



## Home Affairs Committee

### Oral evidence: [Child sexual exploitation and the response to localised grooming: follow-up](#), HC 203

Tuesday 2 September 2014

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 2 September 2014.

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Members present: Keith Vaz (Chair); Ian Austin, Nicola Blackwood, Michael Ellis, Paul Flynn, Lorraine Fullbrook, Dr Julian Huppert, Yasmin Qureshi, Mark Reckless.

Questions 142 – 172

*Witness:* **Chief Constable David Crompton QPM**, South Yorkshire Police, gave evidence.

**Q142 Chair:** Can I now turn to Rotherham? Your sending six police officers down to Sunningdale and the deal that you made with the BBC are in marked contrast to the failure of your police force to act. As you know from your appearance before this Committee two years ago, nobody was prosecuted between 2010 and 2013. We understand from the Home Secretary today that there are investigations into legacy cases. You have clearly read the report by Professor Jay in its totality?

**Chief Constable Crompton:** Yes.

**Q143 Chair:** Do you now regret not taking sufficient action against those people who were responsible for the rape and the horrors inflicted on so many children in Rotherham? Would you like to apologise for that?

**Chief Constable Crompton:** Yes. I have done already and I repeat that apology now. There are, going back over many years, clear failures, because, of course, this report stems from 1997. While I have not heard exactly what the Home Secretary has had to say, I know she has had some strong words in the House today about that. I think there has to be some very clear reflection about how those failures occurred. To come back to your point, Chair, when I was before this Committee before, we talked about the number of prosecutions. I can tell you that since the beginning of 2013 we have had 104 prosecutions for child sexual exploitation and we have nearly 40 people on bail at the moment.

**Q144 Chair:** How many have been convicted?

**Chief Constable Crompton:** There are 104 prosecutions.

**Q145 Chair:** How many people have been convicted? We know you have had prosecutions. Not all of them have been successful, presumably.

**Chief Constable Crompton:** My understanding was that we have all of those as convictions.

**Q146 Chair:** So you have had 104 convictions since the start of 2013?

**Chief Constable Crompton:** Since the beginning of 2013. That is 18 months.

**Q147 Chair:** Since your appearance before this Committee and since the Committee published its report with 130 recommendations, you have now had prosecutions and convictions. Is that right?

**Chief Constable Crompton:** Yes.

**Q148 Chair:** This is a very serious matter—

**Chief Constable Crompton:** It is hugely serious.

**Chair:** Some of this has happened under your watch. We know you have not been chief constable forever, but you have been for the last four years. That is right, isn't it?

**Chief Constable Crompton:** I have been chief constable for the last two and a bit years.

**Chair:** Two and a bit years. Some of this has happened while you have been chief constable.

**Chief Constable Crompton:** The report makes it clear that for the last four years there have been improvements and that where we are now is adequately resourced with better practices. None of that—and I mean this in the strongest possible terms—means that we do not have further work to do. We have, and I have been clear today that we will be setting up an independent investigation to go back to look at the historical issues.

We are already doing investigations into historical issues in different parts of the force. In Rotherham there are two very significant ones that relate to the period of Alexis Jay's report and there are seven others, all of which also relate to the period of Alexis Jay's report. They are multiple victim and multiple offender investigations, certainly the two big ones. We are acting, but nobody is complacent. This is a huge wake-up call. It does stem back a long way. There have been problems.

**Q149 Chair:** Chief Constable, why didn't you get this wake-up call when you appeared before this Committee two years ago and you saw our very critical report about the way in which South Yorkshire police were operating? We told you to get a grip because we felt that things were not happening.

**Chief Constable Crompton:** Chair, in 2010 we had three staff who were dedicated to dealing with child sexual exploitation. By 2012, at the time I appeared before you, we had eight. In 2013 it was 20 and now it is 62. Again, I do not suggest or even begin to suggest that that puts right some of the historical issues, but what I do say is that we are treating this seriously. Nobody is complacent. We are making resources available and we are getting prosecutions.

**Q150 Chair:** Thank you. Are witnesses still coming forward now? In the House today we heard from Sir Kevin Barron, one of your local Members of Parliament, who told the House that he made an attempt to come and see one of your chief superintendents—Chief Superintendent Davies, I think her name was—with one of the witnesses who had appeared before our Committee, Ms Jackson. He was not allowed to have a meeting with the chief superintendent with those people being present. Has that kind of attitude changed?

**Chief Constable Crompton:** Yes, definitely it has changed.

**Q151 Chair:** Are witnesses still coming forward today in Rotherham?

**Chief Constable Crompton:** We have had 12 new cases brought forward since Alexis Jay's report was published.

**Chair:** Since last week?

**Chief Constable Crompton:** Yes, in Rotherham.

**Q152 Chair:** We don't want you to say the names but these are victims, are they?

**Chief Constable Crompton:** Yes.

**Q153 Chair:** You now accept that there is no question of cultural sensitivity in respect of dealing with these cases. Whoever they are, whatever their race and religion, they will be pursued on these cases. Is that the position?

**Chief Constable Crompton:** Sir, we will go wherever the evidence takes us.

**Q154 Chair:** Presumably you will try to handle it in a more competent way than you have handled the issue of the BBC.

**Chief Constable Crompton:** As I say, we have a very comprehensive plan moving forward and, even though we have put very extensive extra resources into this, we may be putting even more resources into it given clearly that we have more allegations coming forward.

**Q155 Chair:** Chief Constable, before I ask colleagues to come in, the Committee has decided in private session that we will recall you next week to deal with Rotherham because there is not enough time to deal with the matter now. I have spoken this morning to Shaun Wright, the commissioner, and he will be coming in to give evidence. We will also be asking for Professor Jay and Joyce Thacker, who is the Director of Children's Services at

Rotherham, to come in to give evidence next Tuesday. I am sorry that you are going to be recalled, but we feel that we will not do justice in the time available unless we have that further time.

**Chief Constable Crompton:** I understand that.

**Chair:** Thank you.

**Q156 Ian Austin:** Paragraph 5.3 of the report says that in 2008 an 11-year-old girl came to the attention of the police after she disclosed that she and another child had been sexually abused by a group of adult males. Just a few weeks later she was found in a derelict house with another child and a number of adult males. She was arrested—11 years of age—for being drunk and disorderly and none of the males was arrested. Has your force identified the police officers involved in that and found out what went on?

**Chief Constable Crompton:** I don't know.

**Q157 Chair:** Will you find out and come and tell us next week? We cannot have a “don't know” on these issues.

**Chief Constable Crompton:** I will have an answer to that question next week.

**Q158 Ian Austin:** All right. Paragraph 5.2.1 shows how a police officer dismissed the case of a 12 year-old girl who had been having sex with up to five Asian males because he said she had been “100% consensual in every incident”. Twelve years of age? I think that is unbelievable, to be honest. Have you identified who that officer was and found out what happened there?

**Chief Constable Crompton:** Can I make one thing clear? I have said today that we must have an independent investigation team to come back at this. I have also personally spoken to the Director of Investigations at the IPCC.

**Ian Austin:** I tell you what, if a report—

**Chair:** I am sorry, Mr Austin, could the Chief Constable just finish? Please finish.

**Chief Constable Crompton:** I have also personally spoken to the Director of Investigations at the IPCC in order to involve them in this as well.

**Q159 Ian Austin:** If a report landed on my desk, well over a week ago now, saying that people I was responsible for had behaved like that I would want to know pretty quickly what on earth had happened. In paragraph 5.9 it says that fathers had tracked down their daughters and tried to remove them from houses where they were being abused, only to find themselves arrested when police were called to the scene. Do you know what happened in that case?

**Chief Constable Crompton:** Chair, I don't seek to defend any of this. I am in the process of setting up an independent investigation because the number of staff at Rotherham over

such a period of time means that it can't have credibility unless we have some independence to the investigative process.

**Q160 Ian Austin:** I know, but I do not think it is too much to expect that, in cases like that, which have been the subject of huge publicity over the last few weeks, the force could have identified what happened. This report sets out the industrial scale abuse of young girls in horrendous detail and it shows that they were completely failed by the police in Rotherham. I would have thought that finding out what happened and finding out who was responsible for that failure ought to be a pretty big priority.

**Chief Constable Crompton:** It is a big priority. I am public on saying that it is a big priority and have taken steps to start putting the wheels in motion to make it happen.

**Q161 Ian Austin:** Why is it another police force that is going to be doing this investigation and not the IPCC?

**Chief Constable Crompton:** I think there are two aspects that we need to look at here. One is straight criminality. Do we have people still out in the community who should have been properly investigated years ago and were not? That is more of a straight criminality issue.

The second issue, which is more in the territory of the IPCC, and this was a conversation I had only this morning with the Director of Investigations, is more about senior people. What did they know, what did they do and were there failings there? It is more in the IPCC's territory where police officers are concerned. As far as the council is concerned, a criminal investigation would have to prove misfeasance, malfeasance—something like that.

**Q162 Ian Austin:** But it is not just senior people, is it? One of your officers decided that a 12 year-old girl who was having sex with up to five adults was 100% consenting in every incident. Should somebody like that be working for the police, somebody capable of making a decision like that?

**Chief Constable Crompton:** No, it is a dreadful decision and I have set my position out to find out about it.

**Chair:** You have. There is a feeling that just giving it to another police force is not necessarily the answer, given your testimony in respect of the other matter. Perhaps the importance of an independent report is that it should be conducted independently by the IPCC. We recognise the fact that if there is criminality you will need to have police officers involved but that can be taken on by the IPCC as well. I think that is what Mr Austin is getting at. I think some of these cases, including the case that he has just mentioned, are in our last report. We will certainly want to know next week, when you come in to give evidence on this again, that those officers, as Mr Austin has said, have been properly disciplined for what they have done.

**Q163 Dr Huppert:** There are many questions that we will look at next week. I would agree with the role for the IPCC; this has to be sorted out properly and I hope you will take that

further. What would you say is the level of confidence that the community in Rotherham currently has in the police force?

**Chief Constable Crompton:** I suppose it is difficult to say, but I would absolutely have to concede in the circumstances that that confidence is probably less than it was a week or two ago before the publication of the report. There is no doubt that a report like this is going to impact on community confidence. That is matter of massive regret, but the point for somebody like me is that we have to take things forward here and try to put things right.

**Q164 Dr Huppert:** Aside from the independent investigation and the IPCC involvement, what else will you do to try to rebuild that relationship?

**Chief Constable Crompton:** As you will be aware, there are 15 recommendations in the report. We are looking at each of those, comparing where we are with our current practice against what is going on and the recommendations, and starting to make assessments about whether we, or partners who we work closely with, need to do more—whether we need to invest more or whether we need to change practices in order to address the serious issues that have been raised in the report.

**Q165 Dr Huppert:** Would you be able to give us that response in time for next week?

**Chief Constable Crompton:** I will do my very best, sir.

**Chair:** We will want the response by next week, because Parliament is going into recess. I am not saying the whole world needs to stop because we are going into recess but, because this is in the public domain and you have known about these circumstances for a number of years, we would like all the answers by next Tuesday.

**Q166 Nicola Blackwood:** I think that credit is due for the 104 convictions that you mentioned earlier. That is a significant improvement on the last time that you appeared, when I think that you had had only five convictions.

**Chief Constable Crompton:** A very low number, yes.

**Nicola Blackwood:** I wanted to follow up on some of the points made by Mr Austin about the two fathers who were arrested and the victims who were arrested for petty offences, but also to go back through the history of some of the operations for child sexual exploitation that have occurred in South Yorkshire: Operation Central, which resulted in the five arrests; Operation Czar in 2009, abduction notices but no convictions; Operation Chard, again abduction orders, 11 arrests and no convictions; and then the following operations.

What efforts have there been to go back to those victims, identify them and try to make sure that you are making amends as much as possible and giving them the support that they need, but also offering them a route through investigation and the criminal justice process if they are willing? If any call has been the loudest throughout the national outcry on this, it has been for prosecutions and justice. If you are

managing to get convictions at this stage, I would hope that you would be going back to those victims and offering them the opportunity.

**Chief Constable Crompton:** Can I reassure you that a year ago we set up an historical child sexual exploitation team, which is going back through all of these issues that relate to Rotherham? The particular cases that you refer to fall within the remit of that team. There are clearly many more, but the point I want to reassure you about is that part of their remit is to go back and identify where we may have failed victims and then look at where we can go with the investigative process.

**Q167 Michael Ellis:** Chief Constable, have you discussed Professor Jay's report with your predecessor, Meredydd Hughes, who was chief constable from 2004 to 2011 and, therefore, was chief constable during a large part of the operative period? Have you discussed it with him?

**Chief Constable Crompton:** No.

**Q168 Michael Ellis:** Don't you think it would be a good idea for you to have made contact with him to at least see what he has to say about these matters? As you pointed out, you were not chief constable at the time. You don't think it is a good idea to make contact and find out some answers?

**Chief Constable Crompton:** We may do that. However, it may be that there is the requirement that he is spoken to in another way by an investigation and that also has to be borne in mind.

**Q169 Michael Ellis:** How much blame should he shoulder? You do not obviously want to accept the shoulder of blame yourself, but how much blame do you think he should shoulder, as chief constable during a large part of the operative period and as someone who I believe was deputy chief constable and assistant chief constable in South Yorkshire before that?

**Chief Constable Crompton:** It is a difficult one because this might get investigated. It would rather depend on what was known at the time, which I think is the issue, isn't it?

**Q170 Michael Ellis:** Yes, but his priority was publicly known as speeding. He was obsessed with a war on the motorist while these horrific crimes were going on in Rotherham. Don't you think, prima facie, there is some responsibility for the ACPO ranked police officers who were responsible in South Yorkshire during this operative period?

**Chief Constable Crompton:** Clearly there is responsibility at a senior level. It is impossible for me to say at this stage who knew what.

**Q171 Chair:** Thank you. I think that we will be calling Meredydd Hughes next week when we look at Rotherham again. Thank you very much for that, Mr Ellis. That is very sensible.

Chief Constable, this Committee has been shocked by events in Rotherham for the last two years. That is why we produced a report with 130 recommendations. Whereas in the Cliff

Richard case you could say, “It is not me, it is the BBC or it is Yewtree”, the responsibility does rest with South Yorkshire Police.

I know we have had different chief constables and you may not necessarily have been there for the last 10 years, but this is the police force. It reflects on the credibility of the police force and we are shocked by this. We do hold South Yorkshire Police responsible for the failures that have occurred—many lives lost as a result of a decision not to take action. I am sure you saw the “Panorama” programme yesterday.

**Chief Constable Crompton:** Yes.

**Chair:** I will be writing to the Home Secretary to ask for the research that was conducted. It seems that all this has been around. That is why I wonder whether another report is necessary. I know it is important to get those responsible and they should be held to account, but at the end of the day what the people of Rotherham need is action, people being prosecuted, convicted. That is what they want to see happen. It is a real worry to this Committee that you have had 12 new cases since last Wednesday because there must be many more who have not come forward to give evidence.

**Chief Constable Crompton:** Chair, if I might say so, it is my responsibility to move this on and get things right. I understand there are difficult times around at the moment. We do have to restore public confidence. We have achieved prosecutions. We will achieve more. We have some very significant investigations in the offing, but it is my duty to take things forward and, irrespective of who has been chief constable in the past, I am here now and it is my job to take it on from here.

**Q172 Chair:** You are not considering leaving your post and leaving it to somebody else to deal with? Given the history of South Yorkshire, given what has happened in recent weeks and the report by Professor Jay, you want to stay and complete the job. Is that right?

**Chief Constable Crompton:** Absolutely, and, in fairness, Alexis Jay does point out that things have been much improved recently. I think we can continue to improve on that.

**Chair:** Yes. We will hear from her next week. Chief Constable, thank you very much for coming.