House of Commons
Home Affairs Committee


Seventh Special Report of Session 2014–15

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Home Affairs Committee

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The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk

Publication

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at www.parliament.uk/homeaffairscom

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Tom Healey (Clerk), John-Paul Flaherty (Second Clerk), Dr Ruth Martin (Committee Specialist), Duma Langton (Committee Specialist), Andy Boyd (Senior Committee Assistant), Iwona Hankin (Committee Assistant) and Alex Paterson (Select Committee Media Officer).

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Seventh Special Report


Appendix: Government response

Letter from Rt Hon Theresa May MP, Home Secretary, 10 February 2015

The Government would like to thank the Committee for its follow up report to the inquiry into 'child sexual exploitation and the response to localised grooming'. The Committee’s report is another significant contribution to the current debate on the steps being taken at both a local and national level to tackle child sexual exploitation.

I have been clear that what happened in Rotherham was a complete dereliction of duty by a number of agencies that should have protected children from sexual harm. There is undoubtedly more to be done for the victims in Rotherham and to minimise the risk of such terrible events occurring in Rotherham or anywhere else in the future. Louise Casey’s Inspection report has now been published, and the Communities Secretary has explained his intention to make a direct statutory intervention to take over council functions through the appointment of new Commissioners.

The Committee made four recommendations. I have set out in an attachment to this letter the Government's response to each recommendation.

The Rt Hon Theresa May MP
February 2015
Government response

Conclusion/Recommendation 1

This is not the first case in which it has been alleged that files of information relating to child sexual exploitation have disappeared. The proliferation of revelations about files which can no longer be located gives rise, whether fairly or not, to public suspicion of a deliberate cover-up. The only way to address these concerns is with a full, transparent and urgent investigation and the Home Office must do everything in its power to locate any missing files in its possession relating to child sexual exploitation in Rotherham and other places. (Paragraph 11)

Government response

The Government is determined that appalling cases of child abuse should be exposed so that perpetrators face justice and the vulnerable are protected.

On 7 July the Home Secretary announced to the House of Commons that Peter Wanless and Richard Whittam QC would be conducting a Review of two Independent Reviews that were commissioned by the Permanent Secretary at the Home Office in relation to child abuse. The report by Peter Wanless and Richard Whittam QC was placed in the House Library on 11 November and is also available, as well as several annexes, on Gov.uk at the following link: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-peter-wanless-and-richard-whittam-qc-review. Publication of this Review is an important step in ensuring institutions take seriously their duty to protect children from abuse and to learn lessons from any failures.

In relation to whether the Home Office received a report in 2002 from the researcher who was working for Rotherham Council, the Home Secretary has asked officials to look into this thoroughly to ascertain whether any information was passed to this department at the time and if so, what action was taken as a result. The Home Secretary has also asked that Peter Wanless and Richard Whittam QC review this work when completed.

Conclusion/Recommendation 2

David Crompton, the Chief Constable of South Yorkshire Police, met with Dr Angie Heal to gain a first-hand account of the issues that she raised. All chief officers in South Yorkshire Police have visited the Public Protection Unit in Rotherham and have met with police staff and council staff to develop a deeper understanding of demand and arrangements to support victims. By 1 October 2014, 29 new cases had been reported to the unit. (Paragraph 14)

Government response
We note the Committee’s comments.

Conclusion/Recommendation 3

There is compelling evidence that both Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council and South Yorkshire Police ignored numerous, credible warnings about the scale of child sexual exploitation in Rotherham. Given that these warnings came from Risky Business and others who had been expressly tasked with investigating and tackling the problem, it is difficult to understand why they were not taken more seriously. It is even suggested that documentary evidence was stolen in order to suppress it. It is hard to resist the conclusion that, if the Council and Police had taken these warnings seriously, the abusers could have been brought to justice more quickly and some of the later victims could have been spared their ordeal. (Paragraph 16)

Government response

The Government is clear that what happened in Rotherham was a complete dereliction of duty. There is undoubtedly more to be done for the victims in Rotherham and to minimise the risk of such terrible events occurring in Rotherham or anywhere else in the future.

We are taking immediate action in Rotherham to ensure the effective protection of children right now. The Secretary of State for Education has appointed a Commissioner to investigate and address the failings identified by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector Sir Michael Wilshaw in his early inspection on child protection services in Rotherham. Furthermore, an independent inspection of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council has been commissioned by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, led by Louise Casey. The National Crime Agency has begun an independent two stage investigation into non-familial child sexual exploitation and abuse in Rotherham, following a request from South Yorkshire Chief Constable David Crompton.

The Home Secretary is chairing a series of Secretaries of State meetings bringing together colleagues from the Ministry of Justice, the Departments for Education, Health, Communities and Local Government and the Attorney General to look at the failures identified in the Jay report and consider how all parties, including the police and local government, can work together more effectively on the issue of child sexual exploitation.

More widely, the Home Secretary has established an Inquiry which will consider whether, and the extent to which, public bodies and other non-state institutions have taken seriously their duty of care to protect children from sexual abuse.
The Government is clear that we must never accept a situation where police forces and local authorities fail in their fundamental duty of care towards vulnerable children.

**Conclusion/Recommendation 4**

We recommend that new legislation be brought in to provide for a Police and Crime Commissioner to be subject to recall. There are a number of possible methods by which this could be done, and detailed discussion is required. One possible model is contained in a draft Bill that is published as an Annex to this Report. It allows for recall of PCCs when one of two conditions is met: the first that the Police and Crime Panel has passed a motion of no confidence in the PCC, and second that one or more local authorities representing at least half the population of the police area have passed a motion of no confidence in the Commissioner. We will return to this issue when we return to the subject of PCCs again. (Paragraph 24)

**Government response**

Police and Crime Commissioners are directly elected by local people. As such, they are held accountable by the most effective check on any politician: the ballot box. This democratic power did not exist before 2012, when we replaced invisible, unaccountable police authorities with directly elected PCCs. Under the old system, the public had no say in who served as a police authority chairman or member.

The rules on the dismissal of a PCC are stronger than those for similar directly elected roles, such as MPs. Police and Crime Panels hold the power to suspend a PCC charged with an offence which carries a maximum sentence above two years' imprisonment. Any PCC found guilty of an imprisonable offence (whether or not a custodial sentence is handed down) is immediately disqualified from holding office.

The Home Secretary has said that there is "a debate to be had" on the issue of PCC recall, and the Government has noted the contents of the Committee's draft Bill, and also noted the Committee's view that detailed discussion on this issue is required. The Government will listen carefully to the views of the Committee, of Parliament, and of the public more generally, and will reflect upon these views.

The Rt Hon Theresa May MP
February 2015