, 31 of the 152 local authorities responded. All in this self-selecting sample had made some progress in developing local understanding of the abuse and a majority had made progress in how they were responding. Notably, much of the action (creating strategies, providing training, and developing multi-agency sub-groups) had occurred in the last 18 months. It was not clear from the interviews to what extent this timeline corresponds to the government’s emphasis on the issue by publishing the national action plan and to what extent it was influenced by local concerns following major court cases. Either way, the increased importance of the issue to local authorities is shown in the fact that 13 of the 31 LSCBs made child sexual exploitation a key priority for 2013–14.

36. However, although this sample of local authorities had made progress it was only partial. Whilst some local authorities were refining previous strategies, many were starting from a very low base and acknowledged that progress was slow. Funding was identified by some as a barrier, whilst lack of internal expertise and organisational upheaval were also cited as challenges to the development of a strategy.

37. The majority of LSCBs had a child sexual exploitation sub-group, which incorporates representatives from a range of agencies. However, many were less than 18 months old, and still in the process of developing and improving upon the multi-agency strategy. The development of multi-agency responses and partnerships have been more positive, with police widely identified by local authorities as facilitating collaborative responses. Social services were mentioned far less often but were known to be central to the response.

38. In research for the good practice briefing published jointly with the Local Government Association we found that the scale of multi-agency collaboration and strategic working can also contribute to effective responses. Having cross-border partnerships facilitates action over individual abusers or victims who travel from area to area. Having regional or joint-local authority strategies in addition to or in place of individual strategies offers opportunities for identifying wider trends and developing more comprehensive actions, and has in some cases led to new pooled resources for specialist provision or response.

What is the quality of data collection, data sharing and research on the issue?

39. As outlined at the outset, Barnardo’s is not able to provide any data specifically about the incidence or character of “localised grooming”. We know that the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Agency did manage to gather some data on “localised grooming” child victims and on the profile of the abusers, but we are not aware of any other data-gathering exercise on this form of exploitation specifically. Likewise, we are
not aware of research into “localised grooming” per se. The picture for data collection, data sharing and research into child sexual exploitation in general is more positive.

40. Barnardo’s collaborates closely with other major organisations working on this issue. We co-host a twice-yearly child sexual exploitation research forum with the National Working Group and the University of Bedfordshire. We assist the National Working Group in gathering and analyzing data on service provision and service users. We co-founded and co-manage the What Works for Us representative group for young people who have been sexually exploited and want to contribute to research and policy on it. We have worked with the Local Government Association to produce a good practice briefing for effective strategic responses to child sexual exploitation.21 Throughout this collaborative work we have found the concept of child sexual exploitation to be well-understood and relevant to the various forms under analysis.

41. In our recent survey of local activity we found that data collection is still very patchy. Only three of the local authorities sampled had developed an overview of the scale and form of the local problem, but only one had yet implemented a data-monitoring system, and it was still in the very initial stages of use. A further five were still considering how to gather data on child sexual exploitation. There were also notable inconsistencies in the type and detail of data collected by local authorities which may make monitoring progress and comparisons more difficult, certainly at a national level. The other three-quarters were not planning to develop a data-gathering system in the near future. In the research for the LGA good practice briefing we did find that some areas have conducted local problem profiles, and have systems to refine the picture as data is collected, but it is clear from our sample and other organisations’ work that data-monitoring is limited.

BARNARDO’S REFERENCES ON CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

(2012) Cutting them free: How is the UK progressing in protecting its children from sexual exploitation?
(2011) Reducing the risk, cutting the cost: An assessment of the potential savings from Barnardo’s interventions for young people who have been sexually exploited.
(2011) Puppet on a string: The urgent need to cut children free from sexual exploitation.

www.barnardos.org.uk/what_we_do/policy_research_unit/research_and_publications/sexual_exploitation_research_resources.htm (Accessed 28 August 2012)

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Barnardo’s
August 2012

Written evidence from Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre [LCG 09]

I write to you in my position as Chief Executive Officer for The Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre and as the ACPO Lead for Child Protection and Abuse Investigation and Missing Children. Following the oral evidence I gave to you on 12 June 2012 I would like to submit further written evidence in order to assist you and The Home Affairs Select Committee in its Inquiry into Localised Grooming.

CEOP is considered the strategic lead agency on matters relating to Child Sexual Exploitation. We are continually developing expertise and knowledge within the centre working alongside partners to prevent crime, protect victims and to pursue offenders in a number of areas. This includes Localised Grooming also known as Group and Gang Associated Child Sexual Exploitation (GGCSE).

GGCSE is a growing agenda highlighted in recent high profile cases. There have also been a number of pieces of research in this area. In 2011 Barnardo’s published “A Puppet on a String: the urgent need to cut children free from sexual exploitation”. This assessment highlighted concerns about a lack of CSE Awareness amongst frontline practitioners and strategic planners. Similarly CEOP’s Thematic Assessment “Out of Mind, Out of Sight” highlighted that Group Associated Child Sexual Abuse (CSE) is taking place everywhere but much of it falls below the radar of relevant authorities, and that there are significant gaps in intelligence and knowledge regarding this type of criminality.

Alongside this in 2011 the government published its “Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan”, the plan included a range of commitments and actions from a variety of departments aiming to ensure victims are identified and supported to break away from CSE. Following these publications The University of Bedfordshire,
supported by Comic Relief published research exploring the response of Local Safeguarding Children’s Board’s (LSCB’s) to the 2009 Government Guidance “Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation”. This report found that the guidance was not always implemented, and as a result, there was insufficient awareness of CSE among young people, parents and carers.

Following on a variety of research and ongoing work has been published and is underway in 2012:

- The progress report into the government’s “Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan” has been published
- The Deputy Children’s Commissioner has launched a an Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups—an accelerated report into the emerging findings has been published with specific relevance to the disproportionate level of children in care becoming victims of CSE as well as indicating that the scope and extent of GGCSE is far greater than what is currently known. The initial report is due to be published at the end of October 2012.
- The Office for the Children’s Commissioner for England, The University of Bedfordshire and The Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime are researching the prevalence of, children and young people’s routes into and away from sexual exploitation in gang affected neighbourhoods.
- Missing People and The University of Bedfordshire are researching Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and CSE.
- Barnardo’s in partnership with Paradigm Research are debriefing children who go missing and are victims of CSE to learn from the experiences.

This is clear evidence that all partners are working to understand and address this serious issue in all its forms, work to date has proven valuable and progress is being made by partners, there has already been action taken to address the matter in response to recommendations resulting from the initial research. These points have been referenced in detail throughout this document in the relevant areas, they are outlined in summary below;

**ACTION ALREADY TAKEN:**

- The Witness Intermediary Scheme—Ministry of Justice (MOJ)
- The creation of a Data Monitoring Toll—University of Bedfordshire
- ACPO Missing Pilots—triailling revised definitions of Missing and Absent
- ACPO and NPIA creation of a CSE Awareness DVD for frontline staff
- ACPO/CEOP consultation with senior investigating officers regarding victim and witness experiences
- The creation of a Memorandum of Understanding between UKHTC and CEOP

Moving forward from Research conducted/in progress and actions completed, I can report on the current action that is underway to address this issue:

CEOP conducted an annual threat assessment in 2011 which identified 5 key threat areas to be focused on in 2012–13. These areas are identified below:

1. Targeting of children based on heightened vulnerability.
2. Those who offend sexually against children using the anonymity of the hidden internet.
3. The production, distribution and possession of Indecent Images of Children (IIOC’s).
4. Those who travel overseas to sexually offend.
5. Group and Gang Associated Child Sexual Exploitation (GGCSE).

Key threat 5 is specifically relevant to this Inquiry and looks to scope and assess our existing understanding of GGCSE, identify gaps in intelligence, examine research into the threat and identify and take forward action in order to address the threat. Currently this key threat is in the process of being reviewed within CEOP. The review will benchmark the current knowledge on GGCSE as a result of academic research and operational experience, a product of this review will be an Action Plan specific to GGCSE; this will identify actions and deliverables to be undertaken across the centre, and will also be for the consideration of partners. CEOP has been and will continue to be engaging with stakeholders and partners across the government and voluntary sector to provide support, guidance and collaboration around this work whilst ensuring consistency and reducing duplication.

In addition to the work undertaken by CEOP, in my role as ACPO Lead for Child Protection and Abuse Investigation I led the production of a CSE Action plan for ACPO, the plan was created in recognition the seriousness of this type of criminality and of the learning and development issues identified for policing within the Governments “Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan” and CEOP’s Thematic Assessment “Out Mind, Out of Sight”. The objective of the plan is to improve existing partnership working, victim prevention and protection, pursuit of offenders and service delivery. The plan is currently in draft and being progressed.
through ACPO for endorsement. Subject to this endorsement we aim to publish the plan in late 2012. The draft plan sets in place a total of 31 individual actions under seven key considerations;

1. Leadership—Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation is a multiagency issue which requires clear leadership within the police service and from the police service towards partners.

2. Victims—Protecting, Supporting, Safeguarding and Managing Risk; a key priority for the police service is to identify and protect children and young people at risk of, or subject to sexual exploitation and to safeguard, support and prevent them from further harm.

3. Partnerships—Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation; is one of the most important challenges facing the police; the only way to tackle it effectively is through multiagency working and a partnership approach. Our objective is to build on and strengthen existing partnerships and identify new partnerships (internal and external) to tackle Child Sexual Exploitation.

4. Effective Investigations and Bringing offenders to Justice—Tackling offending behaviour is crucial to the effective prevention of Child Sexual Exploitation and protection of victims, this will be delivered through professional investigation, effective identification and targeting of perpetrators (including potential perpetrators) and robust offender management.

5. Prevention—Public Confidence and Awareness; Child Sexual Exploitation takes place within our communities, it is important that we engage and raise awareness and understanding to prevent children from becoming victims. It is crucial to victims and public confidence that the response of the police service is reflected accurately through the media and other public facing communication methods.

6. Intelligence and Performance Monitoring—It is of essential that we gain a greater knowledge and understanding of Child Sexual Exploitation and how to effectively target activity at a local, regional and national level. Understanding and monitoring performance is vital to assist the effective promulgation of learning and sharing of best practice.

7. Learning and Development—The depth of knowledge held by frontline policing professionals in Child Sexual Exploitation is inconsistent, it is critical they have the understanding to recognise and respond effectively to Child Sexual Exploitation.

It is evident that there is a clear need for Policing to drive forward proactive work in partnership with other agencies around CSE, this action plan offers a clear way forward that can be monitored and adapted to encompass further recommendations and issues as they arise.

Both CEOP and ACPO are working closely with the Home Office, Department for Education, UKHTC, The Office of the Children’s Commissioner and many other partners and stakeholders in furthering work around GGCSE.

In terms of the future for CEOP in all areas of its business I spoke in detail when I gave oral evidence on 12th June 2012 about the transition into the National Crime Agency (NCA). I would like to take this opportunity to further reassure you in this. As I stated previously CEOP will be one of the four key commands within the NCA and all six principles to which CEOP are committed will be upheld. CEOP is due to begin its role as shadow command within the NCA in January 2013 before the official transition in October 2013. There will be a distinct advantage for CEOP in all areas of its business including CSE to work closer with other commands, CEOP will also have access to greater resources in order to tackle key issues such as CSE and the whole NCA will be subject to Section 11 of the Children’s Act (2004) adding further weight of responsibility for the NCA to ensure children are protected.

In terms of CSE at a national level, CSE is integrated within the Organised Immigration Crime Threat Reduction Board (OIC TRB) as a key threat. Threat Reduction Boards were established to provide a focus for law enforcement partners in tackling specific issues; these multi agency boards are high level and report into a Threat Reduction Assurance Forum (TRAF) and then directly into the Home Office in order to identify the key issues and appropriate actions to reduce the threat. CEOP contributes directly to the OIC TRB in order to ensure actions are undertaken and managed effectively for this area of business, CEOP works alongside SOCA, UKHTC, UKBA, ACPO and other law enforcement partners within the TRB. The format of the TRB may change as the transition into the NCA progresses in order to manage the threats more effectively, however detail around this is still being established.

In your request for a written submission of evidence you specified that the Inquiry is looking at a number of key areas, I have commented on the areas as below:

**The proportion of child victims in local authority care or otherwise known to social services**

The number of young people “known to social services” is a misleading description often bandied around when discussing children who have been exploited. Many children are known to social services without ever having received a service or been subject to children’s services in any significant way. They may have been reported to the local authority due to a parental domestic dispute, for being caught shoplifting or for persistent truanting, none of which would automatically culminate in any intervention other than a record of the referral.
As a result, when using this description, many children involved in studies of CSE “after the event” are reported as being known to their local department. Having established that children are “known” to local authority, there needs to be further assessment of how they are known and, more importantly, whether there has been any significant intervention with that child by the local authority.

Some cases of GGCSE have included children in the care of local authorities, although the level of information available is insufficient to provide clear statistical data, the OCC’s accelerated report from its inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups alludes to a disproportionate representation of victims who are in care however further research in the course of the inquiry needs to be completed in order to better understand this.

It stands to reason that people who are seeking to exploit young people may operate from an area where there are higher numbers of vulnerable children, which may include areas where there are children’s homes. Some of the children exploited by organised groups known to CEOP have been received into care as a result of their exploitation, or parents have asked for them to be accommodated due to the associated behavioural issues, the child being “beyond parental control”.

Children involved in the care system are often vulnerable as a result of their life experiences in addition to the nature of being cared for by “corporate parents” and so the discussion needs to be much wider than simply whether exploited children are “in local authority care”. Furthermore, the exploitation of children in care is not necessarily a reflection on, or a failure of the care system, but may be a culmination of the life experiences the young person has had which led them to be received into care in the first place.

**Whether the current criteria for triggering involvement by social services in individual cases take adequate account of the signs of localised grooming**

Over time austerity measures have resulted in cutbacks in local authority budgets which have led social services departments to prioritise “core business” over a sustained period. In effect, this has led many local authorities to a point where they are only able to deal with Child Protection cases. Thresholds for intervention have risen steadily, meaning that lower end “Child in Need” cases are not able to be addressed as departments do not have the capacity to undertake this work alongside responsibilities for Looked after Children, Child Protection and Care Proceedings.

The Statutory Guidance “Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation (2009)” and “What to do if you suspect a Child is being Sexually Exploited—a step by step guide for frontline practitioners (2012)” both include a list of indicators of CSE and clearly set out the circumstances when Social Services involvement should be triggered. However some of the signs of a child being sexually exploited may not meet the threshold of statutory intervention and as a result would not culminate in Social Services intervention. They may instead trigger intervention under the “Common Assessment Framework” (CAF), leading to a multi-agency response to tackle the causes of vulnerability and provide support services to young people at risk of or who are suspected of being sexually exploited. Some agencies are far better placed than social services to intervene. Equally if indicators are recognised by other agencies it is often only through the sharing of information that issues are clearly identified.

Responsibility for tackling CSE should not be seen as simply the responsibility of social services, it should be shared, there are examples of best practice around information sharing which greatly assist not only indentifying issues but also to ensure the child is safeguarded in the most appropriate way. ACPO recognise Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) as best practice, MASH’s are staffed by professionals from Health, Police, Probation, Children’s Services and 3rd sector support agencies. They share information to ensure early identification and appropriate interventions where issues are identified. Close partnership working not only allows for the sharing of data but also that of learning and best practice which can be valuable in understanding and planning effective interventions. This approach also ensures multi-agency accountability aids the prevention of duplication and minimises potential risk of re-victimisation whilst ensuring the welfare and safeguarding of the child or young person is the paramount consideration.

Further to the challenges for Children’s Services, the University of Bedfordshire interviewed practitioners in social care and found that current child protection procedures do not support the proactive and necessary long term approach required to deal with children who at risk of, and victims of CSE, The College of Social Work is considering its training package to ensure that CSE is accurately reflected in the training of social workers.

Furthermore the current statutory guidance “Working Together to Safeguard Children” has been reduced and split into three new documents in order to streamline the content. There has been a significant consultation period in order to give agencies the opportunity to ensure the guidance contains all relevant information. In my role as ACPO Lead for Child Protection and Abuse Investigation I have worked with colleagues to facilitate an ACPO response to the consultation on behalf of all police forces in England, this is to ensure the police’s perspective is represented collectively in order to improve the existing guidance and in due course the multi-agency ability to safeguard children.
The support provided to victims and witnesses by a range of agencies such as the Crown Prosecution Service, Police and voluntary agencies

The provision and quality of support provided to victims and witnesses in CSE cases is directly impacted by the service provider’s ability to recognise and understand the nature of CSE. There are examples of good practice where areas have invested heavily in training, education and resourcing the issue of CSE and are able to adequately support young people.

The witness intermediary scheme set up by the Ministry Of Justice (MOJ) provides specially trained and accredited professional communication specialists and has assisted many cases that would not have otherwise gone to trial, the MOJ is continuing efforts to improve special measures that would enable witness’s to provide evidence early in the prosecution process.

Aside from this, there is still much that needs to improve. I recently consulted with force senior investigating officers (SIO’s) in a number of GGCSE cases where victims have given evidence in court; this raised a number of significant issues as mentioned below which I discussed with and followed up in writing to the Attorney General, in keeping with the consideration for victims experiences in the Government’s “Tackling CSE Action Plan” I have updated the children’s minister Tim Loughton, MP following on from this.

The main issues identified from my consultation with SIO’s are identified as:

1. Maintaining an overview of how judges who preside over GGCSE cases consider applying the various special measures for vulnerable witnesses.
2. Supporting efforts to enable victims attending court to be free of contact with defendants or their supporters.
3. Ensuring good practice is consistently applied in familiarising victims with the court environment, in advance of a trial, so that they are not subject to avoidable additional stress at the time of the trial.
4. Reviewing how the Criminal Procedure & Investigations Act disclosure process is applied to looked-after children so that they are not placed at an unjust disadvantage.
5. Reviewing the timelines for compensation of victims so that the issues of giving evidence to support a prosecution, and exercising the right to seek compensation, do not create a dilemma for victims or prosecutors.

Issue four is currently due to be discussed at an Inter-Ministerial Meeting regarding the Exchange of Information in the Investigation and Prosecution of Child Abuse Cases, called for by the Attorney General and Lynne Featherstone, MP.

In terms of addressing issues with the judiciary, I meet regularly with representative judges on these matters, and at CEOP we offer opportunities to share knowledge with the judiciary through training and awareness seminars.

Whether front-line agencies are adequately equipped to identify victims and intervene at an early stage

There is a good deal of work ongoing across the agencies, further to the ACPO CSE Action Plan I mentioned earlier, ACPO supported by CEOP are compiling a toolkit for investigators to help them adopt successful disruption tactics and communicate best practice in order to secure prosecutions in CSE cases. It is likely that this information will be available to officers through the Police Online Knowledge Area (POLKA) in due course. The National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) in conjunction with, and at ACPO’s request has also funded and produced a new awareness training DVD for front line police officers dealing with gang related CSE, the video follows a recent “Eastenders” story line and the actress from the soap opera also stars in the video. This DVD is due to be launched September/October 12 and cascaded to police forces.

ACPO are also working with the University of Brighton to produce guidance for police forces regarding the risk assessment of victims and offenders involved in CSE. This work is ongoing and data will be requested from forces towards the end of September 2012. This Guidance is due to be launched in January 2013.

CEOP have provided bespoke training to police and other agencies in specific relation to missing children and highlighting this as one of the key indicators for CSE. Furthermore CEOP have hosted a number of CSE seminars attended by some 205 delegates and the launch of the Thematic Assessment “Out of Mind, Out of sight” launch for stakeholders was attended by 50 delegates.

I am also aware that the Department for Health (DH) has reviewed its training for health professionals and in March 2012 they released a training package which includes specific areas to meet the needs of women and children who are victims of violence and abuse. The DH has also developed two films on CSE which are aimed at Children and Young People; these are available on the NHS choices website. The DH also has a programme of work to improve the development of Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) services, drawing attention to the special circumstances of children who have been sexually exploited.

There are some good examples of best practice in dealing with CSE such as in Lancashire where a multi agency approach has been adopted. Many other local authorities are following this lead, setting up multi-agency dedicated CSE teams who provide a holistic service for children vulnerable to CSE. There are other
areas however that have not matched the commitment to dealing with CSE as a standalone issue and the responsibility remains with frontline practitioners. This may be related to resources or funding, but also may be indicative that CSE is not seen as a priority in some areas. The 2009 Guidance on “Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation” states that “LSCB’s should assume sexual exploitation occurs within its area unless there is clear evidence to the contrary”. There is a clear need to ensure all agencies are doing their best to adhere to these guidelines and tackle CSE.

The extent to which Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) have implemented key aspects of national guidance on child sexual exploitation, including the quality of partnership working between LSCBs, care services and police within and between local authority areas

As referred to above the 2009 Guidance “Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation” directs LSCB’s a responsibility to ensure that agencies are provided with training on how to identify the warning signs and vulnerabilities associated with CSE. In 2010 the National Working Group (NWG) reviewed how the guidance has been implemented and revealed that less than a quarter of areas have the required multi agency protocols. This is now improving; research from Barnardo’s suggests that in April 2012 almost two thirds of England’s 152 Local Authorities had pledged commitment to develop action plans for CSE.

There are also improvements across the board in partnership working with more areas adopting the MASH or a similar model to facilitate the sharing of information and deal with safeguarding more effectively. There are examples of good practice as referred to in the above response regarding the Lancashire model and the frontline agencies ability to identify and intervene in CSE cases at an earlier stage. The same issues regarding a lack commitment to CSE in other areas, as referred to above are again relevant to the extent that LSCB’s have implemented guidance.

The recent progress report on the implementation of the governments “Tackling CSE Action Plan” also indicates that progress by LSCB’s is being made, there remains however, much to be done to ensure this progress continues.

The circumstances under which care services report missing children to the police

The link between missing children and CSE was highlighted in the OCC’s accelerated report and evidenced further by recent high profile cases such as in Operation Retriever in Derbyshire. Each year there is an estimated 200,000 people who go missing, children and young people account for 64% of all missing reports and research suggests that a quarter of these suffer some form of abuse whilst missing. Whilst it is unknown how many children have become victims of CSE specifically from these figures, the OCC’s accelerated report indicated that looked after children are disproportionately represented in known cases of GGCSE. However, that children outside of the care system are also victims of CSE. The government has acknowledged the recommendations made in the OCC’s accelerated report and are taking immediate action to:

- Work with local authorities to ensure there is much clearer data about children who go missing from care, and who may be at risk of CSE. This will identify what more needs to be done to protect children in care and reduce the numbers that go missing.
- Develop a risk analysis map of those areas with a high concentration of care homes
- There will be expectations on the care home to collaborate with police where a child is at risk of running away or being sexually exploited.
- Enable Ofsted to share information about the location of children’s homes with police and there will be a responsibility on the part of the local authority to satisfy itself that the placements are appropriate to meet the needs of the child and their safety. Ofsted have also agreed with partners to develop a joint framework for multi agency inspection of services for the protection of children in local authority areas, likely to be implemented in 2013-14.
- Address the quality of children’s homes and develop a free and develop a plan for significant improvements, including the qualifications and skills of the workforce.

The circumstances in which looked after children are reported missing to the police by care services does vary regionally. ACPO and the NPIA have supported a series of pilots in four police force areas across the country. The pilots implement new definitions of “Missing” and “Absent” and use systems aimed to improve safeguarding, effectiveness and efficiency in case management for children who go missing from care.

The pilot schemes took place over a 3 month period and although they have concluded the areas in which they were implemented continue to use the model. There are other forces that have also heard of the benefits and are keen to progress proposed changes in their force areas. The results of the pilot and proposals around changes to current guidance are being assessed by ACPO currently, when decisions on this have been progressed, consideration will be given to the need for a review of the ACPO Guidance on Missing 2010.

The quality of data collection, data sharing and research on child victims of localised grooming

Collecting data and scoping the extent and nature of the problem of CSE in local areas is the most effective way to identify where and how CSE takes place. The governments “Tackling CSE Action Plan” states that
LSCB’s should put in place systems to monitor prevalence and response to CSE within their area, however many services that come into contact with potential/know victims including LSCB’s do not collate data.

Over half of the 100 LSCB’s surveyed reported that they were not recording any data on CSE and as evidenced in CEOP’s Thematic Assessment “Out of Mind, Out of Sight”, the way in which police record and capture such data does not lend itself to the straightforward identification of relevant cases. There is a need to improve data recording systems. Statutory agencies should collect data and undertake risk assessments of the problems in their area. Such data will identify common forms of grooming and abuse and highlight hotspots, data could also indicate whether there are links to CSE taking place in other areas.

A data monitoring tool has been developed by the University of Bedfordshire with the intention of capturing this data, the tool was developed following an excess of 100 interviews with practitioners and it aims to record the prevalence and nature of CSE. The tool and its guidance has been circulated to all LSCB’s and relevant voluntary and community sector organisations.

CEOP as the strategic lead for GGCSE, supported by the relevant agencies intends to manage a collection and analysis of annual data on the nature and prevalence of GGCSE using the above mentioned data monitoring tool. The centre will also have sight of related police operations and along with other statutory and non statutory agencies will report in the form of strategic assessments.

In relation to data collection and reporting on looked after children, ACPO, CEOP and other agencies are working with the DfE to look at what data should be collated and reported to ministers at weekly meetings. Although this is not specific to looked after children who are victims or at risk of CSE these issues are being considered within the consultation.

Throughout my response to this Inquiry I have highlighted the variety of current and ongoing research in this field. There is a huge assortment of ongoing work and as is important in all aspects of CSE, the sharing of information and a multi agency approach is absolutely vital to addressing the problem.

The degree of coordination between the Department for Education’s child sexual exploitation strategy and the Home Office’s human trafficking strategy

In addition to the responses you have received from the DfE and Home Office in relation to their assurances that the links between trafficking and CSE are highlighted, thus ensuring a consistent and a coordinated approach. I feel that it is relevant to echo that this same approach is adopted by CEOP and its liaison with UKHTC regarding responsibilities around CSE and Trafficking.

I have previously mentioned that in April 2012 a Memorandum of Understanding between CEOP and UKHTC was signed. This set out the respective roles for the two centres in dealing with children who are trafficked into or within the UK for the purposes of CSE. The agreement reflects the different expertise of the two organisations and that people are trafficked into and within the UK for a variety of reasons, of which CSE is just one. The memorandum of understanding provides a supportive framework for CEOP and the UKHTC to work together.

The UKHTC has expertise in all matters relating the trafficking of persons and from April 2012 UKHTC became the primary agency with responsibility for advising on investigations relating to children being trafficked across the border into the UK for the purpose of CSE. CEOP has primary responsibility for advising on investigations relating to the trafficking of children within the UK for the purpose of CSE. CEOP and UKHTC continue to liaise on aspects of CSE and with both law enforcement and government agencies in the respective areas of responsibility.

10 September 2012

Written evidence from the Home Office [LCG 11]

Introduction

The Government published its action plan to tackle child sexual exploitation (CSE), in all its forms, in November 2011. The plan includes a range of commitments for the Home Office and the police to ensure we are tackling this issue, alongside commitments and actions from other Departments which aim to ensure victims are identified and supported to escape exploitation. The Government’s progress report was published alongside the Office of the Children’s Commissioner for England’s (OCC) report and the separate Government responses on 3 July.

The police and the Home Office have a critical role to play in tackling all child sexual exploitation, but in particular in tackling the form of organised, “on street” or localised grooming that is the subject of this inquiry and which so predominantly affects girls. At a local level, the police are actively tackling this issue, with a significant number of operations underway and before the courts. The police are also looking increasingly to Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs and equivalent models to deliver the effective partnership working that is key to addressing this issue successfully.
Whilst good progress is being made locally and nationally, it is clear from the increasing number of horrific cases the police are dealing with, that more can, and should, be done to tackle and prevent this crime. In addition to the measures outlined in the cross-government action plan, the Home Office is therefore supporting the police in this work through a focus on the following four key areas:

2. National Capability (the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) and the National Crime Agency NCA).
3. Ending Gang and Youth Violence (EGYV) and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).
4. Understanding Culture.

Organised Crime

At a national level, CSE is now explicitly included in the definition of organised crime used in the Government’s organised crime strategy “Local to Global”. The strategy recognises that while CSE is not driven by profit, it does share many features with other forms of organised crime. “Local to Global” aims to reduce the risk to the UK and its interests from organised crime by reducing the threat, vulnerabilities and criminal opportunities based on the following themes:

— Stem the opportunities for organised crime to take root;
— Strengthen enforcement against organised crime; and
— Safeguard communities, businesses and the state by raising awareness of the threat and methods used.

The UK Threat Assessment of organised crime includes an assessment of the threat from the sexual exploitation of children. Both lone offenders and groups are engaged in CSE, and offending can be enabled by new technologies. The sexual exploitation of children sometimes involves an element of trafficking as victims are moved around the UK or across the national border for these purposes. Although the understanding of gang and group associated child sexual exploitation is growing, the full nature and scale of the threat is not yet fully understood. Awareness of these forms of child sexual exploitation has increased in recent months as a result of a number of successful police investigations attracting significant media coverage.

Threat Reduction Boards have been established to provide a focus for law enforcement partners in tackling these issues. These multi-agency boards aim to improve the national understanding of a particular threat, and to identify appropriate and effective action to reduce that threat to the UK. The sexual exploitation of children is currently considered as part of the Organised Immigration Crime Threat Reduction Board which includes “child sexual exploitation” as one of its key threats.

Each Threat Reduction Board is responsible for driving improvements to the intelligence picture on which the multi-agency action needed to reduce the threat to the UK is based. In the case of the sexual exploitation of children, all the relevant law enforcement agencies are involved, including CEOP and the UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC), as well as private sector, and other relevant, stakeholders when necessary.

National Capability (CEOP & NCA)

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre was launched in April 2006, as a multi-disciplined “centre of excellence” focused on protecting children from sexual exploitation, especially in the online world. The Centre is law-enforcement led with multi-sector teams working to understand and tackle sexual exploitation. CEOP provides a national approach and is leading international action to tackle paedophile networks across many countries.

Recognising CEOP’s expertise in protecting children, and the links between child sexual exploitation and missing children, this Government took the decision to transfer responsibility for missing children services to CEOP. This has ensured that the UK has in place, for the first time, a dedicated capability to tackle this issue and ensure our national response to these issues is robust.

Child sexual exploitation ranges from individual abuse to highly organised criminal group activity with little distinction in people’s lives between the online and offline world. Offenders look to exploit wherever and whenever they can and patterns of offending and victimisation are constantly changing, not just in terms of how technology is being used, but also in line with many other factors. CEOP’s approach is to understand those trends, themes and patterns and to distil them into integrated programmes of activity that:

— brings added value to front line practitioners across the wider child protection community in terms of sharing thematic knowledge, understanding, skills, techniques and providing bespoke specialist services where the impact is greatest; and
— builds and maintain public confidence through empowering children, parents and intermediaries to spot the risk, prevent the harm and know where to turn if things go wrong.

During 2011–12, CEOP developed and disseminated intelligence packages leading to the arrest of at least 192 suspects, and safeguarded and protected 427 children.
In addition, CEOP has delivered targeted work to increase the police understanding and enhance the UK's ability to respond to organised child sexual exploitation through the:

- delivery of CEOP’s Thematic Assessment “Out of Mind—Out of Sight”;
- delivery of a specialist training seminar on child sexual exploitation; and
- provision of tactical operational support to forces leading investigations into organised CSE.

Partnership underpins these key aims. Intelligence sharing, and operational and safeguarding successes, are achieved in partnership with local and international law enforcement agencies whilst, for instance, some harm reduction initiatives are delivered by a network of over 70,000 volunteers. CEOP have over 80,000 practitioners registered to access and use harm reduction initiatives and resources available on the CEOP website.

At the same time, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) funds social workers who build child protection expertise into everything that CEOP delivers; and private sector organisations provide direct expertise into a range of CEOP's work programmes. Current developments supported by partners include work around missing children, victims and digital forensic analysis.

CEOP has identified Group and Gang Associated Child Sexual Exploitation as one of its five strategic threats for the coming year. In addition to work already underway, CEOP is putting in place a CSE strategy and action plan which will guide the centre’s activity in relation to this issue. The plan is currently being developed and will be in place by the end of autumn 2012.

The UK Human Trafficking Centre provides tactical assistance and investigative strategies where any case of CSE contains elements of trafficking, regardless of the age or nationality of the victim. UKHTC and CEOP will work in partnership as they transition into the National Crime Agency in 2013.

The UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) and its members work to improve the awareness and understanding of parents, children and teachers regarding online safety. This includes educating children and young people about the implications of their online behaviour and the “digital footprint” they leave, particularly where information or images of an extremely personal nature are concerned. CEOP, in turn, has developed a specific educational resource to tackle this issue. This resource is for use in the classroom by teachers and forms part of CEOP’s “ThinkuKnow” campaign, which is designed to reduce the harm caused to children through the misuse of technology to sexually abuse or exploit them.

National Crime Agency

Looking forward, subject to the passage of the Crime and Courts Bill, the National Crime Agency will be established by the end of 2013, at the centre of the reformed law enforcement landscape. It will build on the strengths of the precursor bodies; connecting the efforts of local law enforcement to national agencies and action overseas, in order to coordinate the fight against some of the UK’s most harmful criminals.

The NCA will play a vital role in countering the threat to children and ensuring they are better protected. As well as building on CEOP’s existing role as the national centre dedicated to working with others to protect children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, the NCA will also be subject to a new statutory duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, across all of its functions and activities. Within the NCA, CEOP will:

- retain its operational independence within the context of the NCA;
- have clear, delegated authority for its budget;
- continue to include external partners in its governance;
- retain its well-known brand;
- retain its mixed economy of staff, from a variety of disciplines; and
- continue its innovative partnerships with the public, private and third sector and have the ability to raise and hold funds from donors.

Working across the National Crime Agency’s internal structures (including CEOP, the new Border Policing Command and the UK Human Trafficking Centre) and with external partners, the NCA will enhance our ability to identify the threat from organised child sexual exploitation and ensure that appropriate action is taken to protect children and to disrupt the activities of those perpetrating these appalling crimes.

Importantly, the NCA’s intelligence hub will have access to the full range of serious and organised crime-related intelligence, which it will analyse and assess to gain the definitive national intelligence picture and a consolidated and prioritised view of those causing harm to the UK. The NCA will therefore build a richer picture of organised child sexual exploitation to inform operational, tactical and strategic decision-making on the most appropriate response. The NCA will also have the authority to task and coordinate the national response to threats across the whole of law enforcement—ensuring the most effective activity is carried out by the right agency.
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ENDING GANG AND YOUTH VIOLENCE (EGYV)/VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS (VAWG)

The Government’s report, Ending Gang and Youth Violence, recognised the considerable harms that affect young women and girls involved in gang-related activity. However, most activity to address gang violence is aimed at male gang nominals. Sexual and violent abuse of young girls is a worryingly large component of gang culture and includes girls having to perform sexual acts on one or many gang members, or girlfriends of gang members being targeted and, sexually or violently, assaulted by rival gangs.

Sadly, many girls associated with gangs accept that, to be part of the gang, they have to be sexually available to the gang members. Some have little or no understanding about consent or that it is okay to say “no”. In the context of gang-related sexual exploitation, young women are fearful of violent repercussions from gang members if they take a stand against the abuse.

This presents two major challenges to Government, statutory agencies, the voluntary sector and to communities themselves—tackling the sexual and violent abuse that is currently taking place in gangs across the country, and preventing it happening in the first place.

Tackling existing violence

The Ending Gang and Youth Violence programme focuses funding and support on the 29 areas across the country identified as having the most significant gang problems. £10 million of Home Office funding has been re-prioritised for 2012–13 to support those 29 areas. This is intended to supplement existing local resources used to tackle gang and youth violence, including violence against girls by gangs.

We have established an Ending Gang and Youth Violence team made up of practitioners with experience of dealing with gangs and youth violence, to provide practical advice to the 29 areas. The team has access to support from a network of advisers from a range of backgrounds including community activists, local authority specialists, voluntary organisations and health and education professionals.

The Home Office is also providing £1.2 million over three years to improve the services for young people at risk or victims of sexual violence and exploitation by gangs, funding 13 Young People’s Advocates. These are new posts providing direct and dedicated support to young people who have been victims, or are at risk of, sexual violence and/or sexual exploitation.

They work in areas most affected by gangs and have an understanding of the specific risks that gang violence has on a young person, working with local agencies to ensure that a robust risk management plan is in place. Alongside this, the Government has commissioned a specialist training package, to be rolled out this year, for practitioners working with women and girls who have been affected by gang-related sexual exploitation or violence.

To drive this work nationally, we have established a Women, Girls and Gangs working group, which for the first time brings together representatives from the voluntary and community sector, government departments and the criminal justice system who work on gangs and violence against women and girls. A specific piece of work has also been set up that looks at the issue of gang-associated women and girls in custody.

Changing the culture around sexual and domestic violence

The Government has an ambitious programme to end sexual and domestic violence as set out in our Violence Against Women and Girls action plan. By tackling this abuse in wider society, we will make a real impact on the abuse that takes place in gangs.

The Government has ring-fenced nearly £40 million of stable funding up to 2015 for specialist local domestic and sexual violence support services, rape crisis centres, the national domestic violence helplines and the stalking helpline. This is the first time that funding has been ringfenced for domestic and sexual violence victims on a stable basis (ie over the whole spending-review period).

We have launched our Teenage Rape Prevention campaign to challenge myths about rape and sexual abuse and to educate teenagers about making informed choices and consent. Doing so will help young people, men and women, better understand that these behaviours are wrong.

The actions being taken forward from these two action plans complement, support and reinforce the actions being taken forward in the Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan.

Cultural Issues

Sadly, we know that child sexual exploitation happens in all areas of the country in many different forms. It is not exclusive to any community, race or religion but it must be prevented and punished wherever and however it occurs.

Perceived cultural sensitivities and political correctness cannot and will not get in the way of preventing and uncovering child abuse. We do however want to better understand the landscape of this very complex crime and our analysis must be clear-sighted and based on the evidence, including the very useful emerging findings from the Office of the Children’s Commissioner (OCC) “accelerated” report, published on 3 July.Those
findings state that child sexual exploitation is widespread—and cuts across colour, creed, culture and community.

Recent evidence also suggests that cases of organised child sexual exploitation may in part be linked to outdated cultural attitudes and lack of integration in communities that can sit “outside” shared values of equality, attitudes towards women and civic participation. Women who have no influence over the communities where they live, are the subject of out dated cultural attitudes and are unable to influence the groups of men and gangs that are the perpetrators of these crimes. To understand these issues better, the Home Office will work with relevant Government departments and with community groups to understand more about these cultural attitudes:

— building on lessons learnt from our engagement with particular groups and promoting equalities and shared values through our Prevent programme, we will look to further develop the evidence base to inform government’s approach and interventions;
— identifying and targeting vulnerable groups such as Pakistani and Bangladeshi women in our engagement work;
— using the Government Equalities Office(GEO) work programmes to maximise Women’s potential. The work programme looks at how we can raise girls aspirations and the choices girls and young women make about which subjects to study, qualifications to pursue, and when and how to move into employment or set up a business;
— providing information through GEO networks of stakeholders and women’s organisation to support and empower vulnerable young women and their families; and
— cross-Government work across the Home Office, Department for Work and Pensions and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to look at how we can increase economic participation for these groups.

NEXT STEPS

For those who are convicted of a sex offence, the UK has one of the most robust systems in the world for the management of sex offenders. However, only by enhancing our prevention activity through these work strands will we stop vulnerable children and young people falling victim in the first place. The Home Office will continue to work with partners, in particular CEOP to enhance the law enforcement safeguarding response to ensure we are doing all we can to increase the resilience of young people and parents in preventing this crime.

The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) has developed its own CSE action plan to enhance the local police response and this will be complemented by CEOP’s CSE strategy and action plan. In partnership with CEOP, the Home Office will consider what more needs to be done to ensure early intervention when children and young people display risky behaviours which place them at risk of becoming victims of CSE. As part of our robust EGYV and VAWG programmes, we will continue our work to tackle harmful attitudes about consent, and raise awareness among police forces of the need to ensure safeguarding issues are considered as part of an integrated local response to gangs.

Where cases of organised child sexual exploitation involve elements of trafficking, we will continue to ensure our policy and operational responses are aligned. Through our crosscutting remit on missing people, the Home Office will continue to lead delivery of the Missing Children and Adults strategy and ensure the key linkages between child sexual exploitation and missing are identified and managed. Finally, because ultimately tackling these issues relies on effective local partnership arrangements, the Home Office will continue to lead and fund a local safeguarding support project which will be working with local areas to support the development and delivery of effective multi-agency safeguarding responses across England and Wales.

September 2012

Written evidence from the Serious Organised Crime Agency [LCG 14]

1. This submission sets out the Serious Organised Crime Agency’s (SOCA) written evidence to the Committee’s inquiry into localised child grooming. It incorporates the work of the UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC) and the UK Missing Person’s Bureau (UKMPB). In April 2012 the functions of the UKMPB transferred to SOCA from the National Police Improvement Agency (NPIA) on an interim basis until the establishment of the National Crime Agency (NCA).

2. The submission will specifically seek to address the following areas:
— The support provided to victims and witnesses by a range of agencies such as the Crown Prosecution Service, Police and voluntary agencies.
— Whether front-line agencies are adequately equipped to identify victims and intervene at an early stage.
— The circumstances under which care services report missing children to the police.
— The quality of data collection, data sharing and research on child victims of localised grooming.
It should be read alongside evidence by the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP).

3. In August 2012 SOCA published a baseline assessment on the nature and scale of human trafficking in 2011. On the subject of child trafficking, it concluded that this is a complex crime and there may often be shared elements with other child abuse offences for example internal trafficking and child sexual exploitation (CSE). For SOCA, the safeguarding of children is paramount in relation to these types of abuse.

The support provided to victims and witnesses by a range of agencies such as the Crown Prosecution Service, Police and voluntary agencies.

4. SOCA offers a number of services to those agencies engaged in identifying and safeguarding victims of human trafficking, and investigating cases of human trafficking. The UKHTC’s team of expert tactical advisors provide 24/7, UK-wide support on all human trafficking matters. This includes tactical assistance and advice on investigative strategies where any case of CSE involves elements of trafficking into the UK, regardless of the nationality of the victim. Tactical advisors have the experience and expertise to establish whether an individual may be a trafficked victim and advice is provided to police forces, local authorities, government agencies and non-Government organisations (NGOs). SOCA supports the disruption and prosecution of identified offenders in both pre-planned operations and live reactive investigations, providing best practice in respect of evidence gathering, operational practice, victim care and initiation of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). Further detail on the work of the UKHTC and the NRM is set out at annex A.

Whether front-line agencies are adequately equipped to identify victims and intervene at an early stage

5. SOCA is not in a position to comment on the detail as to whether front-line agencies are adequately equipped to identify victims and intervene at an early stage. However, in support of front-line agencies the UKHTC provides support and advice to police forces and government agencies to help identify trafficking offences and potential victims. In addition, SOCA staff, working within the UKMPB, are trained to recognise indications of CSE particularly in relation to missing incidents. Training provided by UKMPB to police forces and advice supplied in relation to individual missing children cases supplements ACPO guidance, produced by UKMPB and issued in 2010, on the management, recording and investigation of missing persons, by highlighting the potential links between missing children and CSE. Additionally, SOCA refers relevant missing children cases to colleagues in CEOP, particularly where CSE is apparent or suspected. SOCA also shares good practice and operational experience through the Police Online Knowledge Area (POLKA), an online resource available to police forces and other appropriate bodies.

The circumstances under which care services report missing children to the police

6. The UKMPB proactively promotes compliance with the 2010 ACPO guidance on missing investigations and the extant Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) guidance on children missing from home and care. Both sets of guidance recommend the establishment of protocols between police, Local Authorities and carers, return interviews and police missing co-ordinators. Local protocols would include guidance on the circumstances under which care services would report missing Looked After Children (LAC) to the police.

The quality of data collection, data sharing and research on child victims of localised grooming

7. The SOCA baseline assessment on human trafficking provided evidence of the links between child trafficking and CSE in the UK. However, due to SOCA not having the lead role in CSE and localised grooming, it is not able to comment on the quality of data collection, data sharing and research on child victims of localised grooming beyond the data in this assessment.

8. The 2010 guidance promotes individual forces having a Missing Persons Coordinator and their key involvement in reviewing missing cases locally and identifying children that may be at risk of CSE. They have responsibility to identify missing children cases with links to CSE, to implement and review local protocol arrangements and to ensure information and data exchange between police, Local Authorities and carers. Good practice is to use Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) in which information and data is easily exchanged between police forces, and potential CSE cases readily identified.

Serious Organised Crime Agency
October 2012

Annex A

FURTHER DETAIL ON THE UKHTC AND THE NRM

The UKHTC in SOCA works with UK and international law enforcement agencies to pursue and prosecute those responsible for human trafficking. In doing this it:

— Collates, develops and shares innovative tactics, techniques, expertise and good practice.
— Develops high quality intelligence to help identify and fill knowledge gaps in the understanding of human trafficking.
SOCA also provides support to police investigations where appropriate through the Vulnerable Persons Team, which conducts “Achieving Best Evidence” interviews with vulnerable victims, including children and those who are victims of human trafficking.

The NRM was introduced in 2009 to meet the UK’s obligations under the Council of European Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. At the core of every country’s NRM is the process of locating and identifying “potential victims of trafficking”. To be referred to the NRM, potential victims of trafficking must first be referred to one of the UK’s two competent authorities, based in the UKHTC and the UK Border Agency. This initial referral will generally be handled by an authorised agency such as a police force, local authority or certain NGOs. The referring authority is known as the “first responder”.

The NRM is a framework for identifying victims of human trafficking and ensuring they receive the appropriate protection and support; it is also the mechanism through which the UKHTC collects data about victims of human trafficking. This information contributes to building an informed picture about the scope of human trafficking in the UK. Data is published regularly on the SOCA website.

Written evidence from The Children’s Society [LCG 17]

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Children’s Society provides vital help to the most vulnerable children, young people and families in our society. We support over 48,000 children and young people every year through our specialist services and children’s centres. Our priority is children who have nowhere else to turn, such as young refugees, children at risk on the streets, disabled children and children in trouble with the law. We seek to give a voice to children and young people and influence policy and practice so they have a better chance in life.

1.2 Our submission is based on evidence submitted to the joint APPG inquiry into children missing from care that we supported22 and evidence from our nine projects working with young people who run away from home and care and children who experience, or are at risk of, sexual exploitation and localised grooming. As a result, in our submission we focus particularly on the strong relationship between children who run away or go missing and child grooming.

1.3 We welcome this important inquiry into localised child grooming which aims to overcome the challenges in bringing successful prosecutions against individuals involved in the localised grooming of children for sexual exploitation.

2. SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Evidence from our services working with young people who run away and have been or are at risk of sexual exploitation and evidence submitted to the APPG inquiry into children who go missing from care highlighted the following key points:

2.2 Running away and going missing from home or care is a key indicator that a young person may be being groomed for sexual exploitation. Our evidence highlights that all too often professionals in social services and care homes as well as the police are not aware of the risks involved in running away and the links between running away and sexual exploitation. Often this is exacerbated by professionals perceiving young people who run away and/or experience sexual exploitation as “promiscuous” and “streetwise.”

2.3 Our practitioners report that services for young people who have been sexually exploited or run away are failing to adequately safeguard these children, including through court proceedings. They identify a number of barriers such as higher thresholds for referrals to social services for children in need and a lack of support during prosecutions.

2.4 Evidence received by the APPG inquiry and our services also show that local authorities are not adequately adhering to their responsibilities to protect children who run away or are being sexually exploited.

2.5 We recommend that the following changes are needed to improve safeguarding responses to children at risk of grooming and sexual exploitation:

2.6 Social care services should assess referrals jointly with the police to ensure that there is a shared understanding of thresholds for intervention and that they work together to safeguard children in their local area.

2.7 Special measures such as giving evidence by live link and more choice about how they give evidence should be used where appropriate and desired by the child. These should also include access to support before, during and after the court process.

22 The APPG for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers (2012) Report from the Joint Inquiry into Children who go Missing from Care London: The Children’s Society
2.8. The obligation for homes to notify agencies of “Involvement or suspected involvement of a child accommodated at the home in prostitution” under Schedule 5 of the Children’s Homes Regulations 2001, which relates to “Events and Notifications”, should be changed to “suspicion that a child accommodated in a home is at risk of abuse or child sexual exploitation”.

2.9. Children’s home staff should receive training on how to identify the warning signs of grooming, including running away, why young people may have been sexually exploited and how to support young people who have experienced sexual exploitation. This should be continuous tailored training due to the high turn over staff in care homes.

2.10. All police staff should receive awareness raising training on how to identify the warning signs of grooming, including running away, why young people may have been sexually exploited and the actions that need to be taken if they come across a young person who may have experienced, or be at risk of, sexual exploitation.

2.11. All frontline professionals or staff that work with children (such as GPs, hospital staff, parents, landlords, judges, magistrates, teachers, church leaders, youth workers, pub landlords and public venue security staff) should receive tailored training on how to identify the warning signs of grooming, including running away, and the actions that need to be taken if they come across a young person who may have experienced, or be at risk of, sexual exploitation.

2.12. Hotel front of house, domestic and security staff should receive training on how to identify the warning signs of grooming, including running away, and the actions that need to be taken if they come across a young person who may have experienced, or be at risk of, sexual exploitation.

2.13. Guidance should be amended so that all children in care have a statutory right to independent advocacy as part of care reviews and placement planning, not just as part of complaint processes.

2.14. All Local Safeguarding Children’s Boards (LSCBs) should establish a multi-agency missing and child sexual exploitation (CSE) subgroup involving the police, social services and the voluntary sector which should work to joint protocols and appoint a lead individual responsible for co-ordinating work in this area.

2.15. The revised Children Who Run Away or Go Missing From Home or Care guidance should state that every child or young person who runs away from home or care should receive an return interview from a responsible adult the child or young person is comfortable speaking with and disclosing information to, within 72 hours of a missing incident.

2.16. An additional evaluation of the ACPO pilots that assesses the safeguarding and risk assessment procedures in place when a child is classified as “absent” should take place before the new definitions of missing and absent are rolled out nationally.

2.17. All LSCBs should establish a multi-agency CSE and missing subgroup that collects data and intelligence on sexual exploitation and missing episodes to help monitor cases, direct resources and gather evidence for prosecutions.

2.18. Local authorities should be supported by central government and ACPO to set up a local multi-agency information sharing process, for instance a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) to ensure that information is shared between agencies on individual running away and CSE incidents and patterns of running away in the local area.

2.19. The Department for Education should change relevant regulations to allow Ofsted to share information on the names and locations of children’s homes with local police forces.

3. The proportion of child victims in local authority care or otherwise known to social services

3.1 We are aware from our services that local authorities are unaware of the true scale of child sexual exploitation (CSE) of children in their care. The joint APPG inquiry into children who go missing from care found that a significant minority of young people coming into the care system are targeted and groomed for sexual exploitation. Perpetrators target children’s homes specifically because of the high vulnerability of the children there and how easily they can make contact with the children.

3.2 Our practitioners and research, as well as the APPG inquiry all report that going missing is a clear indicator of sexual exploitation. A study by the University of Bedfordshire into child sexual exploitation showed that over half of all young people using child sexual exploitation services on one day in 2011 were known to have gone missing (a quarter went missing over 10 times), and 22% of these were in care. Some young people go missing as a consequence of sexual exploitation; others are at risk of being targeted by perpetrators who groom them for sexual exploitation. Vulnerable young people in care often go missing repeatedly when they meet people who show them the attention and affection that they crave but do not receive from care staff or their family.

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23 Children’s Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations
24 Iago, S. et al (2011). What’s going on to safeguard children and young people from sexual exploitation? How local partnerships respond to child sexual exploitation University of Bedfordshire, Bedford
3.3 Our research has found that in many cases children who run away are being actively targeted and groomed in public places such as parks, bus stations or city centres, not just by adults but increasingly by their peers. Project workers say they are seeing children making connections with their peers from the other side of cities or in different areas altogether, either through spending time on the streets, or because looked after children know each other from various placements. “It’s not just ‘boyfriend’ grooming, you see other girls and boys grooming young people, and taking other young girls to sex parties or parties where they can get drink and drugs.” A project worker in the Midlands25

4. Our practitioners and the APPG inquiry have found that social services and care staff often have a lack of awareness of the signs of sexual exploitation. Professionals often perceive these young girls as “promiscuous” and “streetwise”. These were the perceptions of the social services staff in Rochdale which we know resulted in horrific consequences. For more information on these points, see Section 6 on the ability of frontline agencies to identify victims.

4.1 Our projects have reported a lack of response to child sexual exploitation from children’s services in some areas of the country and higher thresholds for accepting referrals and intervention. Staff are finding that more stringent criteria is being set for defining children in need and there is increased gatekeeping. Previously they would have accepted a referral from our projects to work with a child who had run away and had particular needs relating to drugs, alcohol or mental health. Crucially they are finding that running away is not being considered as a key indicator that a child is being groomed despite evidence to the contrary. One practitioner reports that they have experienced social care questioning the decision to call a strategy meeting because a young person would not disclose what happened when she was missing, despite intelligence and information from several professionals raising serious concerns.

4.2 Our practitioners report that there is a very poor understanding of the processes of grooming. If the offence or harm is not “spelt out” and clear to see, there is often no interest or urgency in interrupting and interfering with grooming. Practitioners report being told that “there is nothing we can do about it” by social care with one social care manager saying that his job was to deal with rapes and deaths and anything below that was nothing to do with them. In certain circumstances the response from social care has been that if a voluntary sector service is providing support, and if there is a lead professional and a Team Around the Child, they will not provide any additional support despite clear safeguarding concerns raised by our projects.

4.3 In Newcastle, social care jointly assess referrals for children and young people with the police as the police defined threshold for intervention from their service is lower than social services. This means a “Child Concern Notice” is sent to social services by the police for any incident relating to domestic abuse, sexual exploitation, missing incidents, substance misuse or assault of a child. The two agencies then discuss and share information around these referrals to ensure that an appropriate safeguarding response is taken.

4.4 Social care services should assess referrals jointly with the police to ensure that there is a shared understanding of thresholds for intervention and ensure they work together to safeguard children in their local area.

5. The support provided to victims and witnesses by a range of agencies such as the Crown Prosecution Service, Police and voluntary agencies

5.1 Investigations into child sexual exploitation and localised grooming are very complex and it is therefore often very difficult to obtain sufficient evidence to convict the perpetrators. Convictions also remain rare. It takes a long time for young people who have been groomed to trust professionals, because sometimes at first the young people believe in the innocence of the perpetrators (which is part of the grooming process), they are often perceived as “liars” who have changed their story and therefore cannot be relied upon.

5.2 As a result our services report that many victims who report allegations of serious sexual violence find that “No Further Action” (NFA) is taken on their case. A large number of cases are discontinued by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). Practitioners tell us that young people often report feeling “dropped” once a case is NFA’ed. Initially there is a lot of interest in what happened and they find themselves having to tell their story to many strangers and agencies/professionals they did not even know existed. Once the case is not going forward or it is dropped in Court, most professionals withdraw and young people often feel that they have been left to deal with the consequences of talking (both psychological and physical) on their own.

5.3 Current law enforcement responses to child sexual exploitation cases remain primarily reactive rather than proactive. The prosecution heavily relies on the young person to make a complaint and give evidence in the court against their exploiter. The process of grooming which children are subjected to and the use of threats and coercion makes it extremely difficult for them to go through the criminal justice process. Our projects find that young people are not given adequate support before, during or after the court process to enable them to give evidence. They find the current prosecution system is not supportive to achieving prosecutions for perpetrators of child sexual exploitation.

5.4 Case study: Joey (aged 14) met another young man online and they soon became quite close. When they met, Joey realised the man was older than he had initially said but they still began a sexual relationship. Joey believed he was in love and that they were in a loving relationship. Soon he realised he was not the only one and that this man was even older than he had claimed to be. The relationship became violent. After the case was reported to the police, Joey felt overwhelmed by the amount of professionals wanting to talk to him about what had happened and he began to refuse to engage. Joey refused to do an ABE interview (Achieving Best Evidence interview where the child is asked to say what happened to them in their own words.) The police asked The Children’s Society in Lancashire to become involved and to visit Joey. Through our work with him, Joey was able to tell his story and find support for all the confusion and mixed feelings he had. Joey chose to make a statement and with this the police were able to continue the investigation and collect enough evidence to put the case forward.

5.5 The CPS did a thorough job, not only based on evidence provided, but also by requiring files from professionals working with Joey in order to better prepare the case. Joey felt that they were taking him seriously. Through our worker, the police kept Joey and his family informed of each stage and what it meant. Because they felt supported, Joey and his mum were able to pass on extra information and evidence that helped with the case. We also arranged for Joey to visit Court in preparation for the trial. Joey felt extremely distraught and anxious when confronted with the reality of his case going to court. However, due to the positive collaboration in this case and the quality of evidence provided, the offender changed his plea to guilty and is being sentenced on Monday.

5.6 Our projects also report that the use of harbouring notices by the police in certain areas helps break the contact individuals have with children and collect evidence for prosecution. Our practitioners report that these could be used more effectively and widely.

5.7 We provided intensive support to many of the young people groomed as part of Operation Mansfield. Our involvement was crucial in supporting the young people through the extremely traumatic process of the operation and also helped the police to gain more evidence about the perpetrators, their actions, other victims and ultimately secure convictions.

5.8 Special measures such as giving evidence by live link and more choice about how they give evidence should be used where appropriate and desired by the child. These should also include access to support before, during and after the court process.

6. Whether front-line agencies are adequately equipped to identify victims and intervene at an early stage

6.1 As mentioned above, we have found that frontline agencies—social and voluntary services, care home staff and the police are often not adequately equipped to identify victims of grooming and intervene at an early stage to protect these vulnerable young people from harm.

Attitudes to young people at risk of sexual exploitation and grooming

6.2 The APPG inquiry heard that in many cases where children are at risk of sexual exploitation, they are seen by professionals in social services as “promiscuous” and making an active choice to become involved in a particular lifestyle. Our practitioners report that professionals therefore think is nothing they can or need to do to support them because it is just who they are. Indeed, the inquiry was told that some professionals see sexual activity between a child under 16 and an adult as acceptable as the young person has “consented” rather than as a child protection or sexual exploitation concern.

6.3 This attitude is also ingrained within the child protection system—for example care home staff are required to notify the placing authorities, the police and the local authority of “involvement or suspected involvement of a child in the care home in prostitution”. In the last five years Ofsted has received 631 notifications of these instances.26

6.4 A practitioner from The Children’s Society working with children at risk of CSE told us that after disclosing a sexual transgression, a young person’s social worker commented, “well if she won’t stay in then that’s what will happen to her.” His evidence goes on to say, “these may be isolated examples, but are indicative of a rudimentary lack of understanding on the complex nature of CSE, why young people go missing, and the psychological manipulation experienced by the young people at the hands of deviant adults. These young people do not choose to be sexually exploited, it is not a lifestyle choice they consciously opt into and clearly some professionals show little empathy to victims of a heinous crime.”

6.5 The obligation for homes to notify agencies of “Involvement or suspected involvement of a child accommodated at the home in prostitution” under Schedule 5 of the Children’s Homes Regulations 2001, which relates to “Events and Notifications”, should be changed to “suspicion that a child accommodated in a home is at risk of abuse or child sexual exploitation”.

26 Children’s Homes Regulations 2001, Schedule 5.
27 Andrew Norfolk, The Times (12 June 2012) Care homes ‘must be improved to stop abuses’ Notifications received 1 April 2007–17 February 2012.
6.6 The issue of some professionals’ attitudes towards children who go missing from care, and the prevailing culture around child protection responses to older children was raised consistently with the APPG inquiry. It is not only seen as a major concern, but indeed a key obstacle to keeping children and young people safe. Research we published in partnership with the NSPCC and the University of York28 showed that some professionals perceived older children to be more competent in dealing with maltreatment than younger children; including being able to escape abusive situations and seek help. The research also found that a lack of resources in children’s social care can negatively affect older children whereas younger children in similar circumstances are identified as requiring a safeguarding response. The research identified a lack of services for young people over 14 years of age, which may deter professionals from making referrals.

6.7 As mentioned above missing is a key indicator of sexual exploitation and a sign that they are at risk of harm. However the inquiry found that many care home staff do not adequately understand the signs of sexual exploitation when it is occurring. The APPG inquiry received evidence of a young girl who “whilst in care was going missing repeatedly for up to eight days at a time. During these periods she was hardly given any food, virtually nothing to drink, nowhere to wash, she was repeatedly raped. She said she would emerge covered in sores, very thin, smelling and in a filthy state. But nobody asked what was happening to her.”29

6.8 The APPG inquiry found that the lack of awareness of the risks of running away and the signs of abuse was exacerbated by the variable quality of staff in children’s homes. The current low levels of training for children’s homes staff who are dealing with vulnerable children were highlighted as a key factor in the current low standards of care by many witnesses. The poor level of training is exacerbated by the lack of consistency of staff in children’s homes. Due to low staff pay and an over-reliance on agency workers, turnover of staff can be very high. Witnesses told the APPG inquiry that more specific training of children’s home staff is needed in areas where young people are being targeted for sexual exploitation.

6.9 Children’s home staff should receive training on how to identify the warning signs of grooming, including running away, why young people may have been sexually exploited and how to better support young people who have experienced sexual exploitation. This should be continuous tailored training due to the high turn over staff in care homes.

Attitudes and awareness of the police towards young runaways and victims of child sexual exploitation

6.10 Our services find that the police often view children who go missing repeatedly as “streetwise” and requiring less of a professional response rather than more. ACPO told the inquiry that: “the police response to repeat runaways is not consistent across all forces” and “forces acknowledge that there has been a perception in the past that repeat runaways are occasionally viewed as ‘streetwise’ therefore misleadingly not considered vulnerable”.30

6.11 Many missing children also present to the police as perpetrators of crimes and this can stop the police from thinking of the child as a vulnerable young person who needs support. One practitioner from The Children’s Society told the inquiry “The response from professionals towards young people at risk of CSE varies dramatically. On the whole dedication to help can be witnessed and the willingness to protect and safeguard can be observed. However there have been several occasions in which the young people report they feel victimised, problematised and ultimately not listened to. One girl commented that she has been called “slag and “white trash” by a beat-officer, another said she was one told after disclosing a sexual transgression “… what do you expect dressed like that, you're looking for it…” It is vital that operational policing and other professionals “on the front line” are properly trained and informed of the facts to ensure they understand this also.

6.12 Our Check Point project in Torquay has been delivering awareness raising training to police officers on what actions to take if they come across a young person that has run away and/or been sexually exploited and how to identify risk indicators. Police can also do a two week placement with Check Point to gain greater understanding on the links between running away and CSE and how to address these.

6.13 All police staff should receive awareness raising training on how to identify the warning signs of grooming, including running away, why young people may have been sexually exploited and the actions that need to be taken if they come across a young person who may have experienced, or be at risk of, sexual exploitation.

30 Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), Written evidence submission, The APPG for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers (2012) Report from the Joint Inquiry into Children who go Missing from Care London: The Children’s Society
Lack of awareness and information sharing from other frontline professionals to identify victims of child sexual exploitation

6.14 Our projects have found that some professionals are not sharing information about children who may be victims of CSE or reporting them through the appropriate systems. In particular health professionals are seen to be reluctant to share information with children’s services and other agencies. Our services report that there is a lack of questioning when a young person presents to Accident and Emergency about how they have sustained injuries which might have been as a result of exploitation. One of our project reports that a young woman they were working with presented at her GP and disclosed that she had been raped. She was asked whether she had shared this with children’s services and the police, to which the young person replied that she had. However, no further action was taken by the GP despite having a responsibility to share the information with children’s services.

6.15 All frontline professionals and staff that work with children (such as GPs, hospital staff, parents, landlords, judges, magistrates, teachers, church leaders, youth workers, pub landlords and public venue security staff) should receive tailored training on how to identify the warning signs of grooming, including running away, and the actions that need to be taken if they come across a young person who may have experienced, or be at risk of, sexual exploitation.

Lack of awareness of hotel staff

6.16 Our project in Coventry has become aware that hotels have unwittingly been used as a venue for sexual exploitation for children who have been groomed. As a result, we have developed the Say Something campaign with the National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People. As part of this we have developed several partnerships with national hotel chains and local hotels. We provide them with information such as leaflets and posters and are developing a responsible kite mark. We are also delivering training jointly with the Coventry Community Safety Partnership and the West Midlands police for security, front-of-house and reception staff on how to recognise the signs of sexual exploitation and to report any suspicious incidents to the police and relevant services.

6.17 Hotel front of house, domestic and security staff should receive training on how to identify the warning signs of grooming, including running away, and the actions that need to be taken if they come across a young person who may have experienced, or be at risk of, sexual exploitation.

Increased risks for cross-boundary children

6.18 In 2011, nearly 22,000 of the 65,000 children who were in local authority care were living in placements in a different local authority. Almost 8,000 were placed over 20 miles away from their authority.31 Children placed in residential children’s homes are particularly vulnerable, they are older and have more complex needs, and many of them have had multiple placements or may be placed there because of a placement breakdown.32 Many of these children may be sexually exploited or will be at risk of sexual exploitation, particularly if they go missing.

6.19 The APPG inquiry found that placing a child outside of their local authority area a long way from family and friends is often a factor in causing them to run away and cross-boundary placements often have a detrimental impact on the young person. In addition, the increased physical distance between a child placed out of borough and their social worker means that the child is not provided with the same level of support and contact. Local authorities were often unaware if a child in their care but placed in another local authority had gone missing due to lack of notifications between “placing” and “host” authorities. This severely limits the ability of social workers and local authorities to carry out their safeguarding duties to all children living within its boundary.

6.20 Young people in care, particularly those placed out of area, have told us that they do not feel listened to and are not provided with any information about where they were being placed. As a result, running away is one of the only ways that the young people felt that they could exercise control over their lives. Research shows that when children are listened to and they get clear explanations about decisions made about their care, they are more likely to be happy about their placements, to achieve stability and to share information. This is particularly important for children placed out of their local area who have little contact with their family and friends and less contact with social worker due to physical distance. Advocacy is instrumental in ensuring that children are supported to participate in decisions and adults are better able to understand their feelings. This is vital for adults to more effectively support a young person who might be at risk of or experienced sexual exploitation. Although the right to be supported by an advocate is included in statutory guidance, one third of local authorities do not report spending anything on this service.33

6.21 Guidance34 should be amended so that all children in care have a statutory right to independent advocacy as part of care reviews and placement planning, not just as part of complaint processes.

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34 Children’s Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations
7. The extent to which Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) have implemented key aspects of national guidance on child sexual exploitation, including the quality of partnership working between LSCBs, care services and police within and between local authority areas

7.1 Findings from the University of Bedfordshire’s research on Local Safeguarding Children’s Board (LSCBs) responses to CSE have found that less than a quarter of LSCBs have a protocol for child sexual exploitation and only a quarter have a specialist service.35

7.2 These findings are backed up by findings from our services that responses to runaway and missing children and young people have been downgraded. The government’s statutory guidance on children who go missing from home or care is clear that protocols should be put in place, which include having a named person responsible for children who go missing and run away.36 Despite this, some of our practitioners report that some local authorities do not have a protocol or named individual responsible for leading responses to children who run away and may have been sexually exploited.

7.3 The Children’s Society has been instrumental in setting up a number of multi-agency forums on CSE and missing locally which involve social and voluntary services and the police. We believe these forums should exist within the LSCB structures and be accountable to the chair. The purpose of these forums is to share information between agencies and use the information strategically to identify patterns of running away and sexual exploitation. This helps ensures that local services are able to respond appropriately to reduce incidents of running away and sexual exploitation, as well as identify children at risk.

7.4 Within the meetings of the multi-agency forums, professionals work together to identify the vulnerability of children and young people while they are running away or missing by sharing information about where they went missing or were sexually exploited, what happened while they were away and where they were found. By bringing together a number of local agencies who are all working with vulnerable young people, the forum can be used to piece together aspects of the young person’s vulnerability. In our experience this has been vital in identifying complex abuse cases where a number of children where found at the same address, or have been exploited by a group of perpetrators.

7.5 For example, Lancashire have a Pan-Lancashire CSE and missing from home group which is a subgroup of the three LSCBs (Lancashire, Blackpool and Blackburn with Darwen). It brings together representatives from the six police divisions, representatives from the LSCBs, the local authorities, health and The Children’s Society. This group has developed an Action Plan responding to the National Action Plan on CSE and to the recommendations of recent government reports and guidance both on CSE and missing from home. It monitors the volume in CSE referrals and missing reports and it oversees the strategic response to these issues across Lancashire. Each division also has smaller subgroups that meet regularly and that bring together the partners on the ground.

7.6 All LSCBs should establish a multi-agency missing and CSE subgroup involving the police, social services and the voluntary sector who should work to joint protocols and appoint a lead individual responsible for co-ordinating work in this area.

7.7 The particularly strong relationship between Lancashire Constabulary and The Children’s Society has been key to this partnership working and is particularly aided by the fact that the two organisations are co-located in the same office. Both The Children’s Society and social services have staff who work out of offices in each of the four Lancashire divisions. The presence of a police Missing from Home Co-ordinator within these multi-agency teams is of paramount importance in identifying the links and recognising the early signs of CSE in young people who are reported missing. The county is currently in the process of developing a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) on CSE and missing.

7.8 As a result, The Children’s Society in Lancashire has worked hard with the police to develop innovative ways of responding to the different patterns of emerging need (eg work with young men as victims of CSE; work with young men at risk of becoming perpetrators of CSE and how they are now involved in challenging other young men; night-time outreach in partnership with police operations working in red light districts).

7.9 Local authorities should be supported by central government and ACPO to set up a local multi-agency information sharing process, for instance a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) to ensure that information is shared between agencies on individual running away and CSE incidents and patterns of running away in the local area.

7.10 A key aspect of the statutory guidance on children who go missing from home or care is that all children who run away should have access to an independent return interview. This can help establish why they ran away, for example as a result of grooming, and identify the most effective type of follow up support they should receive. It can also help social services and the police identify potential perpetrators and hot spot locations for grooming which can save time and resources for both the local authorities and police. This can prevent future missing episodes as well as reduce further risks to young people at risk of sexual exploitation.

35 Jago, S et al (2011). What’s going on to safeguard children and young people from sexual exploitation? How local partnerships respond to child sexual exploitation University of Bedfordshire, Bedford

7.11 The revised Children Who Run Away or Go Missing From Home or Care guidance should state that every child or young person who runs away from home or care should receive an return interview from a responsible adult the child or young person is comfortable speaking with and disclosing information to within 72 hours of a missing incident.

8. The circumstances under which care services report missing children to the police

8.1 Evidence seen by the APPG inquiry highlighted higher levels of reporting of missing incidents from children’s homes compared to those from family or foster homes. According to the Metropolitan Police, for example, 80–90% of young people reported missing are from the care system. However, rather than indicating genuine running incidents, these high rates often reflect the fact that carers are more likely to report children and young people as missing, even in cases of unauthorised absence or if the child is simply late home.

8.2 The APPG inquiry also heard how staff in care homes were less likely to have tried to search for young people who go missing than family members were and were often uninterested in the outcome of the missing report. This was felt to be due to risk aversion and lack of resources. Evidence from the police reported that in a small number of cases, particularly related to private care homes, that they were getting a number of inappropriate reports where care homes had not searched for children who were reported missing and they were filling a vacuum in resources in these homes.

8.3 Yet the APPG inquiry found some children are not being reported missing when they should be. Some local authorities were not reporting children unless they went missing overnight. However, our experience tells us that a child can be very seriously exploited and abused in a short period of time.

8.4 This is a difficult area to negotiate for agencies. As patterns of grooming for sexual exploitation and other harms such as drug taking or involvement in gangs often involve relatively short periods of being away from the care placement, it is crucial that care staff and other local services are alert to these dangers and informed when a young person’s pattern of behaviour indicates risk. Yet an over-reporting of missing incidents to the police runs the risk of a downgrading of the response from local forces as they tire of being used as a “taxi service” for children’s homes. Our practice and the APPG inquiry has found that better partnerships on the ground between local police and care home staff can work to improve relationships and reduce over-reporting whilst ensuring adequate safeguarding.

8.5 New definitions of “missing” and “absent” are being piloted by the (Association of Chief Police Officers) ACPO and the Home Office in West Midlands, Greater Manchester and Staffordshire police forces. Unofficial pilots are also taking place in other police forces. As a result of changes to the definitions some children may be classified as absent—“not at a place where they are expected or required to be”—if they are not considered to be at risk.

8.6 This will greatly affect the circumstances under which care services report missing children to the police and how the police respond. We are concerned that children who go missing repeatedly but who are not considered to be at risk will not receive an adequate safeguarding response. Research has clearly shown the links between frequent missing episodes and grooming and sexual exploitation. However, professionals may be unaware that a child is at risk of sexual exploitation even if they are aware of their whereabouts. In addition, if data about “absent” children is not regularly collected, analysed and acted upon by the police and local authorities, these children may not receive support early enough to prevent and protect them from any further risks or abuse, involvement in crime, drugs or sexual exploitation.

8.7 An additional evaluation of the ACPO pilots that assesses the safeguarding and risk assessment procedures in place when a child is classified as “absent” should take place before it is rolled out nationally.

9. The quality of data collection, data sharing and research on child victims of localised grooming

9.1 Our practitioners report that there is great variety between the quality of data collection, sharing and research on child victims of localised grooming in the areas where they work. Data collection on grooming is not streamlined between social services and the police unless areas have a subgroup on CSE and/or missing children.

9.2 With the abolition of National Indicator 71 (a national indicator which measured local areas performance in relation to runaway children) and no standardised reporting from local authorities, it has become difficult to monitor local data collection on runaways and CSE and to build a national picture. The APPG inquiry found that there were serious shortcomings and inconsistencies in the data collected by local authorities on children who go missing from care. Some of our services also report that local authorities collect little or inadequate data about runaway children and the assessment children receive following a running away episode (such as an independent return interview) which could be a sign that they are being groomed. Information on return interviews is crucial to capture why young people might be going missing and whether this is as a result of being groomed for sexual exploitation.

9.3 Data collection and sharing is essential in order to understand the level of running away and child sexual exploitation in the local area. This information can then inform local service provision and ensure the right procedures are in place to respond to young people. In addition, the capturing of information by every agency
about children in a standard format that can be used by the police in prosecution cases is vital. There is a need for the police to train local agencies in what information they can use and how this should be written. This will enable evidence to be gathered by the police and be used in prosecutions against perpetrators of children sexual exploitation.

9.4 In Newcastle, the M-SET (Missing/Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking Group) is a subgroup of the Newcastle LSCB. The group produces annual Missing Persons data reports collating information on monthly figures for the total number of children reported missing to the police in Newcastle and compares this to other areas within the Northumbria Police Force Area. The report analyses repeat missing incidents, demographic data and whether they are looked after. This information is used to provide an informed response to missing, sexual exploitation and trafficking across Newcastle.

9.5 All LSCBs should establish a multi-agency CSE and missing subgroup that collects data and intelligence on sexual exploitation and missing episodes to help monitor cases, direct resources and gather evidence for prosecutions.

9.6 The APPG inquiry also found that one of the barriers to monitoring the safety of children in care was the lack of proactive data sharing by Ofsted with other agencies. Currently Ofsted does not share the names and locations of children’s homes with local police. This greatly reduces the police’s ability to effectively safeguard children and target children’s homes and hotspots of sexual exploitation, as well as share information on missing incidents in children’s homes.

9.7 The Department for Education should change relevant regulations to allow Ofsted to share information on the names and locations of children’s homes with local police forces.

The Children’s Society

November 2012

Supplementary written evidence from The Children’s Society [LCG 17a]

INTRODUCTION

This supplementary evidence contains our proposed recommendations, as requested by the Committee, regarding the changes for how the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) works with child victims of sexual exploitation. We have also included two key recommendations we would like to highlight to the Committee on the importance of return interviews in both identifying on-going support for victims of localised grooming and providing intelligence for prosecutions.

This evidence should be read alongside our Written Evidence Submission from October 2012 and Oral Evidence given by Martine Osmond, Senior Practitioner at The Children’s Society, Torbay on 19 March 2013 where we made several recommendations about the importance of multi-agency working and tackling negative attitudes towards children who are victims of child sexual exploitation (CSE). The full list of our recommendation is also in an Appendix below.

RETURN INTERVIEWS

Recommendation 1: The forthcoming statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care should require local authorities to offer return interviews, delivered by an independent professional a child or young person is comfortable speaking with, to all children who run away or go missing from home or care within 72 hours of a missing incident.

Missing is a key indicator of sexual exploitation and grooming. A return interview can help agencies understand why the young person went missing and identify the most effective type of follow up support they should receive. This can prevent future missing episodes, aid disruption of sexual exploitation, as well as reduce further risks to young people at risk of sexual exploitation.

Recommendation 2: The forthcoming statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care should require local authorities to have a set of standard procedures in place stipulating what questions should be asked during the return interview, how risks should be assessed, and how information should be recorded and shared with the police and CPS if abuse is suspected or disclosed by a young person.

Return interviews are a very useful tool for social services and police to collect intelligence about perpetrators and hot spot locations where grooming of children is taking place. They can also help the police with building evidence for the prosecution. Local authorities must ensure that they collect, monitor and interrogate intelligence from these interviews and share this with the police and CPS to help them build up evidence for prosecution. Freedom of Information requests that we conducted in January 2012 with local authorities found that 74 out of 152 did not provide figures for the number of return interviews runaway children received.37

CPS (CROWN PROSECUTION SERVICE) CHANGES

**Recommendation 3:** The new CPS guidance should state that young people should have one consistent adult to support them from the beginning to the end of the prosecution process to enable them to give better evidence.

This person should be independent from the police and CPS process so they are not tainted with any negativity that the young person may have towards the process. Our projects find that young people are not given adequate support when they report allegations of child sexual exploitation or serious sexual violence and when they go through the court proceedings. The mechanisms of grooming for child sexual exploitation such as alcohol and drugs and emotional and physical manipulation can mean that children are perceived as unreliable witnesses who may have changed their story. Only through the support of an adult that they trust can the young person start to come to terms with what has happened and tell their story in a way that will produce the evidence needed for a successful prosecution. In addition victims of CSE often find themselves having to repeat their personal and traumatic story to numerous strangers and agencies or professionals. Having one consistent adult to talk to throughout the process would also address this situation.

Our services often provide this support to young people as illustrated in the case study below.

*Case study*

Joey (aged 14) met another young man online and they soon became quite close. When they met, Joey realised the man was older than he had initially said but they still began a sexual relationship. Joey believed he was in love and that they were in a loving relationship. Soon he realised he was not the only one and that this man was even older than he had claimed to be. The relationship became violent.

After the case was reported to the police, Joey felt overwhelmed by the amount of professionals wanting to talk to him about what had happened and he began to refuse to engage. Joey refused to do an ABE interview (Achieving Best Evidence interview where the child is asked to say what happened in their own words.) The police asked The Children’s Society in Lancashire to become involved and to visit Joey. Through our work with him, Joey was able to tell his story and find support for all the confusion and mixed feelings he had. Joey chose to make a statement and with this the police were able to continue the investigation and collect enough evidence to put the case forward.

The CPS did a thorough job, not only based on evidence provided, but also by requiring files from professionals working with Joey in order to better prepare the case. Joey felt that they were taking him seriously. Through our worker, the police kept Joey and his family informed of each stage and what it meant. Because they felt supported, Joey and his mum were able to pass on extra information and evidence that helped with the case. We also arranged for Joey to visit court in preparation for the trial. Joey felt extremely distraught and anxious when confronted with the reality of his case going to court. However, due to the positive collaboration in this case and the quality of evidence provided, the offender changed his plea to guilty and was sentenced to a custodial sentence of six years.

**Recommendation 4:** The new CPS guidance must state that young people should only be taken through the court process as a last resort. Third party evidence and expert witnesses should be used as much as possible.

As illustrated by the case study above, The Children’s Society often provides third party evidence where a disclosure has been made to us and a child may find it difficult to or not want to give evidence in court due to the traumatic process they have been through. This can be vital to achieving successful prosecutions as it provides the victim with the support they need to disclose fully and provides access to crucial intelligence that the CPS may not otherwise have access to. Expert witnesses should also be used to explain the nature of child sexual exploitation, the methods of grooming and the reasons why the child may not be perceived as a reliable witness. This will add credibility to their story and help ensure the CPS and court can fully understand their vulnerability.

**Recommendation 5:** The new CPS guidance must to state that young people should be supported so that they do not feel they are alone when they disclose sexual exploitation.

A balance needs to be struck between not contaminating the evidence and supporting young people and enabling them to understand that they are not alone and that other young people have made complaints. This is important for two reasons: firstly so that they do not feel like they are the only ones who have “blabbed” and therefore risk being isolated from peers and; secondly so that professionals can help them realise that perceived boyfriends have actually committed offences with other victims and that they are in an abusive relationship.
APPENDIX

FULL LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CHILDREN’S SOCIETY WRITTEN EVIDENCE SUBMISSION

IDENTIFICATION AND EARLY SUPPORT FOR CHILD VICTIMS OF LOCALISED GROOMING

1. Social care services should assess referrals jointly with the police to ensure that there is a shared understanding of thresholds for intervention and ensure they work together to safeguard children in their local area.

2. Guidance should be amended so that all children in care have a statutory right to independent advocacy as part of care reviews and placement planning, not just as part of complaint processes.

3. The obligation for homes to notify agencies of “Involvement or suspected involvement of a child accommodated at the home in prostitution” under Schedule 5 of the Children’s Homes Regulations 2001, which relates to “Events and Notifications”, should be changed to “suspicion that a child accommodated in a home is at risk of abuse or child sexual exploitation”.

EQUIPPING PROFESSIONALS AND SERVICES WITH KNOWLEDGE TO IDENTIFY SIGNS OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

4. Children’s home staff should receive training on how to identify the warning signs of grooming, including running away, why young people may have been sexually exploited and how to better support young people who have experienced sexual exploitation. This should be continuous tailored training due to the high turnover of staff in care homes.

5. All police staff should receive awareness raising training on how to identify the warning signs of grooming, including running away, why young people may have been sexually exploited and the actions that need to be taken if they come across a young person who may have experienced, or be at risk of, sexual exploitation.

6. All frontline professionals and staff that work with children (such as GPs, hospital staff, parents, landlords, judges, magistrates, teachers, church leaders, youth workers, pub landlords and public venue security staff) should receive tailored training on how to identify the warning signs of grooming, including running away, and the actions that need to be taken if they come across a young person who may have experienced, or be at risk of, sexual exploitation.

7. Hotel front-of-house, domestic and security staff should receive training on how to identify the warning signs of grooming, including running away, and the actions that need to be taken if they come across a young person who may have experienced, or be at risk of, sexual exploitation. Our Say Something If You See Something campaign with the National Working Group has developed partnerships with hotels and is delivering awareness raising training to all staff to combat the problem of hotels unwittingly being used as a venue for sexual exploitation.

THE SUPPORT PROVIDED TO VICTIMS AND WITNESSES BY A RANGE OF AGENCIES SUCH AS THE CROWN PROSECUTION SERVICE, POLICE AND VOLUNTARY AGENCIES

8. Special measures such as giving evidence by live link and more choice about how they give evidence should be used where appropriate and desired by the child. These should also include access to support before, during and after the court process.

QUALITY OF PARTNERSHIP WORKING BETWEEN LSCBS, CARE SERVICES AND POLICE WITHIN AND BETWEEN LOCAL AUTHORITY AREAS

9. All LSCBs should establish a multi-agency missing and CSE subgroup involving the police, social services and the voluntary sector who should work to joint protocols and appoint a lead individual responsible for coordinating work in this area.

10. Local authorities should be supported by central government and Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) to set up a local multi-agency information sharing process, for instance a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) to ensure that information is shared between agencies on individual running away and CSE incidents and patterns of running away in the local area.

11. The revised statutory guidance children who run away or go missing from home or care should state that every child or young person who runs away from home or care should receive a return interview from a responsible adult, that the child or young person is comfortable speaking with and disclosing information to, within 72 hours of a missing incident.

12. An additional evaluation of the ACPO pilots that assesses the safeguarding and risk assessment procedures in place when a child is classified as “absent” should take place before it is rolled out nationally.

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38 Children’s Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations
THE QUALITY OF DATA COLLECTION, DATA SHARING AND RESEARCH ON CHILD VICTIMS OF LOCALISED GROOMING

13. All Local Safeguarding Children’s Boards (LSCBs) should establish a multi-agency CSE and missing subgroup that collects data and intelligence on sexual exploitation and missing episodes to help monitor cases, direct resources and gather evidence for prosecutions.

14. The forthcoming statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care should require that local authorities offer return interviews, delivered by an independent professional a child or young person is comfortable speaking with, to all children who run away or go missing from home or care.

15. The forthcoming statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care should require local authorities to have standard procedures in place stipulating what questions should be asked during the return interview, how risks should be assessed and, how information should be recorded and shared with the police and CPS if abuse is suspected or disclosed by a young person.

CPS (CROWN PROSECUTION SERVICE) CHANGES

16. The new CPS guidance should state that young people should have one consistent adult to support them from the beginning to the end of the prosecution process to enable them to give better evidence.

17. The new CPS guidance should state that young people should only be taken through the court process as a last resort. Third party evidence and expert witnesses should be used as much as possible.

18. The new CPS guidance must state that young people should be supported so that they do not feel they are alone when they disclose sexual exploitation.

April 2013

Written evidence from South Yorkshire Police [LCG 18]

LETTER FROM DAVID CROMPTON, CHIEF CONSTABLE, SOUTH YORKSHIRE POLICE, TO THE CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE, 16 NOVEMBER 2012

Home Affairs Select Committee Tuesday 16 October 2012—South Yorkshire Police Questions on Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) [HC 622-i]

Following my appearance before the Committee, I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to address, in more detail, the concerns raised by members.

The Committee posed a number of questions and, to assist my response, I will summarise the key themes:

— Why so few prosecutions in South Yorkshire, particularly when compared to other forces?
— Co-location with other agencies to improve prosecution rate?
— Whether the ethnic origin of the offender is a factor in the police decision not to prosecute?
— Co-location with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)?

During this response, I propose to address each of the questions raised and then provide you with the current position as to how South Yorkshire Police is presently tackling Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE).

Committee Questions

Why so few prosecutions in South Yorkshire, particularly when compared to other forces?

Firstly, it is important to state that The Times reporting, although not inaccurate, does not represent a full picture of the situation in South Yorkshire, and Rotherham in particular. In terms of prosecutions, CSE can encompass offences such as rape, sexual assault, taking of indecent images etc. In common with other forces, we deal with offences committed against children on a frequent basis and our prosecution rates are comparable with other forces. In 2011, when looking at the number of sexual offences committed against children (16 years and under) where the offender was an adult, 76 detected offences were recorded (a detection rate of 33.3%). This is not significantly different from the picture nationally.

The South Yorkshire prosecutions quoted in The Times, relate specifically to the phenomenon of multiple offenders, multiple victims and organised ‘grooming’ type offences that, thankfully, are much rarer. There have been very few convictions nationally for this type of offence, with Derby, Rochdale and Rotherham being notable exceptions.

Committee Note: The oral evidence session was entitled ‘Hillsborough Independent Panel Report’. The Committee asked several questions during that session regarding localised child grooming. This letter is a response to those particular questions.
Over the last 10 years, South Yorkshire Police has conducted 27 separate investigations into suspected organised ‘grooming’ type CSE. In total, these investigations revealed 90 linked children, though not all were victims, and led to the arrest of 65 suspected offenders. Of these, 20 were ultimately charged with offences, including rape. 14 others remain on police bail and of the remaining 31 that were not proceeded against; one was a police decision, whilst the remaining were CPS decisions, amongst which was an investigation that was referred to the Director of Public Prosecution for decision. These figures are more accurate than those estimated in our 2010 intelligence assessment and quoted by the committee.

The police, along with other local services, have a duty to protect the vulnerable, especially children, and it is important to acknowledge that prosecution is only one outcome of this on-going duty. Because of joint efforts between South Yorkshire Police and other local services, many children have received intense multi-agency engagement and have been removed from risk. Sheffield, Rotherham and Doncaster have dedicated multi-agency teams specialising in CSE prevention and protection. Early identification and intervention has often reduced or removed the risk before any harm or offences have occurred. Conversely, where offences are suspected, early action may frustrate the investigation process, but this is a secondary consideration to the welfare and safety of the child concerned.

During the appearance at the HASC, members referred to:

(i) Thousands of offences and hundreds of victims involved in CSE in South Yorkshire.

(ii) A specific case involving three members of one family linked to 61 girls, 13 of whom had been raped, sexually assaulted or threatened by members of that family.

(iii) An incident where a 12-year-old girl was found in a car with an adult male member of that family, alcohol was present and the man had indecent images of the girl on his phone.

We operate this multi-agency co-location model across the Force in three of our local authority areas and advanced plans are in place to co-locate with the final local authority area of Barnsley. The staff involved are from the police, local authority and voluntary sector. We also work closely with colleagues from the health authority and our co-located service offers specialist ‘family support’, in addition to that normally only offered by national voluntary organisations. Far from being slow in taking this step and seeing the benefits, South Yorkshire has been influential in identifying good practice. For example, the 2009 guidance document produced by the Department for Children Schools and Families ‘Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual
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Exploitation’ cites Sheffield as national good practice for the work of its Safeguarding Children Boards and Sexual Exploitation Service (p56).

More recently, the 2012 Ofsted Inspection, which graded Rotherham Local Authority Children’s Services as outstanding, recognised that “Good collaboration working between Police and Local Authority has resulted in a targeted and successful approach to tackling child sexual exploitation, which is further strengthened by a commitment to creating a team of qualified social workers based within the Police Protection Unit”.

**Whether the ethnic origin of the offender is a factor in the police decision not to prosecute?**

The majority of suspects in the 27 suspected South Yorkshire investigations mentioned above, were described as “Asian” or “Pakistani British”. This had no influence on the investigations carried out. In light of The Times reporting, we have commenced a review of all 27 investigations. This process is being led by a senior detective and is specifically focussed on wider investigative links, those suspects not previously arrested and revisiting CPS decisions regarding those not proceeded against. We have also requested further information from partners, to identify if there are new lines of enquiry that can be followed up. Any new information will be pursued vigorously.

**Co-location with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)?**

To address the committees’ final question, the Crown Prosecution Service ceased co-location a number of years ago under a national CPS re-structure. We do, however, retain good access to specialist lawyers and positive working relationships, including early consultation to achieve and capture best evidence to support prosecutions.

**Current Situation**

Since our 2010 intelligence report, we have also taken the following positive steps to improve our response to the problem of CSE:

— CSE is now part of the force Control Strategy, giving focus and driving operational activity.
— A Force Strategic Lead on CSE has been appointed.
— Delivered awareness training to all front line staff and enhanced training to detectives and specialists.
— 79 officers working specifically in child abuse related investigations incorporating CSE, eight exclusively dedicated to CSE work.
— Improved multi-agency working structures, including co-located police and partner agency teams.
— Proactive use of other intervention/disruption measures where prosecution is not achievable.
— South Yorkshire is one of the few forces nationally to recognise and map the link between CSE and Organised Crime Groups.
— A new “missing person” IT system has been introduced and this underpins CSE risk factors.
— The Force has membership of and actively contributes in the CSE National Working Group.

Through our CSE lead, Local Safeguarding Children Boards and Force Public Protection Board, we also have the following work ongoing:

— A restructure of the four local Public Protection Units under a central management structure. This will retain the benefits of co-location with partners, bring a consistency of approach, allow good practice to be shared more easily, and support victims in a more structured way.
— Benchmarking with other leading practitioners, including the feasibility of victimless prosecutions.
— Establishing a disruption “toolkit” based on that used by Lancashire Police, to ensure that we utilise disruption tactics, including other non-CSE legislation available.
— Introducing a performance framework.
— A greater consistency in all ‘missing from home’ return interviews focussing on CSE risk factors.
— A renewed focus on prosecution and disruption.
— Establishing a county-wide CSE Sub Group to the four Local Safeguarding Children Boards.
— Ensuring that the Force is compliant in all areas of the imminently released ACPO CSE Action Plan.
— Ensuring that the latest education material around CSE is provided to front line officers and our partners, an example being the recently released Child Exploitation Online Protection (CEOP) video utilising a storyline from the TV programme, Eastenders.
WIDER CONTEXT

Our experiences and developments over the last few years would suggest that more can be done to understand and tackle the problem of CSE nationally and I would summarise the key steps as:

— A greater recognition across the criminal justice system of CSE.
— Consideration could be given to strengthening the Sexual Offences Act 2003 around sexualised conversations, to cater for the advances of modern technology.
— A national database for the sharing of CSE information and intelligence. Linked to this would be better recording by police forces so CSE data is consistently recorded and searchable to allow meaningful comparison.
— Better provision of safe accommodation for victims of CSE, where relocation is necessary for their protection.

In conclusion, I hope that this response allows the Committee to gain a more informed understanding of the background and current position in South Yorkshire. I strongly believe that we have much to contribute to the national debate and I look forward to sharing our experiences with others to safeguard children within our communities.

David Crompton, Chief Constable
South Yorkshire Police
November 2012

Written evidence from NWG Network in Association with Victim Support [LCG 22]

The NWG Network was asked for a further submission on victims and witnesses and the court process. This report was jointly develop between Victim Support and NWG Network.

INDEPENDENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE ADVOCATE

The Independent Sexual Violence Advocate (ISVA) role is an extremely important role in supporting victims of sexual exploitation, sexual violence and rape. An ISVA can assist a young person to better understand and manage the whole court process. Each one should be specially trained in working with children and young people and understand the whole judicial process.

Introduction to a trained ISVA at the beginning of the process is vital, often young people experience a number of professionals “moving on” to other posts/cases during their experience. An ISVA allows for a constant individual who has only the interests of the child at heart, which is essential in these complex cases.

Understanding the issues facing young people who have been sexually exploited and raped is essential. We see many key workers from dedicated teams supporting victims and witnesses, some of these are ISVA’s, others experienced Child Sexual Exploitation workers, some who support the young person but not all have had previous experience of court processes.

We need to understand the journey that the young person has been through, the likelihood of further disclosures, retraction of allegations and the control through fear and retribution they experience. These features should be seen as a symptom of the abuse suffered and should not have a negative impact on the young person’s court experience.

To have the same supporting individual present from ABE interview till the end of the process will allow a young person to develop trust and confidence to share more details of abusers as time goes on. Young people will often share their worst experiences at a very late stage so it is important that this relationship is constant and maintained.

It is essential we use Registered Intermediaries from the onset of cases. Many police forces consider having trained officers with ABE interviewing skills as sufficient and that Registered Intermediaries are only used in cases where there are communication difficulties such as very young children or those with learning difficulties. However, when it comes to court and young people 12 to 16 years old being cross examined by multiple defence barristers, a lack of intermediary to be able to intervene in court proceedings on a child’s behalf is devastating. Equally, introducing an intermediary late into the process doesn’t help the young person or intermediary build a trusting relationship, which is vital. In addition to this an intermediary would not only be able to assist with communication barriers but also help with establishing credibility and highlighting vulnerability of a victim/witness.

Ushers require specific training in meeting the needs of the young person experiencing the court process, we currently experience a “we don’t do that in this court” attitude that hampers a victim/witness attending court and giving evidence.

Having a robust Young Witness Service can really assist with this as they will already have a relationship with the court manager and the usher and can sort many of the practicalities out and help prepare and support the young person through the process and also provide post trial support.
The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) young witness packs are currently being revised—these can be a useful preparation resource for children and young people and for those supporting them through the process.

Specialist Courts seems to work well in Domestic Abuse cases, appearing in front of an informed judge and victims being supported by those who understand the complexities of the issues. These features would add value where young people appear as a victim/witness in sexually violent cases.

Over the past few years we have seen some horrendous cases where the errors in the use of “special measures” has negatively hampered a case and those within the court process have not understood the potential impact on the victims/witnesses.

Examples of these are:

- A court appearance several years after the exploitation took place went ahead, but the appearance of the victim is considerable partly due to age, partly due to protecting her identity, but errors in the process showed the present identity to the whole court, defendants, jury, public gallery etc.
- Although screens have been requested, we have seen them forgotten on the day, victims/witnesses are then faced with all of their alleged abusers. In some cases the reaction of this unexpected situation makes it either impossible for the victim to continue to give evidence or in some cases, the reaction creates the illusion of an unreliable witness and the case is withdrawn.

In Nottingham there is a Specialist Domestic Violence Court with Victim Support and young witness service which works particularly well.

There is a critical need to develop the use of Expert Witnesses, in order for the court to understand the pathology of the children and young people who have experienced rape and/or sexual violence. Understanding sexual exploitation, the controls used and how victims can appear as “willing/consenting” is crucial to tackling sexual exploitation and creating an environment where those hearing the cases can be made aware of all the complexities. It is essential we understand the “bad character” references and applications made and what the impact is for a victim/witness and its relevance to being a victim/witness of sexual exploitation.

It is essential to have specially trained crown prosecutors, magistrates and judges dealing with cases of sexual exploitation. It is also clear that many of the signs and symptoms of sexual exploitation mirror those of trafficked victims. We are seeing more cases of trafficking within the UK but many of the young people who are either not seen as or have not been identified as trafficked victims through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) process demonstrate the same symptoms and distresses as sexually exploited victims.

Therefore we need our crown prosecutors, magistrates and judges to be trained not just in sexual exploitation but trafficking too. This would then also apply to Advocates. The advocate’s toolkit is being launched in April and has one specifically for Children and Young People.

In order to understand sexual exploitation and trafficking within the UK it would be extremely useful to see juries being given an awareness session on some of the complexities before the trial begins.

Implementation of Section 28 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 which allows for pre recorded pre trial cross examination via video link would assist in managing the situation where there are multiple defendants and therefore cross examination is usually by a number of barristers. Questions for cross examination submitted and done remotely in a child friendly environment would assist in not keeping children waiting in court unnecessarily and avoid long delays.

Ensuring young people have access to their ABE interview before trial (not on trial day!) to help refresh their memory and prepare them for cross examination would be of great assistance, it may be many months since they conducted the interview and may have been very anxious at the time. Therefore clarity on what was said and time to digest this would be beneficial to the young people. It is also important to allow for pre-court visits and explain the process and allow the young person to practice remote links, etc. before attending on the actual day, this requires courts to be more flexible in meeting the child’s needs.

We need to appropriately utilise remote links more than we do presently—young people being able to give evidence via video link without being in the court room in the presence of their abusers—therefore reducing anxiety of attending court and also providing them with a child friendly space if there are delays and adjournments rather than a court.

Sheila Taylor
NWG Network

Amanda Naylor
Victim Support
Written evidence from Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council [LCG 24]

HOME AFFAIRS SELECT COMMITTEE TUESDAY 8TH JANUARY 2013—ROtherham Borough Council questions on Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

Can I thank you on behalf of Mrs Thacker and myself for allowing us to appear before the committee on this extremely important issue. I want to reassure you of the Council’s commitment to tackling child sexual exploitation. It is a high priority for us as a Council; we will vigorously challenge multi agency partners regarding their performance and expect the LSCB to hold the Council and all partner agencies to account.

The Select Committee has correctly challenged the historic performance of the Council and partners. Performance in the past was simply not strong enough and I am not seeking to avoid this or reduce the impact it had on young people. But I do wish to get across that significant improvements have been made and service delivery today is far stronger. The Select Committee will rightly want to know that lessons from individual local cases and national experience have been learned and are being applied, and that as a consequence young vulnerable people are being better protected and supported. I would like to illustrate for you some of the ways in which this is happening in Rotherham.

Equally, I could not fail to take the strong message from the Select Committee regarding prosecutions and the significant deterrent effect of convictions. I have asked the LSCB to invite all relevant agencies to an urgent meeting to set out a clear way forward in improving performance in this area, within the broader context also of prevention, protection and accelerating improvements already planned and underway.

You asked for a number of reports which I have attached. One is the Serious Case Review of Laura Wilson, referred to as Child S. I have shared an unredacted version of this report previously with The Secretary of State for Education, and also with the Deputy Children’s Commissioner to assist with her national research.

The Serious Case Review contained a number of recommendations and a significant number requiring action from the Council had already been dealt with prior to the author finalising the report. This was because the Council had a separate and distinct Improvement Plan regarding our safeguarding activity which we were implementing as a parallel action whilst the SCR was being undertaken. The SCR which was prepared in 2010 made significant recommendations with regard to the way we handled child sexual exploitation through our Risky Business project (referred to as Project 1).”

Risky Business

The SCR acknowledged the skill and passion of staff working there but also noted that its original role and function had changed over time. The independent reviewer in summary recognised that the activity should form part of an integrated child safeguarding system, and not sit outside it. There was a clear recommendation that the role, purpose and function be reviewed and the Council has since done this. The service has not ceased, there is an integrated specialist unit managed by a qualified social worker sitting within the council’s Safeguarding Team that is delivering an enhanced range of services and some of the original workers remain. The difference is that it can now draw upon the full range of safeguarding social work capacity within the Council, and has stronger systems support and governance. These arrangements have allowed us to develop a co-located multi-agency service delivery model with the police which reflects current best practice thinking.

We have retained the elements of Risky Business recognised as key strengths. When the team was originally set up, one of its main objectives was to provide awareness raising in schools. To that end we have been delivering informal education programmes in all Rotherham Secondary schools since 1997 and this remains one of our priorities.

However, we have considerably strengthened this and target Year 8 pupils of both genders as local and national evidence indicates that this is the best time to make an intervention. We have recently developed a Year 10 programme where pupils who have been through the programme in Year 8, co deliver awareness training to the younger pupils. This is proving very successful and having good impact on the Year 8 pupils.

A Willingness to Share and Adopt new Learning

The Select Committee has heard evidence from CEOP and the Deputy Children’s Commissioner and each said that responses to their calls for evidence had not been widely supported by agencies. Rotherham were one of the 13 local authorities who contributed to the CEOP report “out of sight, out of mind”, we also contributed to the University of Bedfordshire research that underpinned this report and also both calls for evidence to The Office of the Children’s Commissioner’s Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation In Gangs and Groups. We have been and remain very active in attempting to share learning about child sexual exploitation and are members of the National Working Group on this subject.

We also commissioned the Lessons Learned Review of Operation Central, a copy of which I have also attached. We believed this to be so significant we hosted a Regional conference attended by 500 delegates to share information. We invited a young woman who is a survivor of sexual exploitation to address delegates and give direct experience of the circumstances in which these terrible crimes unfold, and the lifetime impact this has.
As part of our local councillor training programme we have increased the emphasis of all councillors as “Corporate Parent” and developed a programme of specific training on child sexual exploitation that we are now progressively rolling out.

Improvements since 2010 and planned Improvements

You asked us about licensing issues. We have considerably strengthened arrangements in Rotherham following concerns that some licensed private hire/hackney carriage drivers were associated with suspected Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). We have required enhanced level checks from the Disclosures and Barring Service (and its predecessor organisation) as a matter of course for many years. However, in recent years we have strengthened the links between the Safeguarding Children Board and the Licensing Authority and the officers that support both, to ensure that information regarding any potential risks of harm to children or adults is shared between departments in an effective and expedient manner.

To supplement this, we also hold regular Responsible Authority meetings which engage all the appropriate responsible bodies including senior representatives from the Licensing Team and the Manager of the Safeguarding Children Board. Information regarding child protection issues is shared at this meeting if it relates to any licensed premises or individuals (including taxi and private hire drivers).

In addition, Rotherham MBC Licensing have been leading on a county wide initiative to introduce a training package that covers adult and child safeguarding issues, (including CSE). It is anticipated that this training will be delivered to all new hackney carriage/private hire driver licence applicants as part of the application process. The issuing of a licence will be dependent on the successful completion of this training.

In the last two years, there have been four cases where we had concerns relating to a child safeguarding or sexual exploitation matter. All four drivers had urgent action taken against them to prevent them acting as taxi drivers. On receipt of information, three drivers were immediately suspended. The fourth prospective driver had a licence application refused by the Licensing Board on the basis of historical information relating to CSE. None of these individuals now operate as taxi drivers in Rotherham. Of these four, one driver subsequently had his licence revoked by the Licensing Board, a second remains suspended pending further investigation, the third voluntarily surrendered his licence and the fourth driver appealed the Licensing Board’s decision at the Magistrate’s Court, however the Court dismissed the appeal.

We have delivered multi agency training this year alone to 875 front line professionals. These include park rangers and gardeners, local housing officers, security guards at the local transport interchange and the Meadowhall shopping centre, health workers, and a range of other staff. The objective is to raise awareness in all partner agencies of the signs of sexual exploitation and the joint responsibility all officials and citizens have to tackling it.

I have already mentioned the multi-agency co-located team working with the police. In April, we are further strengthening our multi agency work when Public Health functions transfer to the local authority from the former PCT. We are developing co-location with the school nursing function and believe linked with the school based training above that this will be a very powerful addition to our team.

In addition to the multi-agency working and training we have redesigned our contact and referral processes and improved our practice on initial and core assessments. These are the mechanisms for ensuring the specific needs of children are identified quickly and they receive the help and support needed. Our performance in these areas now significantly outstrips national comparators.

The Select Committee are only too aware of the significant resource challenges faced by the public sector and I know they have raised this issue with the Chief Constable of South Yorkshire. Since 2010–11 the Council has progressively increased its budget for safeguarding activity. This has seen an increase of £5.65 million between 2010–2011 and 2012–2013 and as a percentage of the councils overall spend has risen from about 9% to 12%. Whilst making this investment in safeguarding activity, the Council has reduced spend overall within the Council by 28% during the same period. This demonstrates the commitment the Council has to ensuring all children within the borough are safe, and receive the right protection and support.

Our operational plan for 2013–14 is being considered at the next LSCB on 15th March by all partners for ratification. I will forward this to you as soon as the document has been agreed.

Sharing information with Members, Partner Agencies and Citizens

The Council is committed to having an open dialogue with citizens about how deep child sexual exploitation cuts into society. Following the Select Committee we have published some information for citizens and partners and this has been widely distributed.

We produce a confidential CSE briefing that goes on a monthly basis to the Leader of the Council, Children young people and families Cabinet Member, Chief Executive, Independent Chair of the LSCB and now the Police and Crime Commissioner. A quarterly edited version goes out to Members and Cabinet is briefed on a quarterly basis.
Currently we have 6 ongoing Operations, two of which are cross border. Our current CSE caseload is 59 children. Of these 59, we have safeguarding concerns for 6 of them. The other 53 are “at risk” of sexual exploitation. Of the 59, 11 have been missing at some point; of the 59 cases 4 are LAC.

Since 2008 we have issued 84 Abduction notices relating to 205 children. This does not equal 205 abused children as these were served as part of disruption of CSE and missing from home.

Our confidential briefing puts the scale of CSE into a stronger context. CSE as a proportion of all Police child abuse referrals is 6%, for Children’s services child abuse contacts it is 1.4%.

We are in partnership with the local newspaper to run a series of features on CSE to raise awareness and strengthen opportunities for reporting and disclosure of incidents of child sexual exploitation.

Ofsted

At the Select Committee I did emphasise that the council was anxious to improve. The most recent inspection of our Safeguarding provision was undertaken in August of last year, which was broadly contemporaneous with the articles appearing within the times Newspaper. The report to the Council acknowledges we still need to complete our improvement journey, but that we have continued to make progress following the service being taken out of Government intervention in early 2011.

The report specifically stated the following about the child sexual exploitation service as it existed in August 2012, “However, good collaborative working between the police and the local authority has resulted in a targeted and successful approach to tackling child sexual exploitation, which is being further strengthened by a commitment to creating a team of qualified social workers based within the police protection unit”. I can confirm that this team is now in place.

Finally, you made reference to the 2002 Home Office report. The Council has made enquiries of the Home Office for this report and they are unable to locate a copy. It is a document the Council does not have, and which I have never seen. If you believe it could assist the council in accelerating its improvement journey and are able to let me have a copy I would be very grateful.

Martin Kimber
Chief Executive
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
18 January 2013

Enclosed documents

— Ofsted Report—Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children
— South Yorkshire Police CSE—A strategic problem profile
— Serious Case Review Overview Report In respect of Child S
— Lessons Learned Review—Operation Central

Supplementary written evidence from Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council [LCG 24a]

I am responding to your request for further information as set out in your letter to me of the 30th January. I would also refer you to my letter to Mr Vaz of 18 January 2013. Before answering the specific questions, I thought it would be useful to describe more broadly our response to child sexual exploitation in Rotherham. As you will know, from the more general picture across the country, in recent years there has been growing professional and public awareness of child sexual exploitation as a form of child abuse. DfE publications such “Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation” (2009); the revised “Working Together 2010” and “Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan” (2011) and the progress report of July 2012, make reference to areas of work that were formerly less well understood. The development of our services in Rotherham has taken into account the various forms of government guidance; new legislation which has enabled the police and local authorities to develop best practice in respect of safeguarding children and young people and has resulted in enforcement action in respect of people who are suspected of being engaged in child sexual exploitation; and the practice being developed in other local authority areas.

It has become obvious in our work on preventing and responding to child sexual exploitation that we require information from a variety of sources in order to build up intelligence and evidence that enables us to establish risk to the child or young person, and to take enforcement action, or criminal proceedings against the alleged perpetrators. This can come from multiple sources and build up over time. As a result, our collection and analysis of data is becoming more focussed on incidents that can be assessed as involving child sexual exploitation, although many of the young people we come across have multiple factors in their lives which need to be recorded.

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For example, incidents which may in the past have been viewed as antisocial behaviour are now subject to the CSE Screening Tool which builds up a picture of young people with a number of risk factors indicating that they may be at risk of CSE. These young people are then referred to our preventive programmes, whereas for young people where it is assessed that they are at risk of significant harm through CSE, a qualified practitioner starts work with them immediately.

While your letter refers to “localised grooming” our team also receives referrals and information about other forms of child sexual exploitation, including incidents which have occurred through social networking, “boyfriend/girlfriend” relationships; and young people’s relationships which show signs of domestic abuse. This means that “localised grooming” is part of the caseload of our CSE team rather than representing their entire workload.

I hope this information proves useful as a background to the answers to your questions below.

1. What methods do you use to “disrupt” child sexual exploitation in the form of “localised grooming”?

We take “localised grooming” to be based on the CEOP definition from 2011.

“Localised grooming is a form of sexual exploitation, previously referred to as “on street grooming” by the media where children have been groomed or sexually exploited by an offender having initially met in a location outside their home. This location is usually in public, such as a park, cinema, on the street, or at a friend’s house. Offenders often act together, establishing a relationship with a child before sexually exploiting them. Some victims of street grooming may believe that the offender is in fact an older boyfriend. These victims introduce their peers to the offender group who might then go on to be sexually exploited as well. Abuse may occur at a number of locations within a region and on several occasions. Localised grooming was a term used by CEOP in the intelligence requests issued to police forces and other service agencies in order to define the data we (CEOP) wished to receive”

The first stage in this work is to raise professional and public awareness and we have done this by delivering multi-agency professional training through the Rotherham LSCB. By January 2013 875 professionals have attended training workshops and our elected members have been fully briefed on this area of work. Further awareness raising training has been organised to ensure senior managers in all local authority Directorates, LSCB, Children, Young People and Families Partnership are fully briefed on the indicators of CSE and how and when to share information. Our updated CSE Strategy and Action Plan reflects the roles and responsibilities of all departments within the local authority and how we can all ensure that CSE is reported and responded to appropriately.

The second stage in this work is to gather sufficient information for the police and the local authority to share and analyse to establish whether and where there is a risk to young people of “localised grooming” which might result in them being victims of child sexual exploitation.

The techniques the police use to disrupt “localised grooming” include:

- High visibility patrols in identified areas of the town including vehicle and person checks.
- “Abduction Notices” (further details below).
- Management of specific identified areas, eg making the green spaces in Rotherham safer by planting them less densely and preventing exploitation being conducted in secrecy; and the location of official and unofficial taxi bays.
- “Risk of Sexual Harm Orders”. This is a civil order to manage and restrict the lifestyle of an individual who has not been convicted of an offence. Rotherham has one “Risk of Sexual Harm Order” in place and we are applying for another. During the same period, one Risk of Sexual Harm Order (ROSHO) has been obtained. This particular offender was a lone female who posed as a young male on Facebook to contact young girls. She breached the ROSHO and was sentenced to 50 weeks imprisonment suspended for two years, a two-year supervision requirement, 150 hours of unpaid work and Sex Offenders Registration.
- Specific operations, where although disclosures have not been made, there could be a risk to children and young people, for example taxis and limousines carrying children (mainly girls) to proms.
- Joint working between Safer Neighbourhood Teams and Detached Youth Workers where information had come to our attention that young people were congregating at a car wash, we didn’t identify CSE at that time, but engaged young people in discussion about staying safe.

The impact of the disruption work is to make potential perpetrators aware that the police are observing their activities and deter them from approaching children and young people; identifying where children and young people are in cars, properties or on the street with adults who are not their parents or carers. The police take protective action and refer to the front line social care assessment team immediately. Young people found through these means and through engagement with youth workers and the CSE team are referred for assessment and specialist support.
2. How many attrition visits have you made in (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012?

The process of “attrition visits” is a tactic that has been developed specifically to target persons known to police where intelligence suggests they are actively involved in committing serious acquisitive crime. That intelligence, often supported by information from offender management processes, justifies assertive police action to intervene, disrupt and wherever possible prevent offending behaviour.

Outside the existing CSE referral processes, four intelligence packages have been developed over the last 12-months around individuals who may be at risk of engaging in CSE. Each of these cases, being intelligence rather than evidence-based, has been the subject to attrition visits by members of the Public Protection Unit (PPU). One individual, who refused to engage with police, was the subject of attrition visits for some time without successfully proving any intelligence. Such cases are further developed through more assertive policing tactics.

3. In your letter dated 18 January 2013 you told the Committee that you had issued 84 abduction notices since 2008. Please could you tell us in more detail how many abduction notices have you issued in (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012.

We take “Abduction Notice” to be a Child Abduction Warning Notice, which identifies the child/young person and confirms that they should not be with a specific adult and that that adult has no permission to associate with or to contact or communicate with the child. If the adult continues to do so, they may be arrested and prosecuted for an offence under Section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984 or Section 49 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1989, or for any other criminal offence committed in relation to that child.

Where evidence emerges or where the child or young person provides evidence of an inappropriate association, positive action is taken against the person responsible, including arrest, search of property and presentation of any available evidence to the CPS.

Serving Child Abduction Warning Notices is becoming a standard practice through our CSE team. In 2010, 35 notices were issued; in 2011, 34 notices were issued; in 2012 15 notices were issued. By the end of 2012, a total of 84 remain active; and by February 2013, there were 105 active. Similar warnings, guidance and referrals are made with the child or young person, and/or parents or guardians to ensure all future contact with that person ceases. Such notices and interventions tend to be used where arrest/prosecution for any substantive offences is not available or is inappropriate at that time.

4. How many taxi licences have been revoked or refused in relation to localised grooming in (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012?

Where information has been shared about the risk of CSE involving a specific named taxi driver or a potential taxi driver, this is discussed at the CSE Strategy Meeting and action agreed. Based on good practice elsewhere we have put training in place for taxi drivers to raise their awareness of their roles and responsibilities in respect of vulnerable adults, children and young people. This was devised jointly with LSCB’s and the South Yorkshire Joint Licensing Action Group.

In response to your question about revocation and refusal, this falls into three categories below:

- The number of taxi licenses revoked in 2010) 0, 2011) 1, 2012) 0
- The number of Taxi licenses refused because of concerns relating to child welfare 2010) 0, 2011) 1, 2012) 0
- The number of Taxi licenses were suspended 2010) 0, 2011) 0, 2012) 2

Of the two suspensions, one is likely to lead to revocation, the other licence was voluntarily surrendered post suspension. I covered this in my letter to Mr Vaz on 18 January.

5. We received evidence that 18 Rotherham taxi drivers were arrested in relation to localised grooming activity last year and yet according to your letter dated 18 January only four licences were suspended in the past two years. If these taxi drivers were arrested in relation to child sexual exploitation then why were they not all immediately suspended.

This is incorrect information and I am unsure on what basis it has been said.

Having discussed this with South Yorkshire Police colleagues we believe the arrests that may have been referred to were made in 2011 in relation to Operation Chard where there were 15 men arrested. Of these, one was a taxi driver and he immediately had his licence suspended and then revoked. This is shown in the figures I have provided above. In relation to other suspects, none was in an occupation where action could be considered under complementary legislation (such as the licensing acts) in addition to traditional criminal justice system routes. It is not the case that if taxi drivers are suspected of offences relating to safeguarding issues that the Council and the Police take no action. Regrettfully false information of this type, no matter how well-meaning start to become common currency and paint a picture of potential perpetrators and Council and Police inaction that erodes public confidence.
6. How many takeaway licences have been revoked or refused in relation to localised grooming in (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012?

There have been no takeaway licences revoked during 2010, 2011 and 2012. There is no current evidence to support the need to do so on the grounds of CSE, however given the national picture relating to CSE and takeaway food outlets, if information comes to light, the local authority and the police would take appropriate action. Information has been produced to assist the public in passing relevant information to the police and local authority if they have concerns.

7. How many licences relating to the sale of liquor have been revoked or refused in relation to localised grooming in (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012?

There have been no liquor licences revoked for 2010, 2011 and 2012 in relation to child sexual exploitation per se.

However one premise, had its licence revoked in March 2010 because of concerns relating to the protection of children. This was in relation to underage drinking and drunkenness.

There is no current evidence to support the need to revoke or refuse licences on the grounds of CSE. However given the national picture relating CSE to licenced premises, if information comes to light, the local authority and the police would take appropriate action. Information has been produced to assist the public in passing relevant information to the police and local authority if they have concerns.

8. Did Denis MacShane, whilst he was still MP for Rotherham, contact you to request a report on the issue of localised grooming in the area? If yes, please provide us with a copy of that report.

Denis MacShane did not contact us to request a report in relation to localised grooming therefore there is no report to provide.

9. When we asked you about multi-agency working, you told us that this had been set up 9 months ago. Can you tell us which agencies are involved in your multi-agency working model, how many representatives there are from each agency and how long each of them has been in place?

The following explains in summary the development of our children’s sexual exploitation activity:-

(i) For some years, young people thought to be at risk of CSE were supported through “Risky Business” an organisation set up in 1996 to support young people in Rotherham, which became part of our mainstream Youth Service in 2007.

(ii) In 2010, when “Operation Central” began, Risky Business was expanded to include two experienced Youth Workers from the Youth Offending Service to provide one to one support to young people identified as being at risk.

(iii) In July 2010 Rotherham’s Parenting Advisory Service added a Parent Support Worker to the Risky Business Team to support parents and carers who were worried about their child being at risk of CSE.

(iv) In September 2010, Rotherham MBC appointed a qualified, experienced social worker as Safeguarding Co-ordinator for CSE. This post ensured continuity to investigations and CSE work with children and young people.

(v) In May 2011, this social worker became the team manager of “Risky Business”, working jointly with the CSE Police Officer, the Police Missing Person’s officer and “Safe at Last” a local runaway’s charity. The Police strengthened their designated PC input from part time to full time.

(vi) In the months following her appointment the Team Manager further strengthened multi-agency working by having direct contact with the Detective Inspector at the Public Protection Unit (with responsibility for child sexual exploitation, child abuse, missing persons). At this point regular discussions began on a monthly basis around developing a multiagency team which could be co-located in order to follow best practice in other areas, which was fully researched jointly by Police and the Team Manager.

As can be seen we developed a way of working collaboratively with other agencies throughout this period and it gradually became more sophisticated. However, it was in May 2012 that our collaborative working developed to the point that the way we worked with other agencies made a sufficiently strong routine, pattern and structure to it that it could genuinely be termed as two or more associated partners working together in a conjoined way.

(vii) In May 2012 we restructured our Risky Business team into our Child Sexual Exploitation Team further to recommendations from the Child S serious case review. You will recall I explained in my last letter that the Risky Business model had been criticised for not having a strong child protection base.

At this time we further strengthened our multi-agency working through regular information sharing meetings with the police and health agencies.

(viii) In May 2012 a formal restructure of the CSE team took place. Following this, work began to recruit two qualified social workers to join the team, although it was supported in the interim by my general
safeguarding unit pending formal recruitment. The interviews took place in the summer of 2012 and the two workers joined the Team Manager, Connexions Worker, Parenting Worker and Youth Workers as part of the CSE Team in September 2012.

In my last letter I drew attention to the Ofsted inspection of the Council’s safeguarding activity that occurred in August 2012. This made clear reference to the improvements we has made to our CSE service, and which showed clear evidence of the impact our multi-agency working had delivered between May up until the inspection. This gave us further confidence to take the next step to move from multi-agency working to a model where we could have agencies operating from the same room, sharing systems, data and real time intelligence to agree support and interventions for young people.

(i) On 1 October 2012 the team became fully co-located in the Public Protection Unit in Rotherham. The Team Manager of the CSE team is managed by the Service Manager responsible for front line duty and assessment social care services, and recording is carried out on the social care electronic recording system.

(x) The CSE team consists of a Team Manager, three qualified social workers, a parent worker, and two part time youth workers; together with two Detective Constables, one Police Constable and one Detective Sergeant from March 2013; and a Community Health Nurse from April 2013.

(xi) We also have the services of a Psychology student evaluating our preventative work in schools since last October.

10. In your letter dated 18 January you said that you have been delivering informal education programmes in all Rotherham Secondary schools. How many schools did they visit in 2012? And how many schools are there under the purview of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council?

Rotherham has 16 secondary schools, 5 special schools and three pupil referral units where we deliver education programmes to raise awareness of what CSE is, and helping young people to identify what positive relationships look like, carried out as part of the PHSE programme. In 2012 we delivered programmes in 7 secondary schools, 1 special school and 1 pupil referral unit. This is a rolling programme and all secondary schools and PRU’s will have had a programme by the close of the summer term 2013.

We also deliver programmes to our children’s homes, voluntary sector housing providers and alternative education providers. Staff from the CSE team have spoken at both primary and secondary schools forums and to headteachers; and delivered the key note speech on promoting resilience to reduce vulnerability in the 2012 Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health in Rotherham Schools Conference. This was to over 100 schools and associated health colleagues.

As you will appreciate Rotherham MBC strongly supports the drive by the Home Affairs Select Committee to ensure child sexual exploitation is tackled. The Select Committee will be instrumental in drawing together the lessons to be learned from history and in helping all agencies to make a step change in improving their CSE services.

It would act against the interests of vulnerable children and families if an impression is created in the mind of those needing services that the Council and others will turn their back on them and not take matters seriously.

I have previously said that I believe performance in the past was simply not strong enough and it was only from about 2009 that greater national professional awareness began to crystallise about the nature of child sexual exploitation and the potential responses to it.

But there is strong and independent evidence from Ofsted as recently as last August that the Council has improved. Whilst there is still things that need to improve I am anxious that the public of Rotherham feel confident that they can report any matters of concern they may have to us and that we will provide help and support to them.

I have shared with you the intelligence we have jointly with the Police and other agencies relating to current levels of risk, and the active operations that are underway. Any inference there are currently hundreds of young people in Rotherham town centre that are being sexually exploited and which the Council and Police will not tackle is not borne out by evidence. You have my personal commitment in ensuring the Council will support young people and families that need help will get it, and that the Council will do whatever it can working with others to protect young people and identify and bring perpetrators to justice.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you need any further information.

Yours sincerely,

Martin Kimber,
Chief Executive
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

18 February 2013