



Communities and Local Government Committee

Oral evidence: Jay Report into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham, HC 648

Wednesday 10 September 2014

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 10 September 2014.

Written evidence from witnesses:

Panel 1 (Questions 1-151)

Watch the session

Members present: Mr Clive Betts (Chair); Bob Blackman; Simon Danczuk; Mrs Mary Glendon; David Heyes; Mark Pawsey; John Stevenson; and Chris Williamson.

Panel 1 Questions [1-151]

Witnesses: **Martin Kimber**, Chief Executive, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, and **Joyce Thacker**, Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, gave evidence.

Chair: We start this afternoon with an evidence session on the report by Professor Jay into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham. Before we start, could I ask members to declare any interest they might have in this inquiry or related to it? I am a Vice President of the Local Government Association. I also want to say that I am a close friend of Councillor Sioned-Mair Richards, who is a councillor in Sheffield but was, for a period of time, a part-time scrutiny officer in Rotherham. Although I have to say I am putting that on the record to be transparent; that did not give me any information at the time about any matters connected with this particular inquiry.

David Heyes: I have two members of staff who serve as local councillors.

Chris Williamson: I also have a couple of members of staff who are elected members.

Simon Danczuk: My wife is an elected member and some staff in my office are elected members.

Q1 Chair: Thank you for coming. Just for the sake of our records, could you say who you are and your position in the council, please?

Martin Kimber: I am Martin Kimber, Chief Executive of Rotherham Council.

Joyce Thacker: Joyce Thacker, Strategic Director of Rotherham Borough Council.

Q2 Chair: Thank you for joining us this afternoon on this very important and challenging issue. Can I say at the beginning that we are aware that you appeared before the Home Affairs Committee yesterday, and we do not want to simply go over all of the ground that they covered? We want to try to focus on local government and wider issues and look at how things could move on. We are not asking you to go on oath today; that is not the way we are approaching this as a Committee. We do, of course, expect you to be full and open with your answers to us.

I also want to say right at the beginning that we, as a Select Committee, do not consider ourselves to be a quasi-disciplinary body, but we do nevertheless want to explore with you what, within the local authority of Rotherham, prevented it investigating and combating child sexual exploitation. We want to look at what the mechanisms are for identifying failures, both organisational and individual. We want to look at the chain of command and responsibility at the council. We want to look at whether Rotherham is an outlier or is representative of an endemic problem of child sexual exploitation across the country. Finally, we want to look at what the authority is doing now to put right past failures and to deal with the hundreds of young people who have been affected by those failures. They are the sorts of areas, but there may be other issues that come up from members of the Committee.

Mr Kimber, if I can just begin asking you some questions, what do you think, as a chief executive, you have in terms of your responsibility to prevent the sexual abuse of children within your council's area?

Martin Kimber: In terms of my responsibility, I have to provide reassurance to the people of Rotherham that child sexual exploitation is being tackled effectively. That requires me to make sure that there are adequate resources in place, working with members. It requires me to be able to reassure members that we have effective staff training in

place and we have well qualified people in the right quantities. I am required to do a number of things.

In the context of preventing child sexual exploitation, I think it is extremely sad but nonetheless true that sexual exploitation is occurring on a widespread basis. There are many bad people, I am afraid, in society who want to harm children. The role of the local authority, working with partners in a multi-agency approach, is to try to make children as safe as they can possibly be. I need to make sure as well that I advise the council on its partnership arrangements to make sure that they are appropriate and fit for purpose, and of course signal to it whether there are any fractures within those relationships. In broad terms, sir, that would be how I would explain my responsibilities.

Q3 Chair: The next obvious question is that might be a description of the job that you have to do but, in practice, it did not work, did it?

Martin Kimber: In practice, the Jay report is very clear that there have been some very significant tragic failings within the council. It covers a very wide time period: 1997 through to 2013. The reason we are here today of course is because of the victims. I have previously said in various places that I have been deeply shocked, personally deeply shaken, by what has been revealed and I have apologised to all of the victims and all of their families.

What I do need to say, however, is the Jay report is very clear that, during my tenure as chief executive, I have worked very hard and been successful in making sure that services have been improved. When I joined the council at the very end of 2009, the safeguarding services had just been placed in formal Government intervention. In very simple terms, that would mean that our practices in protecting children were unsafe and they are not unsafe today. The Jay report indicates that they are safe but, of course, improvement is necessary.

Q4 Chair: Was it not because the members of the council, initially with the Labour group but then the whole council, were not convinced about the ability of yourself and other senior officers to deal with this matter, that they actually asked for an independent report, eventually by Professor Jay, to be conducted into these matters? They had not got confidence that you, as an officer structure, could actually deal with the issues in question.

Martin Kimber: No, I do not think that was the case. Certainly it was the case that, as the chief executive working with members, I was asked to undertake an independent inquiry. Of course, I had an advisory role in that process as well. Such decisions are, as you correctly point out, matters for members.

The key issue for me was that there were a number of articles beginning to appear within a variety of the media, which were making it clear to me that I did not fully understand the scale of sexual abuse that had been occurring within Rotherham throughout its history. A pivotal moment for me—and again I would say that this was a moment that shook me personally—was when an article came forward in the middle of 2013 indicating or telling in particular about an incident of sexual exploitation that had occurred within the mid-2000s in Rotherham. It had implicated in some way one of the members working in Rotherham of that. For me, that was a pivotal moment.

What you need to know is that there was a police investigation, which I personally asked for. It did not find, in respect of that member, any criminal activity. Nonetheless, what that said to me was that, as a chief executive working with members and working with other officers, we did not understand the full scale of CSE and how it had arisen. That is why the independent inquiry report was commissioned.

Q5 Chair: What was going on was surely a complete failure of governance in Rotherham at this time, in terms of these matters, was it not? Within the organisation, there were people who knew, yet you are saying you did not know.

Martin Kimber: I am being really clear that I did know of sexual exploitation from around 2011, as a consequence of a criminal investigation.

Chair: That was all; that was the only information you had.

Martin Kimber: I am just trying to help you, sir. There was a criminal investigation that resulted in successful prosecutions. There was then a subsequent criminal investigation where charges were brought. The Crown Prosecution Service did not take, at that point, that any further. That was the scale of CSE that I knew about at that time. I had no knowledge of events, for example, expressed in the Jay report, that by 2005 everybody must have known it was a significant problem. I had no knowledge of that scale whatsoever and I am being clear about that.

Q6 Chair: Is there not a problem with an organisation that could keep such horrible secrets for so long?

Martin Kimber: I think the Jay report indicates that that was the case. The Jay report says that there were a variety of reasons. I would agree with you in broad terms. You could only describe a situation where information does not flow through an organisation properly and is not acted upon properly as a failure of governance. The Jay report indicates that there were a variety of reasons. Clearly the

relationships, for example, with other services that were responsible for protecting children, such as the police, were not effective. There is very significant criticism within the Jay report of the role of the police.

I think there is also a contextual point to look at. This was picked up by what I regard as some extremely good work by the Home Affairs Select Committee in 2013. That contextual point was that young people, going back to this period of time—so we are looking 10 years and more ago—were regarded as, in some way, being misbehaving teenagers, rather than being dealt with, as is appropriately the case now, as young people who are being subject to exploitation. The risk factors today of sexual exploitation are far better understood. Most practitioners and society more generally would understand that, if young people are involved in truancy, if they are involved in alcohol substance abuse, if they are missing from home, if they are coming from a home where child neglect is a feature, that would be a symptom and a risk factor of CSE. It would not be a signal that you had a young person who was misbehaving. I just think that, today, it would be viewed very differently.

Q7 Chair: Each year you sign off an annual governance statement to say that everything is okay in your authority and things are working properly. Do you ever pause before you sign that statement to wonder what was happening, given that you began to become aware of problems with regard to child sexual exploitation?

Martin Kimber: You are absolutely correct I sign that every year and I take that responsibility very seriously indeed. The key point I would make is that I became aware of these issues I have indicated, at the scale I have indicated, in 2011-12—the subsequent failed set of prosecutions. I was content, at the scale that CSE was presenting within Rotherham, that our services were appropriate and fit for purpose. Indeed, in August of 2012, there was an Ofsted inspection of our services that indicated to me, amongst a whole range of things about our safeguarding activity, that our CSE services in particular were regarded as being strong and appropriate for looking after children. In the context of the information available to me, I believe that I took the most relevant and appropriate steps.

I just want to reassure the Committee that I would be regarded as a person, whilst quietly spoken, who will deal with and face up to problems. I have just given you a really strong example of that when I have indicated to you that I personally made a referral to the police in circumstances that I had concerns about.

Q8 Chair: A very simple question: do you think you have any responsibility for what happened?

Martin Kimber: I bear the responsibility—of course I do—for the things that have happened.

Q9 Chair: Could you have done anything differently?

Martin Kimber: Would I have done anything differently? When the newspaper articles started appearing—I have asked this question of myself many times—I wonder whether I could have asked for an independent inquiry report working with members earlier. Generally in terms of my support for the council as a whole and my support for safeguarding activity, the personal role that I have tried to take—so personal responsibility as well as personal role—to try to make sure that our services moved from an unsafe to a safe position, I would not have changed that. However, I do accept responsibility for the things that have not been handled as well as they may have been, during my period of tenure as a chief executive. Of course I do.

Q10 Chair: You announced on Monday your intention to retire. Was that any indication of responsibility for this?

Martin Kimber: I announced my intention—actually it was to serve my contractual notice period—the reason for that I just want to explain. I had attended an extremely emotional cabinet meeting on Wednesday of last week. I have been deeply shaken by these events, as I am sure you all are, and felt a deep sense of shock, because I had no idea whatsoever of the scale of CSE abuse that had occurred to young children in Rotherham over a period of more than a decade. I was deeply shocked and deeply saddened. I can see, and quite rightly so, the anger within the local community, and it is absolutely right and proper that that emotion should be expressed in those terms.

My view of all of that was that it would be easier for the community of Rotherham to be able to complete their grieving and begin the process of healing if I were to leave, because it would signal a very pivotal new chapter in the history of Rotherham. I do want to be clear: I am not serving my contractual notice period because I am presiding over a significantly failed service. That is not what the Jay report says. The Jay report is clear: that the services from 2010 to today have improved; that there have been significant improvements; that those improvements, whilst I accept responsibility for things that have not gone right, I also accept responsibility in part for some of the things that have been put in place. I have made a personal effort and taken on personal tasks to try to improve things for young people. I did want to be clear on that, but I felt it was the appropriate thing to do.

There are occasions within public service—you will all have experienced them—where it is vitally important that you place the mood of the citizen, the requirements of the citizen, in front of any requirements that you may have and that is what I believe I have done in these circumstances.

Q11 John Stevenson: As chief executive officer you must take responsibility for your directors. If there was a financial problem within the authority, you would expect your financial director to bring that to your attention, would you not?

Martin Kimber: Yes. I have a series of advisers and clearly they all—

John Stevenson: I am just trying to establish lines of communication and responsibility. If you have a financial problem within your authority, which has been ongoing, you personally might not know about that, but you would expect your finance director to bring it your attention.

Martin Kimber: Yes, and I would expect to know personally about the significant issues within the organisation.

Q12 John Stevenson: Within children's services, you would therefore be dependent upon your director of children's services bringing to your attention problems within that service.

Martin Kimber: And internal people within the organisation who would have similar responsibilities.

Q13 John Stevenson: Did you feel that the director of your children's services brought to your attention adequately the difficulties that were going on?

Martin Kimber: I think that Mrs Thacker has always tried to share information with me openly and honestly. I take that view because I would hope that she would regard me as a supportive chief executive.

Q14 John Stevenson: Do you think you were properly advised?

Martin Kimber: In the context of the Jay report that tells me that my services today are safe, in the context of the Ofsted inspection of 2012 that tells me that my services are safe and my CSE team—

John Stevenson: That is not the question. I am asking you directly: do you think your director of children's services advised you properly?

Martin Kimber: I think the advice I have had is consistent with independent advice that is available to me, so I have seen nothing from the advice I have had that conflicts with the independent advice I have had, which tells me that my services today are fit for purpose.

Q15 Chris Williamson: Mrs Thacker, I just want to try to explore the responsibilities that you have as a director of children and young people's services. From the evidence that you gave to the Home Affairs Committee yesterday, it seems pretty clear that you do not accept any responsibility for failing to tackle the abuse identified in the Jay report, do you? Is that a fair assessment?

Joyce Thacker: I am sorry, sir; I do accept responsibility for my part in this. As Mr Kimber said, I also accept my part in this. I am sorry if that did not come across clearly at the Home Affairs Select Committee. I do take my part in responsibility for this.

Q16 Chris Williamson: You joined the council in 2006, I believe. Is that right?

Joyce Thacker: That is right.

Q17 Chris Williamson: You are not suggesting, then, that the director responsible for children's services from 2006 to today was powerless to tackle child exploitation, are you?

Joyce Thacker: Could you just repeat that question again?

Chris Williamson: You are not suggesting, are you, that during the period that you held office in Rotherham, from 2006 to today, that the directors responsible for children's services from that date were powerless to tackle child exploitation, are you?

Joyce Thacker: No, I am not suggesting that. We have all tried to tackle child sexual exploitation over a number of years. What the Jay report brought for us is that, really, there were systemic failings in the past. It really makes it quite clear that there have been significant improvements going on since about 2007, which is when it says the first improvements started to come into the system, then moving onward to 2009 and 2010. What shocked us all are the tragic failings of the past. I would stress that there are significant improvements today. Particularly we are very pleased to have things you would expect to see in a modern fit-for-purpose service. We are a multi-agency safeguarding hub. We have really excellent work going on with the police and health colleagues, and the voluntary sector. There are a lot of improvements today that we have not had in the past. It is deeply regretful that the children of the past did not have

those services and the luxury that we have today of that joint working but, I can assure you, we have made improvements.

Q18 Chris Williamson: If you are saying that you were putting in an improvement programme from 2007, why is it that the exploitation continued? I think in the Jay report it suggests to this day; how has that happened?

Joyce Thacker: As Mr Kimber said, there are bad people out there intent on harming children. Sexual exploitation has to be tackled in so many different ways. It is about awareness-raising amongst children and young people to enable them to have safe relationships, strong relationships that are positive relationships. Our work in schools is really important. It is our work raising awareness amongst professionals, whether they are health, police, dustbin men, gas fitters at homes—all sorts of people. It is about us taking corporate responsibility as corporate parents as well for our children.

Q19 Chris Williamson: Do you think then that the procedures that you were putting in place from 2007 were not adequate? Patently they were not.

Joyce Thacker: What I am saying is, in every single town and city across the country, you will have child sexual exploitation; not one of us has managed to stop it. If you look at the Deputy Children's Commissioner reports that have come out, it clearly says there—and it is heartbreaking to think of the scale of child sexual exploitation across the country. We have worked hard. Clearly it still goes on. I would love to stop it; I would love to stop it today. Our track record in terms of prosecution and really good deterrents—we have really stepped that up, but there are still people out there. As of today, we have 58 live investigations on the go. For all the deterrents, for all the national media that is going on around prosecution, quite high-profile ones, this is still going on today. There is something quite endemic about culture for me, about valuing women and girls, and boys actually as well—because I think, at the moment, in our group there are about 18 boys that we are working with—there is something about valuing children and young people.

Q20 Chris Williamson: What you are saying there, though, is that you recognised the problem from 2007; you have put in place measures to try to address it, but they have not been successful for all the reasons you have just outlined. When I asked the question about whether you felt that directors were powerless to deal with child sexual exploitation, you did not feel that they were. From your last answer there, it seems that they are powerless, to a certain extent.

Joyce Thacker: “Powerless” is a difficult word in this context. We work really hard and have high expectations about how we tackle child sexual exploitation across all our partners. We have a really robust child sexual exploitation sub-group of the safeguarding board, at a very high level. People are really committed to it. We have a really good operational group as well. Things we have got today are like monthly tactical assessments, victim profiles and offender profiles. We do such a lot of work now that we have never had in the past. We are much better placed to tackle the issue, but what I am trying to say is that there are people out there who just seem to think it is perfectly okay to sexually exploit children. There are people that actually think it is okay.

Q21 Chris Williamson: Are you saying it is an iterative process?

Joyce Thacker: It is a process that evolves. Colleagues in the past tried a range of things. That has been difficult for them because, clearly, the prosecutions were not there in the past. They were quite powerless to achieve change in that way. Moving on, we have had, in the last 18 months certainly, a lot more prosecutions and people convicted of these dreadful crimes against children and young people than we have ever had. We are having success.

Q22 Chris Williamson: You worked, I understand, very closely with an organisation in Rotherham called Risky Business, which provides advice and support for girls and young women at risk of sexual exploitation. Did you act on the warnings that they gave you? You must have been aware, presumably, as a result of the information that they passed to you, of the scale of the problem.

Joyce Thacker: Absolutely. I was there as an independent chair, once a month chairing a group of practitioners coming together from across different agencies—a multi-agency group. They would bring information to the meeting. We had people from the police, from social care and from our leaving-care system, plus some others from the project itself, clearly. We were looking at projects in school, working with group work with young people, bringing the reports to us—what they have said that the issues were. The numbers will vary, so I think we were aware of around 120 young people at 2005-06 time. Actually looking forward to the report that came to the safeguarding children work, which was mentioned in Professor Jay’s report, there were something like 60 young people there, so the numbers fluctuated up and down all the time, depending on the referrals that were coming in from agencies. We were aware that there were issues.

Q23 Chris Williamson: How much power did you have, as the deputy director and then the director, to actually make the changes that were needed?

Joyce Thacker: I had no resistance.

Chris Williamson: There were no obstacles to making those changes.

Joyce Thacker: There was absolute support. For example, Risky Business was funded on external funding. In 2006, we got agreement that we would make the funding mainstream, and then, in 2008, we doubled the funding for Risky Business. People knew that we needed to have resources to tackle the issue and that was really quite significant. We also approved, at that time, having people in place like an assistant safeguarding board manager to make sure that they took responsibility for child protection issues.

Q24 Chris Williamson: Do you think you should have done more earlier than you did?

Joyce Thacker: I have read this report on several occasions now. With the benefit of hindsight, absolutely all of us could have done more—absolutely without question. What I do know is that we did the best that we could with the resources available to us at the time. We had a commitment to work together, and I think what we are saying is that, today, we have really got everyone on the same message.

It was hard because there were some people saying, as it says in the Jay report, they were consensual victims. No child consents to their own abuse. They just do not. It is just a simple matter of fact. I think there has been a whole awareness-raising programme, throughout a number of years, with professionals, to say a child cannot consent to its own abuse. This is not consensual. I think we are at that place now where everyone absolutely understands that message. I would hate to lose that impetus that we have, which we have built up. I am absolutely passionate and determined to make this better. I want to make sure that those 1,400 victims who Professor Jay identifies are individually looked at, so that we understand what is going on there, understand who was working on that case at the time. We look at other issues: did they have a baby taken away from them? We need to understand absolutely if they got post-abuse support. We need to make sure that we have gone back to those people and individually said, "I am sorry," because we have obviously not met their needs well enough.

Q25 Chris Williamson: Can you explain where the line of command runs and stops in Rotherham?

Joyce Thacker: In relation to me, I am completely responsible for children's services and I report into the chief executive.

Chris Williamson: The buck stops with you then.

Joyce Thacker: It does with children's services.

Q26 Chris Williamson: Do you accept that elected members are laypeople who are reliant upon professionals like you for advice?

Joyce Thacker: I do.

Q27 Chris Williamson: Were there any benchmarks or national standards against which Rotherham was judged from 1999 on detecting and tackling child exploitation or sexual exploitation?

Joyce Thacker: Not really, but there was a variety of documents about "Whose Daughter Next?", some Barnardo's work, etc. Really, the qualitative and quantitative work that has come up has been the Deputy Children's Commissioner work. That is, for me, the first seminal document to state the case of where we are at. There are a number of documents highlighted at the back of the report and appendices that the National Working Group gives, which is all the journey of how it went from back in the 1990s through to the present day. This is a nationwide issue. In Rotherham we have our part to play absolutely, in terms of tackling that.

Q28 Chris Williamson: Do you think you would have benefited if there had been some sort of national benchmark then, in that way, which you could judge yourself against?

Joyce Thacker: Absolutely, I think so. It is really important to know what you are measuring yourself against. Now, we look at it across South Yorkshire, for example. There is far more joint work. We have a South Yorkshire-wide group, which meets every couple of months. We look at the live cases, we look at prosecutions, we look at the number of victims, the profile of it and so on. I have just described there what we do on a borough command basis, as it were. If we had done that years ago, I think we would have been in a far stronger position now, but that is just in South Yorkshire. We need to do this nationwide, absolutely.

Martin Kimber: I wonder if I might help in adding a little bit more. One of the things we do in Rotherham is we report regularly to the cabinet on children we are working with who are subject to sexual exploitation, both in terms of children at risk and children who are

being exploited. That is in the public domain; it is on our website. It goes in front of the cabinet; it is subject to challenge. That is not something that I am conscious of that is undertaken by every authority. Certainly there does not appear to be any form of national reporting system, so your suggestion of some form of national reporting system not least would give a proper understanding of the scale of risk and the scale of abuse that is occurring across the country. I certainly would support that idea.

Q29 Chair: Mrs Thacker, at any time when you were appointed in 2006 to the time when Professor Jay's report was commissioned, did you do any report before elected members or even the chief executive, now or at the time, which indicated concerns over child exploitation, which you did not think were properly being addressed or you needed more resources, better relationships with your working partners or anything else at all? Are there any particular reports you can draw our attention to?

Joyce Thacker: Absolutely. In July 2008, I took a report to the cabinet member then about child sexual exploitation. It was an annual report. It set out that the referrals in the previous 12 months were something like 58 referrals into the project. It talked about the issues that we had with young boys. We had a case at the time where a man was successfully prosecuted for abusing boys. You will remember that case, of course. It was a landmark case for us, actually. It predates the Operation Central. That had been flagged up, because we needed to develop a service for boys.

Q30 Chair: Did the report make recommendations and were they actually accepted?

Joyce Thacker: It did. As I mentioned earlier, the recommendation was to increase the funding into Risky Business as a project, and a report was brought back in November of that year to say what we had done about it, etc. That was the basis; there has always been an annual report on child sexual exploitation.

Q31 Chair: Did the further reports of 2013 provide further examples of you saying, "We're not getting it right. We need to do more. We need to change this. We need to change that. We need more resources"?

Joyce Thacker: Absolutely. I can send you a copy of our 2013-14 annual report.

Q32 Chair: Did all those reports get acted on?

Joyce Thacker: Yes, they have.

Q33 Chair: Are we saying that the reports themselves were not asking for sufficient action, following what Professor Jay found when she investigated?

Joyce Thacker: I think what the reports said to me was these were the findings of Risky Business at the time. They were working with X amount of children. We looked at what we had in place. We had brought together a steering group of people across the different agencies. We had health, the voluntary sector, our youth support service in there and social care. We did bring together people to say, "How are we actually tackling this issue?" We tried to flag that in the reports but, as Mr Kimber has pointed out, the scale of it over nearly two decades is just breathtaking.

Q34 Chair: In hindsight, the reports did not get to the scale of the problem.

Joyce Thacker: It is interesting. I think they did illustrate the scale of the problem. It is the enormity of it, actually.

Chair: Sorry; you just said you were not aware of the scale of the problem.

Joyce Thacker: Year on year, 58 one year and currently, in Rotherham, we are working with 145 young people. 45 are in the child sexual exploitation team itself; some are in integrated youth support service. When you think about that as a proportion of the children in the borough it is quite high.

Chair: So you were aware of the scale of the problem, which seems to me to be slightly different from what you have said so far.

Joyce Thacker: I am sorry if I am confusing you, sir. We just know that from the early 2000s there were about 100 children who we worked with. In the following year, some of those might have been a repeat young person to the next year, about 80 worked with and so on.

Q35 Chair: You did not know, did you, because the recording was not very good? That was an Ofsted regular complaint about the process.

Joyce Thacker: Absolutely. We did not have the systems in place at that time to effectively record. Professor Jay highlights it was a problem in the past, and we are far, far better now.

Q36 Chair: Right the way through this period Ofsted—and I might be critical of some of their findings where they were reassuring about what was happening—regularly identified lack of monitoring and lack of reporting as being issues, which never seemed to be addressed right the way through, did they, even though you were responsible for them?

Joyce Thacker: I took on responsibility for safeguarding children in 2008, and it became apparent to me that we did not really have robust systems in place.

Q37 Chair: You did not have them by 2013.

Joyce Thacker: We do have robust systems in place, sir.

Q38 Chair: That is not what Professor Jay said.

Joyce Thacker: The issue she does flag is the issue of our risk assessments. That is what she flags. We always have professional judgment on every single case, and she highlights that in her report. We are really clear that we need to understand the needs of the child. What we brought in, in the last 12 months, was the risk assessment tool, which is based on Barnardo's practice model used in Lancashire, and so on and so forth. We brought that in and it has been evolving in South Yorkshire. We wanted to have the same tool across South Yorkshire, so that we work consistently across the police force with the same tool. Professor Jay was critical of the fact that some files did not have the risk assessment in place, but actually, I can assure you, as of today they all have.

Q39 Chair: Less than 20% actually had adequate risk assessment.

Joyce Thacker: It was a newish process. Remember, this report has taken 12 months to write. At the point when she came in is the point where we are bringing in the risk assessment. I know, as of today, that every single file is there in place. What we are looking at now is working with the social workers to address the quality of those, because that was the second issue. The first thing is the issue of whether they are there. The second is whether they are of a robust quality. That is what we work on now: we work with social workers in the team to make sure that they are of good quality. We have improved that risk assessment tool. She was critical of it—that it was purely numerical, for example, which you will have read. Now what we have done is put in a dialogue box, which basically means the professional judgment on that case is brought forward into the risk assessment.

There are two issues. One is the social worker's professional assessment of the case and then there is the risk assessment tool, so we have not missed anything about that child.

Chair: She did say, basically, until then it was a tick-box exercise, did she not?

Q40 Bob Blackman: Could I just ask one question to clarify? I am just slightly confused about one of the things you have said. In Professor Jay's report, she says that the number of prosecutions for child sexual abuse is very low. Can you confirm to us how many successful prosecutions there have been over the 15-year period of this particular report?

Joyce Thacker: I cannot give you the 15-year period, but I will get back to you.

Q41 Bob Blackman: During your time as director, how many people have been successfully prosecuted?

Joyce Thacker: When we came to the Home Affairs Select Committee last year, it was not good to report; there had been very few prosecutions. There had been one prosecution in the previous period of time. What I can tell you is, since January of last year, since the Home Affairs Select Committee, we have had 20 individual offenders, 11 of whom have been found guilty on 19 charges. Presently, there are a further six individuals with a further six charges. As I said earlier, there are about 50 live investigations going on as well, at the moment. We are in a very different place from where we were. It has been an iterative process, as you said.

Q42 Bob Blackman: So it has changed. Why do you think Professor Jay reports that number of prosecutions remains very low? In her report that is what it says.

Joyce Thacker: I am not sure at what point she has had that information. As I say, the report took 12 months. If she took it at the first point, I do not know; we would have to ask Professor Jay. If she took it at the first point when she started the report, it would have been low, absolutely.

Q43 Bob Blackman: In her executive summary, she says, "The police are now well resourced for CSE and well trained, though prosecutions remain low in number." That is today's position—not the historical position but today's position. Do you disagree with the report?

Joyce Thacker: In that period of time from January 2013, there were 62 CSE offences. When you think that only 11 people have been found guilty, that is low compared to the number of offences. What we need to do is have better and best evidence for victims. We need to really step that up to make sure that, when we do take a case to the Crown Prosecution Service, we have a really good response there. It is improving. Absolutely without question it is improving, but it needs to do more: the training of our social workers on best evidence gathering, so they are equally as equipped to get it at that point of disclosure, so they are there, ready to get the best evidence for a court.

Q44 David Heyes: Can I get you to clarify the answer that you gave to the Chairman's question about what action you have taken to report your concerns, your fears, about child sexual exploitation? You gave one example of a report that you had taken to the cabinet member. Did you say in 2009?

Joyce Thacker: 2008.

Q45 David Heyes: Is there an inference in that? There was no follow-up to that; nothing happened as a result of that report. Is there an inference in that that the potential action was suppressed in some way, by the cabinet member or by the elected members? They did not act on the report at that time.

Joyce Thacker: It is really difficult for me to say. How it works and does work in Rotherham is that I report to a cabinet member and they decide, with the leader of the council, which reports then go on to cabinet itself. What I would say is that, from 2010, my cabinet member has made sure that any reports of this nature do go forward to cabinet. As Mr Kimber described, we now do even more. We actually take a quarterly report. It is not an annual one; it is a quarterly report, with a briefing actually for all members, not just the ruling group. Every year, you try to think, "How better can we make people aware of the scale of the issue that we are dealing with?" the things that we are doing well and the things that we are not doing well, as we flag up. It is a very honest assessment. We would be very happy to send you a copy of our 2013-14 annual report and our quarterly monitoring.

Q46 Chair: In 2008-09, your report never got beyond your cabinet member and the leader.

Joyce Thacker: No.

Chair: It never went to the rest of the cabinet.

Joyce Thacker: I do not think so.

Q47 Chair: Did you complain about that? You were raising serious issues, as you have just told us.

Joyce Thacker: Absolutely. What I said to the cabinet member was, "We need the resources to tackle this," and that was fine. He agreed to that. He ran a seminar as well, in 2007, for members.

Q48 Chair: In 2008, your report asked for more resources. Did you actually get the resources?

Joyce Thacker: We did.

Chair: But the report never went to cabinet highlighting the problems.

Joyce Thacker: No.

Chair: Who would be the cabinet member at the time?

Joyce Thacker: It would be the Councillor Wright

Chair: And the leader was Councillor Stone.

Joyce Thacker: Yes.

Q49 Chair: I was going to say they stopped the report, but they did not allow it to go to cabinet. Chief executive, do you have a responsibility in that area?

Martin Kimber: I do have a responsibility for that.

Q50 Chair: Did you know the report? Did you know it was stopped?

Martin Kimber: I was not working there at the time, sir, so I am answering a general question, which is: yes, I would have responsibility. Certainly if I felt a report needed to go through to cabinet, you could be reassured that I would give that advice.

Q51 Chris Williamson: Just on that point, was the report that you provided with the intention of taking it to the cabinet or was it a report for information to the cabinet member to act upon?

Joyce Thacker: The cabinet member really decided. All reports went to him and he decided which ones went on to cabinet.

Q52 Chris Williamson: Did you recommend that report should go to the full cabinet?

Joyce Thacker: I would meet with him and say, "We've got these reports on a variety of issues you would expect," and he would decide which ones went on to cabinet or not.

Q53 Chris Williamson: Did you recommend that report should go before cabinet then?

Joyce Thacker: I cannot remember, in 2008, if I did, if I am absolutely honest.

Q54 Chris Williamson: Were your recommendations contained in that report fully acted upon?

Joyce Thacker: I believe so. I have a copy of it. I could find it for you.

Q55 Chair: But it did not go to other members beyond that.

Joyce Thacker: No. Like I say, it might have been discussed at their executive meeting, which I would not have been part of and I do not know that.

Q56 Simon Danczuk: Do you feel let down by Shaun Wright?

Joyce Thacker: Not personally, no.

Q57 Simon Danczuk: Professionally? I am not bothered about your personal situation, Joyce; I am bothered about your professional situation.

Joyce Thacker: I think we have members who are trying to get their heads around this issue.

Simon Danczuk: I am asking you explicitly if you feel let down by Shaun Wright.

Joyce Thacker: In hindsight, yes, I am.

Q58 Simon Danczuk: Why is that?

Joyce Thacker: If the report had gone to cabinet, it still would not have stopped the child sexual exploitation. I have been absolutely clear about that. I have made that quite clear, as I have said, but actually the ownership might have been there for the issue much better across the council than it was. It was a difficult period of time. We were facing intervention; we went into intervention; we came out of

intervention. There was a lot of focus on keeping children safe, and we had 43% vacancies at that time. It was a very frightening place to be. Now, today, we are at 4% vacancy. We have worked really, really hard to make sure we have a well trained, well equipped staff and he was supportive of getting resources to us. At that level, I am not failed by him. I just think the issue about broader cabinet ownership of this issue was something—

Q59 Simon Danczuk: You know as well as I do though that it is not just about resources in this issue. I represent Rochdale; I am familiar with the issue. The same applies to you, Martin; it is often more about culture within an organisation. These girls have been making lifestyle choices. These were good vulnerable girls, who were making lifestyle choices. That has been the culture within social services and children's services. The culture is set not by the workforce themselves, the frontline workers, but by the leaders in the organisation. Do you not take any responsibility for setting a poor culture within the organisation, Martin?

Martin Kimber: You make a fair point. The culture of the organisation does come from the top. I want to make it very clear—I think I already have but it is worth repeating—that I understand fully as an individual the risk factors associated with child sexual exploitation. I would not regard young people, boys and girls, who are missing from school, who are playing truant, who are subject to alcohol and substance misuse—

Q60 Simon Danczuk: Sorry to interrupt, Martin. I know that you hold that view. I am not surprised that you hold that view now but, within your organisation—and the same applies to you, Joyce—people underneath you, the culture that you set in that organisation was one that effectively said to frontline workers, "Ignore these girls." That is fair. Do you take responsibility for the culture?

Martin Kimber: No, actually it is not fair. If you read the Jay report, there is no implication from 2010, during the time I have been there, that that culture was apparent.

Simon Danczuk: You changed the culture.

Martin Kimber: Lots of things can change a culture, not just a single individual. There can be lots of elements to that. I can only talk about the culture that I know to date, because I am there. Certainly I do not recognise the culture you are describing to me, but I do fully accept that that is exactly as is described within the Jay report and, moreover, it is also described within the report of the Home Affairs Select Committee from 2013. I absolutely accept that that in history appears to have been the way that young people have been regarded.

Q61 Simon Danczuk: Let me make some progress. What you have effectively said so far, Joyce, is that over a seven-year period, from 2006 to where we are now, more or less, it has gradually got better, to the point where now you are claiming that it is running pretty well; things can be identified; not just you, but staff are on top of everything and everything else.

During that intervening period, those seven years, you describe the scale of the problem as breathtaking. You had children being raped up and down Rotherham, left, right and centre, in those seven years. You have already pointed out effectively to Bob Blackman that literally very few perpetrators of this crime—child rapists—were successfully prosecuted. That tells us that the council was not working effectively with the police in terms of getting prosecutions. If we have 1,400 victims—now, I accept that that is spread over a wider period—the reason that the scale is so enormous is because of an absolute failure to get prosecutions, so the child rapists were continually raping various children up and down Rotherham, to the point where you end up with so many.

Do you accept that, just in that seven-year period, you have been very slow to get it to where you describe it as being good now? During that period, lots of children were raped, primarily because the high numbers, the enormity of it, as you describe it, is because the council failed to work with the police to get any prosecutions of the rapists. That is right, is it not?

Joyce Thacker: No, it is not right.

Q62 Simon Danczuk: Oh, it is not right. You got many prosecutions, did you?

Joyce Thacker: No.

Simon Danczuk: How many prosecutions did you get then?

Joyce Thacker: I have just described to you the prosecutions that we have had.

Simon Danczuk: You got very few.

Joyce Thacker: We did get very few.

Simon Danczuk: So the rapists carried on raping. That is right, is it not?

Joyce Thacker: What I am saying to you—

Simon Danczuk: Is that right or not—they carried on? Is that right or not, Joyce? The rapists carried on raping children.

Joyce Thacker: Our social workers worked really hard—

Simon Danczuk: No, answer the question. Did the rapists who did not get prosecuted—the perpetrators—not carry on raping children in Rotherham? That is right, is it not?

Joyce Thacker: Our social workers—

Simon Danczuk: Please answer me the question: they did or they did not?

Joyce Thacker: Rapists seem to have—

Simon Danczuk: Carried on raping.

Joyce Thacker: Seem to have done that.

Q63 Simon Danczuk: That is right, okay. Let us make some progress. Let me ask you both how much responsibility we should attach to your predecessors, in terms of the failure, starting with you, Martin.

Martin Kimber: I have the same information that you have, sir, which is that set out within the report. The report sets out the number of general themes. It lacks specificity, and the reason for that clearly is because a number of the information sources that it has used have been sources that have come through parliamentary reporting on this.

Q64 Simon Danczuk: Did your predecessor adequately meet his responsibilities, do you think?

Martin Kimber: I think you need to form that judgment.

Simon Danczuk: I am asking for your opinion. You inherited it. You went in there and inherited what he had left you with. Do you think he had met his responsibilities?

Martin Kimber: I think, when I joined the council, it was a broadly stable council, with the exception that children's services had gone into intervention. My focus, from the minute I walked in, was in trying to deal with that problem. This is one of the questions I have asked myself: whether, if I had looked backwards rather than looking forwards to try to bring about improvement, I might have known more than I did earlier. When I walked through the doors, I was focused on trying to deal with the problem that was on my desk, so to speak, at that time.

Simon Danczuk: As far as you were concerned, your predecessor was doing a good job and everything is fine.

Martin Kimber: I have not said that.

Simon Danczuk: Why do you not, succinctly for the Committee, tell us what you think of your predecessor in relation to this issue?

Martin Kimber: I have met my predecessor once, so I have no view of him personally. What I have indicated is, when I walked through the door of the council, I thought it was a broadly stable organisation, with the exception that children's services had gone into intervention and that was a big task for me to tackle.

Q65 Simon Danczuk: Okay, we are not making much progress. Joyce, in terms of Sonia Sharp, your predecessor, she left an appalling mess for you to sort out.

Joyce Thacker: When she left, performance was slipping in children's services, which became apparent in 2008. When I started that first week, I had a failed Ofsted inspection and, from there, we went on to, as I say, challenge a failed children's—

Simon Danczuk: She left you with a mess.

Joyce Thacker: I am not saying she left us with a mess.

Q66 Simon Danczuk: How would you describe it in just a few words, Joyce?

Joyce Thacker: I think there were some challenges in children's services when she left.

Q67 Simon Danczuk: Martin, which individuals do you blame for the failure?

Martin Kimber: I do not think the Jay report takes you to a series of individuals. I think it needs far more work to get there.

Simon Danczuk: No, but I am asking you which individuals you think should be blamed and named for the failure?

Martin Kimber: The Jay report is a really comprehensive document and even that does not get us to that position, so how could I possibly get there without knowing all of the underpinning information?

Q68 Simon Danczuk: Let me come to your announcement of your resignation. You decided to move on. I think the *London Evening*

Standard are right in saying that you announced that you were stepping down just after Prince William and Kate announced that they were having a second child. People will think that it was a good time to bury bad news. You were trying to get it out. What do you have to say to that, Martin?

Martin Kimber: If that happened, it was entirely coincidental. I have never heard that. I can tell you the time horizon, if you would like me to explain it to you.

Q69 Simon Danczuk: Why do you not leave now?

Martin Kimber: There is still significant work to be done in Rotherham. Rotherham needs a steady hand and a calm and experienced—

Q70 Simon Danczuk: You think you are best person to do it, do you, Martin?

Martin Kimber: Over the next three months, yes, absolutely.

Q71 Simon Danczuk: Are you better off financially leaving now or better off financially leaving in December?

Martin Kimber: Better off financially leaving today?

Simon Danczuk: Or in December?

Martin Kimber: It would not impact.

Simon Danczuk: Your pension or anything?

Martin Kimber: No, it would not impact either way.

Simon Danczuk: You would be fine.

Martin Kimber: Yes.

Q72 Simon Danczuk: Let me finish by saying there are 1,400 victims. Joyce, I have met many victims of child abuse. How many of the victims have you met?

Joyce Thacker: I do not know who all these 1,400 victims are.

Simon Danczuk: No, I am asking you how many victims you have met.

Joyce Thacker: In my time?

Simon Danczuk: Yes.

Joyce Thacker: I have probably met about half a dozen in my time.

Simon Danczuk: Half a dozen out of 1,400. Martin, how many of the victims have you met?

Martin Kimber: I have not been introduced to anybody.

Simon Danczuk: You have not met a victim of child abuse.

Martin Kimber: If you will just let me finish, I am trying to help. I have not met a victim who has been introduced to me as a victim or indeed a survivor of child sexual exploitation, but I will have met a number of young people, for example, during my inspections of things like children's homes.

Q73 Simon Danczuk: You would not know whether they are a victim. I will finish here, but what you are saying to the Committee is, in all this time, you have not made it your business to go and meet a survivor of the abuse. I will leave it there, Chairman.

Martin Kimber: No, actually that is not true again.

Simon Danczuk: So you have met a victim.

Martin Kimber: If I could just answer, I have made arrangements on three occasions to meet a victim of CSE, not least because I thought that being able to share their experience with me would help me. On each occasion, they have been advised by their legal advisors not to attend to meet me and, of course, I can quite understand that.

Q74 Simon Danczuk: When was that?

Martin Kimber: Three occasions during the course of the last two years.

Q75 Chair: Can I just pick up one point? You said, with regard to the Jay report, that the Jay report had not gone as far as identifying specific individuals who might be held to account, but that work was a process to be gone through. What is that process?

Martin Kimber: What I need to do is, in a calm atmosphere, to understand from Professor Jay the information sources that she has. Some of them have never been made available to me previously. By way of example, I have never ever seen a full copy of the 2002 report that is quoted within the Jay report. I have enquired at the Home Office. There is lots of information that Professor Jay will have from a variety of sources that I do not have, and I need to painstakingly go through that and then form some conclusions. They are conclusions on questions of the type that you have asked me. Is there any

responsibility? If there is, who was responsible? What are the degrees of responsibility? I need to go through that process.

Q76 Chair: Just two brief follow-ups: how do you deal then with people who have moved on, either retired or moved to work in other authorities?

Martin Kimber: I deal with it in exactly the same manner. I understand what the issues are.

Chair: You have no disciplinary authority over them, have you?

Martin Kimber: No, I have not but, at that point, I would try to understand—I would say two points to that. The first thing is, to provide some reassurance today, organisations up and down the country have extremely good performance management regimes relating to professional standards. They have personal development appraisals. They have inspections, etc. That is the way their performance today is judged, including of staff. What I would do would be to understand, as I have already indicated, who may have been responsible—what the degrees of responsibility may have been. Then I will draw to the attention of current employers what I have found out, and it would be a matter for them thereafter.

Q77 Chair: Given your performance might also be subject to that scrutiny and you might be scrutinising the performance of your predecessors, do you not think you need some independent assistance with that?

Martin Kimber: Independent assistance is certainly something I would consider, but the point I would make, of course—

Chair: Would you welcome it? Indeed, should it be simply done?

Martin Kimber: Actually, I think it is a good idea and I would be very happy to recommend to the council that that happens. Again just for the record, because I do think it is important, I absolutely accept that, as a chief executive, my own performance may be called into question. Consequently, prior to me providing any advice at all to cabinet, I ask my colleagues to seek leading council advice on the Jay report to indicate whether it, in any way, implicated me in a way that would need the council to consider disciplinary action. I did not provide that advice directly to the council; that was provided independently of me, as you would expect me to act entirely properly in those matters.

Q78 David Heyes: When did Rotherham go over from the committee system to the cabinet and scrutiny? Can you remember which year that was? Was it during this period?

Martin Kimber: I have to say I do not know. It was already in place when I joined the council in 2009. If my memory serves me correctly, the executive system came into place around 2004. It would clearly have been between 2004 and 2009.

Q79 David Heyes: What I am wondering about—this is perhaps a question for Mrs Thacker—are the difficulties you had in getting the cabinet member, who had responsibility for this, to act. Would things have been different had it been the old-fashioned social service or children’s committee system, where a group of a dozen members would have been receiving your report?

Joyce Thacker: That is a very interesting point. All I would say is, if you look at the Jay report, it does say that, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, there was not much difference then. I do not know; I was not there then. Clearly there were people around then. This information was made available then, so I do not know if it had much difference.

Q80 David Heyes: The reason I ask this is, by inference, the cabinet member failed to act on your reports or maybe more than a report, that ought to have been picked up by the scrutiny function, should it not? You could perhaps explain to us how the council’s scrutiny function should work. How can they fail to get on to this?

Joyce Thacker: You will find in the Jay report there is reference to the scrutiny function there. That was not as effective as it could have been, given what you have just said.

David Heyes: I perhaps did not hear you very well then. You said the scrutiny function was not as effective as it might be.

Joyce Thacker: It clearly says in the Jay report there was a criticism of the scrutiny function.

Q81 David Heyes: Is anything being done about that? Is that being addressed?

Joyce Thacker: Yes, it is. Mr Kimber can advise on the body that is coming in to look at the scrutiny.

Martin Kimber: The council has asked for independent advice on its scrutiny function to strengthen it. There is a council meeting this afternoon, contemporaneous with this meeting, so I am afraid currently I have no idea of decisions coming out. I do know that the acting leader wants to establish an independent improvement board that will

deal both with looking at scrutiny and also a range of other improvement areas for the council as well. That will be an entirely independent body.

Q82 David Heyes: You said earlier that had no idea whatsoever—those were your exact words—you had no idea whatsoever that this child sexual exploitation was going on.

Martin Kimber: No, not that it was occurring, but not that it had occurred at the scale that has been revealed by the Jay report. As I had indicated, I had not really taken a backward look at the council. There was a series of newspaper articles that were coming out that were indicating to me that there were clearly some young people who had been badly let down within Rotherham in the past, and I needed to know the extent of that.

Q83 David Heyes: It was surely more than newspaper reports. The Jay report itself takes about seven or eight pages to list an enormous catalogue of reports, reviews, audits, case reviews, conferences, forums and committees. Over and over again, these matters were raised and come in the public domain. You only became aware of it through newspaper reports.

Martin Kimber: The Jay report does say that but, as I have indicated, I still have not seen a full copy of the 2002 report referred to in the Jay report, even though I have made extensive enquiries. I have had a partial copy, which actually was supplied to me by newspapers. The Home Office and other sources that ought to have that report no longer have it. The 2003 report I have never seen at all, and I am making enquiries now. I have made extensive enquiries, but Professor Jay has it. The 2006 report I saw for the first time on Sunday evening. Whilst there is this catalogue of reports, they are not within the council's archives, because I have asked to see previous historic information.

Q84 David Heyes: I need to follow up on that. Is there a suggestion there then that documents drawing attention to these issues in the past actively have been destroyed?

Martin Kimber: I do not know whether they have been actively destroyed. All I can say is that I cannot find them. They are not within the council's archives.

Q85 David Heyes: What have you done to try to find them?

Martin Kimber: I have done quite a bit, as I have already indicated to you. In the context of the 2002 report, I wrote to the Home Office and made enquiries of them. I have made enquiries of the Home Affairs

Select Committee, because I thought they may have had access to that report. In the context of the 2003 and 2006 reports, I made enquiries of partners because, again in the Jay report, it indicates that the document was shared widely amongst managers, but the Jay report also indicates that the reports did not find their way into formal council machinery. For example, there were no minutes and no committee papers. All the traditional routes that I would be able to take to try to find this information have not been available to me.

Joyce Thacker: I just wanted to say that, in my assistance to Alexis Jay to try to find these reports, I was working with colleagues who do administrative work. It became clear to us that, whilst reports were referred to—I think the 2002 report was referred to—there is no copy of it in the council system. Certainly it does appear that the 2003 and 2006 reports do not appear to be referred to anywhere in any of the council minutes. We have extensively looked. I read and read back copies of minutes to try to find references to it, but they do not seem to have come into the council for discussion.

Q86 David Heyes: Do you have thoughts on why that is? Is this just carelessness or is it deliberate attempts to suppress information?

Joyce Thacker: Regarding the 2002 report, Professor Jay is very clear what she thinks—that it was suppressed. The 2003 and 2006 reports were not council reports; they were police reports, so I do not quite know where they would have gone. It does say they went to leaders of services, but there is no record of that.

Q87 David Heyes: You said earlier that the services are now fit for purpose, in your view. How did you get to that point? To be able to say that with some confidence today from where you were, how did you get to that point, because the report is very strong on the apparent absence of active learning, and not just in the distant past but until recent times? This is not a learning organisation and it very much needed to be. What things have you done to bring about the change?

Joyce Thacker: Professor Jay does highlight the successes that we had. When we went into intervention, it was a very difficult time and the importance was to stabilise the organisation and get some security into keeping it safe. One of the things I was really clear about is that I need a stable workforce, who were well trained, well supported, well supervised and were taking things forward.

Q88 David Heyes: Given the scale of local government cuts and the very difficult decisions that have been made about losing what had previously been regarded as essential services, it must have made it very

difficult for you to have a very active intervention programme of the sort you were starting to describe there.

Joyce Thacker: Yes, it was. It has been an incredibly difficult few years, absolutely without question, but I have been determined—absolutely determined—that my staff would be as good a quality as I could make them, that they would be settled and that they would have learning development opportunities. Indeed, you will see in the report, which was a delight to read, I have to say, that actually staff say it is unrecognisable now from when they first came in. That gave me a great degree of comfort, because it is what I see when I go out and speak to staff. I am a very visible leader; I meet my staff regularly. I am out there; I visit social work teams, children's homes, children's centres and schools. I try to get out as much as I can and I get the feeling and feedback from people that it is a far better safer place now than it has been.

We work tirelessly on our staff development. We have a really good recruitment and retention policy in place. Now, we are doing all sorts of practice consultant work. We actually spend time with newly qualified social workers, so they get post-qualifying opportunities. There is lots of stuff in place, so we are a learning organisation. I know perhaps it does not come out as strongly as I would like in the report, but we do a lot of good stuff, which is well recognised by both universities in Sheffield. We do a lot of good work with universities, because we want our social workers to have really good fitness-to-practise approaches to their work.

We have spent a lot of time looking at stripping out some of the bureaucracy that was there. There were really complicated forms. Actually, the only thing they served to do was to complicate it for social workers and, therefore, the children could have been unsafe because of the process. We have done a range of things. We have improved accommodation for staff; daft as that sounds, actually it says to staff, "You're worth it and we want you to be here, and working in good quality environments."

We have improved our advocacy services for children. Children now have advocacy services that were not there. We now have that in place. We have a really good looked-after children's council and a really good youth cabinet. We have ways of engaging with young people. Our youth cabinet, for example, last year did a really good piece of work on self-harm; from a sexual exploitation perspective, many of the victims and survivors of CSE do self-harm. We try to engage people. Our safeguarding board now has really robust leadership and a really good Chair, who is very committed to tackling this agenda.

Q89 David Heyes: I am sorry to just interrupt you there. It is my last point. In light of what you say, it must be really tragic that all this horrible press and the enormous personal difficulties that you have been dealing with recently has descended on you, when you have been actively doing the things that you have been doing. In fact, I guess Rotherham should be commended for this: you actually brought this investigation report upon yourselves. My worry about that is that there is a risk in that, is there not? Other local authorities might look at the Rotherham situation and say that covering up is a better option than being open and honest, and going public.

Martin Kimber: I think that you make a good point. Of course, it is the responsibility of Select Committees such as this to make sure that the information that is brought forward is used very responsibly.

I do just want to make two very brief points, if I might help you with your last question. You indicated how difficult it must be to be able to resource in current circumstances. When I joined the council, I recommended that we made investment within children's services within a very difficult budget environment, and the council supported that. The Jay report indicates that, to the extent that we have been able to, we have tried to protect our safeguarding budgets, in the context of having made over £70 million worth of cuts since 2010, with a further £23 million worth of cuts to come in the next financial year—a total of nearly £100 million out of a £250 million budget.

The second point I want to make is about a learning organisation and having well trained, passionate and committed staff—we do, and you should be in no doubt about that. Now is an incredibly difficult time, and you have just reflected that. Notwithstanding that, despite all of the flack that Rotherham is currently taking, last week the National Working Group, which is recognised as being an expert in child sexual exploitation, came out and said Rotherham's current services are amongst the best that they have seen. I think that reflects the journey that Rotherham has been on. Whilst this is difficult at the moment, and it is far more difficult for victims and their families than it ever would be for anybody else, potentially this could be a seminal moment within UK history, because it could make sure that this vile crime, which I think has been hidden for many years, is only now starting to get the visibility it deserves. You might have that visibility going forward forever more. As a Select Committee, you clearly have a very powerful role to play in that.

Q90 Bob Blackman: Just moving on, you are long-serving professional officers in Rotherham or elsewhere. You have seen the Jay report; you have seen the vast plethora of victims. Given that

experience, do you think that the social workers involved, who were charged with the responsibility of protecting vulnerable young children, were actually competent to do that job?

Martin Kimber: The Jay report sets out a number of factors that led to, quite simply, young people not getting the services they deserved. That failure has resulted in many shattered lives. The Home Affairs Select Committee report of 2013, which I think was a very good document—it was a well researched document—indicated that problems were systemic. In other words, it is not an individual professional group or individual organisation that fails, but it was about the way the whole family that is there to protect children has failed. I mean the professional family there.

Secondly it is cultural; Joyce has already made the point. We just need to understand why young women can be so undervalued in society. I was thinking about this over the weekend, and one of the thoughts for me is about the current discussion about criminalising professionals for not reporting child sexual exploitation. You just need to take it from me: I do not need to be threatened with criminal action to have that as a sanction for me not to report what is a vile, hideous crime. I do not think I am in the minority. I think everybody in this room would take the same position. There is that wider issue about culture within society and why young women are so poorly valued.

Joyce Thacker: I just want to give you some assurance about that. We do take fitness to practise really seriously, because that was your question really: have we let people down? Mr Kimber has explained some of the context around that, but I would just assure you that, since 2008, I have had 38 staff go through disciplinary procedures. I have about 130 staff. We have had one capability, six dismissals and six referrals to standards bodies, so we do take this seriously. Where we do have poor practice, we do deal with it. What I am trying to say is I would much rather have a staff who were really clear on the expectations on them and had that really positive culture to work in to know that, actually, "This is a crime and you will report it".

Q91 Bob Blackman: Can I be clear then? In these particular circumstances, did social workers come to you, as the head of the service, saying, "I'm really frightened that Child X or Child Y is being sexually abused and no one's doing anything about it. Can you help?"

Joyce Thacker: Absolutely. I have an open-door policy.

Bob Blackman: So did staff come to you?

Joyce Thacker: I have had two occasions in the past—just two—when staff have come to me really concerned about a child.

Q92 Bob Blackman: In your time—so we are talking now about 2008 when you were appointed to now, so that is six years—only two social workers came to you and said, “I am worried that this child is being sexually abused.”

Joyce Thacker: We have checks and balances all the way through the system. They do not have to come to me to do it. We have checks and balances in the system. We have an awareness-raising procedure. If a member of staff—it can be a partner as well; it does not have to be social care—if for example there is a strategy meeting, and you have health professionals there, police, etc, and a decision is taken on whatever, and somebody in that meeting feels a concern that it is not the right decision, there is a dispute resolution process in place, so they can heighten that up and it will be heard by somebody who is not the manager of that case. We have brought that in. There have been a number of those exercises, so I do get to hear about it.

Q93 Bob Blackman: Taking the corollary then, some of the evidence that is produced in the Jay report of the young people who have given evidence to say that they have been sexually abused, they report and they say that their social workers were treating them as the criminals, rather than the criminals who were abusing them. Do you think that is the work of a competent social worker, because I certainly do not and I do not think the general public does either?

Joyce Thacker: Absolutely. What I want to assure you on, sir, is with this report there were 1,400 victims identified.

Bob Blackman: We do not know how many victims there are, do we? The estimate is 1,400.

Joyce Thacker: We estimate; we will start with 1,400. We know that Professor Jay looked at 66 cases. We know that we have a historic operation at the moment, which has about 130 girls’ names in that, so there are another 130 I know about, so we are now over 200 pretty much. We have to start and I want to forensically go through where I can find where these young people are who have been let down. I want to give them an assurance and an apology—it is an indictment of how they have been treated. Also, doing that piece of work is also saying, “Who are the workers involved in that?” That is all partners in that case. Was that child criminalised? Did that child have a baby taken off them? Did they get post-abuse support? What have we done for that individual? If we need to, we will be asking the police to reopen cases and I give you my commitment that we will do that. It is really important that we do that.

Q94 Bob Blackman: The clear concern is that the person often at the frontline of this is the social worker working in your Department. Their competence to address these issues and then report them and take the appropriate action—what the evidence suggests from these reports—and I accept that there is a limited number that Professor Jay looked at—is that the staff were dismissing these particular young women coming forward, and saying that they were criminals, not the other way around. That seems to me not to be the work of a competent social worker. What assurances can you give us that you are going to address those particular issues in the department, both now and historically?

Joyce Thacker: As I say, historically, we will go back and look at all the cases and see what the case files said on those individuals. We will look at what actually happened there for that young person. If action needs to be taken, we will take it. That is going back historically, and it will take some time. It is a huge piece of work and I do not underestimate that, but it is important that we do it for those people who are identified in this report.

Now and going forward, we have a really good supervision process in place. We do look at practice learning sets. We actually are really clear on our expectations for our social workers. As I have said to you, in the last time since I have been there, there have been 38 investigations, and so on and so forth. We do actually ensure that we do check cases. We do audits. What was really important, Professor Jay said in her report, was that we have an excellent audit awareness-raising programme, and audits do pick up issues about decisions. I do file audit reading with my auditor. He will bring me a case: sometimes he will bring me a good one; sometimes we will go through the negative ones.

Q95 Bob Blackman: You will be aware of Emma Jackson, who gave evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee on the particular issue of what happened to her. In her particular circumstances, as I understand them, the social worker advised her parents to pay £500 that allegedly was owed for drugs and alcohol to the people who were abusing her. Is that a competent social worker?

Joyce Thacker: I have looked into that case. I am not disputing anything that was given in evidence, nothing whatsoever, but what I would say is that was a joint investigation with the police. I have asked for this case to be looked at again by us to look at fitness to practise, but I would say it was a joint investigation with the police. That was a joint visit, I know, because we looked at the case files on that. I need to understand what the police's advice at that time was, if somebody is blackmailing a young person. It cannot just be, as Mr Kimber said, down to the social worker. There has to be some discretion about the

police's role in this. Surely they have to take a stand against that, so I cannot comment on that.

Q96 Bob Blackman: Clearly you do not have a role over the police. I am talking about the competence of the social worker, who is your line management responsibility.

Martin Kimber: I think the point that Mrs Thacker is trying to make is that, in that particular incident, blackmail is a criminal offence. It is not any other offence and, therefore, one would assume that the police would be responsible for dealing with that.

Bob Blackman: It depends who gave the advice, I accept, but the evidence is that it was the social worker who gave that advice. That is what the young lady concerned, Emma Jackson, actually reported, so we have to take it at face value, because she was clearly there. I want to move on to some cultural issues.

Chair: John, do you want to deal with your questions next?

Q97 John Stevenson: Thank you; that is very helpful. I am digressing slightly, just on the wider issues for local authorities generally. Clearly this is a fairly damning report of Rotherham Council, but do you think it is a one-off or do you think this is something that is potentially an endemic problem across the country, Mr Kimber?

Martin Kimber: The Home Affairs Select Committee report again is a very recent document. I refer to it because it is recent and it was a strong piece of research. It does indicate that child sexual exploitation is a feature up and down the country. The Deputy Children's Commissioner I think described it as being present in every town, village and hamlet within the country, so clearly CSE is very widespread. We have already had discussions earlier in the day about reporting and recording systems, and I am not entirely convinced that we fully understand the scale of the issues across the country.

Q98 John Stevenson: Accepting that point you made—that it is widespread—do you think other councils have failed in the same way as Rotherham has?

Martin Kimber: I do not know. Clearly I am responsible for this council and I have a detailed working knowledge of this council, but I do not have a detailed working knowledge of others.

Q99 John Stevenson: Mrs Thacker, you obviously have meetings with other directors of children's services from other councils. Has this been an issue for them as well?

Joyce Thacker: Yes. We do look at this issue across the region in Yorkshire and the Humber. Mr Heyes just said it was a brave or perhaps foolish thing for us to do, but I think it was an important thing. We needed to hear the voices of the victims and what had gone on over many years. They would have to look long and hard as to whether this was something that they wanted to do.

Q100 John Stevenson: Do you think other councils should possibly go down the same route that you have gone down?

Joyce Thacker: I think they should look at it, but I would just say to look at what has happened as a consequence of this. It might actually be a perverse incentive for people to say, "I actually don't want to do this, because we don't need this in our council." It has been a painful thing for us to deal with, but it has been a really important thing for us to deal with in Rotherham.

Q101 David Heyes: How many of your children's services colleagues in the region have said that to you openly?

Joyce Thacker: What?

David Heyes: That they want to shy away from doing what you did.

Joyce Thacker: I have not met them since the report came out, so I cannot comment. We meet next in October, so perhaps they will have a view then, but I have not met them.

Q102 John Stevenson: From your experience then, do you think this is an endemic problem and that other authorities have had the same failures as yourselves?

Joyce Thacker: There will be various scales of it. I refer back to the Deputy Children's Commissioner's report—in every town and every city. Indeed if you look at the appendices at the back of this report, which the National Working Group supplied Professor Jay, there are cases there in places all over the country, places you might not expect this to be. What I am saying is it is everywhere. It may not be; it might be less, but it is everywhere. 1,400

Q103 John Stevenson: I accept the issue is everywhere. What I am really trying to drill down to is whether other authorities are dealing with it in the best way they possibly can or whether other authorities are also having the failures that you have had.

Joyce Thacker: I do not know their practice well enough in some of them. We went out specifically to look at best practice elsewhere. We

worked really closely with the National Working Group. I said, "Where is the best practice you are picking up?" so we went out to places. We have been to Oxford to have a look at the pilot there. We have looked at Lancashire; we have looked at Rochdale. We have looked around to see what there is, and so we have begged, borrowed and used people's best practice from elsewhere. Do you know? If somebody has thought it through, let us adapt it for Rotherham.

There are people coming to us now to say, "Can we look at what you are doing? How do you report it? How do you do this reporting-in?" We have got some really good stuff going, for which people have said, "Can we borrow what you are doing for monthly tactical assessments?" as I said earlier, and all sorts of stuff, which other people just do not have in place. Do they need to do it? I suggest they do look at it as things that we would certainly assist any national inquiry with. Indeed, we would be happy to contribute in any way that we could to assist the shaping of that and learning from our experience in Rotherham.

Q104 John Stevenson: The Secretary of State for Communities has suggested that he might have an independent investigation. Would you welcome that?

Joyce Thacker: I think so. If it is on child sexual exploitation, we have had 12 months of doing an investigation into it. It would be good if it was a national look at this. There are some things that I would really recommend we did look at nationally. For example, I think training is an issue, not just for social workers, but for all people who work in child services on child sexual exploitation. We get social workers who come out of university and then we have to train them on child sexual exploitation. It should be part and parcel of training courses for them. We should not have to be dealing with that when they come in because, when you are doing some training, you form a view on how you practice. You go out and, as Mr Kimber said earlier, you are faced with a child with chronic neglect. If you have not really understood child sexual exploitation as part of your training, you are not looking for that because, actually, it is not part of your training. We have to really get our social workers and other frontline professionals up to speed.

Q105 John Stevenson: I completely get your point about skills and think that you are absolutely right, but clearly there was a failure of that in Rotherham. Could you go slightly further? Would you support mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse, also backed by criminal sanctions?

Joyce Thacker: Criminal sanctions for the authority?

John Stevenson: Yes.

Joyce Thacker: If you did not report?

John Stevenson: Yes, if you did not report.

Joyce Thacker: Actually, it was interesting. We took part in the two surveys that the Deputy Children's Commissioner put out. There were surveys there and we fully complied with all of that. It was interesting; it was not a difficult exercise to do. We have the information there. I think it would be useful for everyone to report in to then give you that national benchmarking of what the issues are. What would be really important to do is have real clarity on what you are reporting, so you do not get some of the apples with pears. You are really measuring high-risk cases, medium and low-risk. You are not just saying, "I have 145 cases in Rotherham at the moment" but, actually, out of that, there are about 11 that are high-risk cases. The rest are varying degrees of vulnerability. We would have to be really clear what we were measuring so it was a comparison, like for like, across the piece. If you could do that against head of population as well, it would be useful.

Q106 John Stevenson: Mr Kimber, do you think there are any lessons for other local authorities and, if so, what are they?

Martin Kimber: We have already had the discussion around training. There are some best-practice issues coming out that it would probably be helpful to share with you in writing, because they are very technical. For example, they do refer to some of the long-term post-abuse therapies and the relationship that that may have during the course of criminal prosecutions, where witnesses may be regarded as less reliable or less credible witnesses, as a consequence of the type of therapy that they are undergoing to help them to deal with the abuse that they have faced. We would be very happy to write to you and set out for you those areas that we have encountered, which are what I would call system interfaces, which could be improved and should be improved.

Q107 John Stevenson: I was also thinking more about the role of chief executive and the director of children's services.

Martin Kimber: In the context of chief executive, the chief executive advises the whole council. It needs to make sure that appropriate resources are in place. There are some things that chief executives have had available to them previously to be able to consider and look at how organisations can work more effectively that are no longer there. For example, the standards board was always a means of being able to look at dealing effectively with matters relating to members.

That is no longer there; that is no longer an option a chief executive has—him being able to look, for example, at officer-member relationships.

Q108 John Stevenson: Do you think there are a lot of chief executives up and down the country reviewing their procedures?

Martin Kimber: I think there will be lots of authorities up and down the country that have extremely good quality practice. They will be looking at how they can strengthen it, as indeed will we in Rotherham. The final point I want to make on that is that we have always welcomed independent assessment of our services. We have had a number of independent assessments since 2010, including for example Barnardo's. I think that type of approach makes you self-aware and is to be commended.

Q109 Simon Danczuk: It is a very brief point, Chairman. It is an observation really, Martin, on something you said earlier. It is about the culture and we are going to come on to it, but about the language. Twice you said earlier "these young women". They are not women at all, are they?

Martin Kimber: No, they are children.

Simon Danczuk: They are girls. They are children. I think it speaks volumes that you describe them as "women" actually, but that is the observation. Thanks, Chairman.

Q110 Bob Blackman: Just moving on to some of the cultural aspects within the authority, which I think are quite significant, the Jay report makes clear that the principal sexual abusers of young children are Pakistani males, but the culture within the council and within the social work element seems to have been frightened of being accused of being racist by raising these things. How do you react to that accusation?

Martin Kimber: In the context of the Jay report, for example, it says a number of things. Dealing with the issue head-on, we give really clear guidance to all of our staff that criminal activity is criminal activity, and ethnicity is not an influence at all in tackling criminality, or indeed in tackling things that are plainly wrong and incorrect. In the context of the Jay report, what the Jay report says is that, in having a look at operational practice, she has not found any circumstance where operational practice has been unduly influenced by issues relating to ethnicity or race.

Equally, the report also draws attention to a report prepared in 2006, where workers did report that that was an issue; that was a fear to

them. To that extent, the report is making two points: one, there appears to be a general concern. Actually, when that general concern was put into practice, the practice was effective. As I say, I just make it really clear: criminality is criminality. All you judge is whether you are looking at a criminal act, and no more.

Q111 Bob Blackman: Within the Jay report, it is quite clearly stated, and I quote once again, "Several staff described their nervousness about identifying the ethnic origins of perpetrators for fear of being thought racist; others remembered clear direction from their managers not to do so." That suggests that the culture was not as you are suggesting, but people saying, "Downplay this. This should not be reported," which is a complete contradiction to what you just said.

Martin Kimber: All I can do is report on circumstances as they are today with me. I am just being really clear that criminality is criminality.

Q112 Bob Blackman: The staff who take that view and express that view were wrong. This is not the culture that you portray, but clearly they feel it is. There seems to be then a gap between you, as chief executive, and the line management that goes through the department.

Martin Kimber: No, the report refers to a time period from 1997 through to 2013, which is a really long period of time. I am not sure that the quote you are referring me to would be staff speaking today. I think that is the point I am making. I am not disputing at all that it is not in the Jay report. What I am saying is that, when you are dealing with a time period that is—

Q113 Bob Blackman: You can give us an absolute assurance that staff would not say that today.

Martin Kimber: I and my management colleagues were really clear: criminality is criminality.

Q114 Bob Blackman: Mrs Thacker, you have been in post for a bit longer. This report covers a whole period of time. That culture clearly existed. Whether it exists today or not, we have an assurance, but did you encounter this culture when you first arrived?

Martin Kimber: I was aware that there was a fear about people saying—and absolutely, it is about modelling behaviour. If someone has committed a crime, against a child in this case, it is a crime and it has to be dealt with. I will just take you back to the 2007 operation, then Operation Central, Operation Czar and Operation Chard. These were all where they were largely Pakistani men who were perpetrating

the crimes. There were other ethnicities in there. My experience is that we have tackled this issue and we did not let that go. I cannot account for the years before that, but clearly that is what staff were saying they felt, and we have to accept that in the report.

Q115 Bob Blackman: So that would not be the case now.

Joyce Thacker: Absolutely. I would be appalled if I heard that now, but then that is about staff feeling safe, as well—doing that in an organised way.

Q116 Bob Blackman: One of the issues is, if staff feel they could be accused of being racist, they may be reluctant to raise the issue for fear of what it may mean for their future employment prospects and their further careers. How often have social workers raised this issue with you about the ethnic origin of the perpetrators of these deeds that are being investigated now?

Joyce Thacker: I am really back to my early days being there. It has not been something that has been raised with me in recent years. I am really quite clear on that, but staff have to be supported to raise those issues. I would say that we have robust supervision, practice learning sessions for staff to say, “This is how you handle these situations.” It is about enabling staff to have the skills to deal with something and I think we have a system in place now that enables staff to do that.

Q117 Bob Blackman: The Jay report also talks about a culture of bullying and macho behaviour. There is a whole series—I am not going to go through them—of quotes from staff of the attitudes that were being adopted. How have you addressed that? To be fair, Mr Kimber, you have addressed this from 2009 onwards—that you recognised this. Is that correct within the authority generally, not within the social work department?

Martin Kimber: Yes. It would be fair to say, when I first arrived within the authority, just by way of example, that the use of industrial language I found not to my tastes. It may be appropriate in some circumstances, but not within an office environment. Indeed, it could be regarded as being very intimidating. I strongly believe in modelling appropriate behaviour. I made it very clear with my senior team the behaviours I expected to see, and I think the organisation has responded very positively, in the main, to that.

The one thing I would say is that, within all organisations, you always have exceptions. That is almost inevitable. Equally within organisations, they will never have a single culture. Organisations can

often have more than one culture and often many cultures over a significant period of time.

Q118 Bob Blackman: Mrs Thacker, I do not know what the mix is of men and women working in your department, but clearly the Jay report talks about the sort of macho nature of some of the managers involved. Equally, you have talked about newly qualified social workers coming out of college and, therefore, needing to be trained. By definition, they would be relatively young people going to these sorts of environments. What have you done to address those reports of cultural problems?

Joyce Thacker: As I mentioned before, it is about modelling behaviour. I have a very positive attitude towards my staff.

Q119 Bob Blackman: Have you disciplined people who displayed bullying behaviour and macho behaviour?

Joyce Thacker: I have not had many instances to deal with of that but, yes, probably out of the ones that I mentioned earlier, the 38, there have probably been one or two, but they are very isolated incidents. As Mr Kimber says, there are people around there who have behaviour tendencies, but I am really clear that we speak to people with respect, whoever they are in the organisation, from the cleaners right up to the leader of the council. We are respectful to everybody.

Q120 Bob Blackman: One of the things I am trying to get at is: why was it that the social workers at the front line here did not believe—because they clearly did not believe—these young women or young girls, and some boys, were being sexually exploited. They just did not believe them, did they?

Joyce Thacker: That goes back to a period in time, which I mentioned before. I do not condone this in any way, but I think we have all moved on in society. Today, in the present day, we do believe children; we do believe young people.

Q121 Bob Blackman: Can you give us an assurance then that, since you were appointed, the social workers have been taking up actively the reports from young children of sexual exploitation and there are no examples where they have dismissed them and said, “No, behave yourself. You are clearly just messing us around”?

Joyce Thacker: I have not come across a case like that, but that is not to say there is not one in there. We have 2,200 children in social care, in one way or another, so I am not saying that there is not a case in there somewhere, but what I am saying is that we have really good audit procedures. We do thematic audits. We look, for example in this

case, at child sexual exploitation. We look at cases. We look at children in care, and so on and so forth. If I came across an instance where I thought a child—and that is why the advocacy service is important as well. If the advocacy worker, who is independent, from Barnardo's, felt a child was not being listened to, they would actually be able to deal with that. We have a range of checks and balances in place to try to make sure that the child's voice is very central to the journey here. I would be appalled and I would take a really dim view if a child was not believed.

Q122 Bob Blackman: How often or how frequently have children in care been able to have access to members of the council and senior staff to just talk through their experiences of being in care in Rotherham?

Joyce Thacker: We have a really strong corporate parenting programme in the borough. It is very good, led by our lead member, who takes a real passionate interest in this. He has a regular programme of visits to children's homes with other members, and they meet for a cup of tea, cake and whatever with young people, and have some fun with them. He also regularly attends the looked-after children's council as well. We do not over-burden them there, because it is their space and we go by invitation, because actually they need to have space for themselves too, but we go there and—he will kill me for saying this—watch my cabinet member make bracelets and things like that. He will be quite mortified but, actually, if you are doing this exercise, you want to join in, so you do, because it is their time and they are setting the agenda. Through that practical way of engaging with young people, they talk about things. It is not formal like this, so we have lots of opportunities.

Q123 Bob Blackman: Have there been any examples of young children reporting to members terrible things that have happened to them, either in care or by other abusers? Are there any examples? I am not saying there should be.

Joyce Thacker: I do not think there has been direct reporting to a member, but we do have a complaints system where we have had young people exercise that. We have a really strong programme where young people can raise complaints. I do not think there has been any—I might be wrong—direct reference to an elected member on a visit, because I think that might be quite difficult for a young person to do that, but I certainly can remember a couple of complaints that have come in, where they have said they have not been treated fairly, they have not been listened to, they have not whatever. We deal with those. They are not many, thankfully, but when they do come in it is something that we have to deal with robustly.

Q124 Bob Blackman: Finally from me, regarding the 2002 Home Office report, and I accept this was completely before either of your time within the authority, do you agree that the response from the council was wholly unjustified and inaccurate? If the council at the time had taken the Home Office report seriously, then a lot of what we are talking about today would never have happened.

Martin Kimber: It is clear throughout the Jay report that there were a series of missed opportunities. How significant those missed opportunities are is really difficult to know. If everybody could turn the clock back, we would have tackled this issue far more directly and far earlier than was ever the case.

Q125 Chris Williamson: Just briefly, can I take you back to the comment about ethnicity? I just want to clarify: are you saying that the ethnicity of the perpetrators of these crimes resulted in the downplaying of the crime and the not taking action on the crime, or are you simply talking about the ethnicity being downplayed and that action was still taken on the crime? Has the ethnicity led to the fear of actually tackling these crimes? Is that what you are saying?

Joyce Thacker: What I am saying is that we did not really start taking action, if you look at prosecutions, until 2007. Before then possibly it was downplayed.

Chris Williamson: The crime was downplayed because of the ethnicity of the perpetrators.

Joyce Thacker: For me, as I understand it looking back, it was people saying, "We won't just talk about that; we'll pursue it but we're not going to talk about—"

Chris Williamson: Sorry, pursue what—the fact that these people were from an ethnic minority?

Joyce Thacker: Yes.

Chris Williamson: They would pursue the crime, are you saying, but just not make reference to the fact that they were from a Pakistani heritage?

Joyce Thacker: If you look at our prosecution rate, we did not do either very well in the past. It is much, much better now. As I said, from 2007, we started to get some quite significant, high-profile prosecutions of individuals. Before then, if prosecutions are the measure, clearly it was downplayed.

Q126 Chris Williamson: Is your view that the ethnicity is a relevant factor here?

Joyce Thacker: No, I do not think so. Across every walk of life there are bad people intent on harming children. It just so happens that, in these particular cases here, there seems to be a strong Pakistani heritage issue. There are other cases where that is not the case.

Q127 Chris Williamson: Some of the media coverage has suggested that the reason action was not taken was, if I could paraphrase it, political correctness gone mad, you did not take action because the perpetrators were of Pakistani heritage, and you are saying that is not the case.

Joyce Thacker: Since I have had some degree of responsibility for actually taking these forward, I have a 2007 case; I have 2010. It was 2008 that the case was uncovered, as it were, which led to prosecutions. The other ones where we did not have prosecutions the Crown Prosecution Service thought they were unreliable witnesses—they were all men of Pakistani heritage, so I am saying I am prepared to tackle these issues head on.

Q128 Chris Williamson: Are you saying the failures would still have happened if the perpetrators had been white British?

Joyce Thacker: I think so, because there were no prosecutions, or very few.

Q129 Chris Williamson: The media reportage has been completely wrong on that aspect, on that accusation.

Joyce Thacker: The media report is very specific to a certain community. I can tell you now, I think our profile at the moment is about 60% white, 40% BME. I think that is our rough profile at the moment.

Chris Williamson: That is the profile of...?

Joyce Thacker: Of offenders over the last 12 months. It is not right now.

Chris Williamson: Thanks for that clarification.

Q130 Chair: Just a couple of final questions: leading on from that one, it may well be that you are right; in the end, the council did not pursue these cases because people were from the Pakistani community, though clearly there is some evidence in the Jay report that that was a factor in frontline staff's perceptions of the council's position. You now

have a problem in Rotherham, do you not, chief executive in particular, with wider community issues, where it is one community where responsibility for these appalling crimes has happened. It is essentially Pakistani men. Is that not a challenge for Rotherham as a whole, and for the authority in particular, which has to take a lead on it, outside of the particular issues about the children and young persons' service?

Martin Kimber: Yes, it is. It is picked up in the Jay report as part of the recommendations. We need to improve our engagement with all of our hard-to-reach communities, but we particularly need to make sure we have gender-appropriate relationships with women's groups from Pakistani heritage backgrounds. Again, that was one of the things that came out within the Home Affairs Select Committee report, where it was indicating that, actually, one of the things that needs to be tackled is to work with, I think the phrase was something like—it will not be entirely accurate—grandmothers, mothers and daughters. That is picked up within the Jay report. It is within our action plan and it is something that we need to do.

We also of course have a range of other communities within Rotherham as well where increasingly we are facing challenges, not least because the age of sexual consent across Europe is not uniform. That of itself brings some challenges for us.

Q131 Chair: This is in the Slovak Romani community.

Martin Kimber: Absolutely.

Q132 Chair: Of course there is a challenge about child exploitation within the Pakistani community itself—of girls within that community as well.

Martin Kimber: That is exactly the point as well. It is clear, coming from the Jay report, that there was under-reporting of sexual exploitation of young people within that community as well.

Q133 Chair: Do you have social workers and children's workers who actually have the skills to get involved with that community, in that way?

Joyce Thacker: We do have some but we are always trying to recruit more. We do actually recruit social workers from the Slovak community as well. We have a good relationship with Romania and we are trying to recruit people. We have family support workers there, so we are starting to build up our skill base so we are able to respond to different communities.

Q134 Chair: Just looking at that, that leads me on to my final questions. The Jay report did identify that improvements have been made. In terms of support for those young people who have been exploited, been abused and are now damaged in a whole variety of ways, there simply was not sufficient support in place by way of mental health support, counselling and psychological services. It simply was not there. On top of that, you have identified the need to revisit all these historic cases, particularly those where risk assessments were not being done appropriately, even up to the end of last year. It is absolutely evident that now, as an authority, you do not have the capacity, either in staff or resources, to do these things, have you?

Martin Kimber: I think we just need to understand the scale of the challenge before we draw that conclusion, but it certainly will be very testing.

Q135 Chair: The scale of the challenge is there: it is 1,400 young people, as a conservative estimate, according to Professor Jay. You do not have the resources. If you want to go away and try to make the best of it, then you are going to fail people again, are you not?

Martin Kimber: I agree with you; it is not about making the best of it. It is about being really clear on what needs to be tackled and the resourcing plan for that.

Q136 Chair: Are you getting a resource plan together and, if you do not have the resources in-house, either in terms of the skills or the finance, are you going to say to the Secretary of State, to this Committee, "We can't manage. We need help to address these issues"?

Martin Kimber: It would be entirely appropriate of us to do that and that would indeed be our intention.

Q137 Chair: That is helpful. Just in terms of one other issue, you have talked about scrutiny and putting arrangements in place to try to improve that. What about your whistleblowing arrangements? Is anyone actually whistleblowing about any problems in this area, in all the time you have been there, either directly or indirectly?

Joyce Thacker: Not whistleblowing on this. We have had whistleblowing on other matters, but not on CSE.

Q138 Chair: Does that not lead you to have some concern that your whistleblowing processes might not be adequate either?

Martin Kimber: You are right that whistleblowing is an important part of the governance of a well run organisation. As Mrs Thacker said, we have had a number of whistleblowing referrals during the course of the

last several years, which are always passed to our audit team or appropriate investigators to look at. It is something I take very seriously but, in common with Mrs Thacker, I have to say I cannot remember a sexual exploitation whistleblowing referral.

Q139 Chair: Are you going to review your procedures there as well, to see if they are effective? Whistleblowing only works if people use it.

Joyce Thacker: It is used and we do promote it amongst all staff. They are very clear on whistleblowing policies, so it is part of the armoury of things that people can use. If they do not feel confident using dispute resolution, you can in confidence use the whistleblowing. It either tells you one of two things: that they do not recognise it as an issue or they are confident with the arrangements that are currently in place: supervision, dispute resolution, etc.

Q140 Chair: Are you going to have another look at it?

Joyce Thacker: We have looked at it and we have reviewed it. In the last 12 months, we reviewed our whistleblowing.

Q141 Chair: Ofsted is going to come in, along with the Secretary of State talking about an investigation. The Home Secretary talked about Ofsted coming in again to have a look. Do you have any confidence in Ofsted after the rather inadequate attempts to inspect the services around 2007-08, when they kept reassuring about the service being okay generally?

Martin Kimber: In the context of Ofsted, I would go back to their latest inspection of 2012 and what they had to say there. What they had to say there has since been verified for us independently, by for example Barnardo's, which is recognised nationally as being experts within this area. That gives me confidence that the 2012 inspection was a thoroughly well run inspection.

Q142 Chair: They have made some improvement as well.

Martin Kimber: I should imagine Ofsted has improved substantially over the years they have been operating, yes.

Q143 Chris Williamson: It is a very brief point. It is just in relation to elected members. I wondered if you could say whether or not you are putting any support or training in place for elected members to enable them to scrutinise and interpret advice from professional officers,

bearing in mind, as I have already made the point, they are laypeople at the end of the day. Are you doing that?

Martin Kimber: We have an extremely active member development programme now, which includes a number of facets to it.

Q144 Chris Williamson: Is this new? Is this building upon that as a consequence of what has happened?

Martin Kimber: This is something that has been in place for several years. It has been substantially strengthened during the course of the last few years.

Q145 Chris Williamson: Has it been altered or strengthened in any way in the light of the Jay report?

Martin Kimber: No, we are going to strengthen it. As I have already indicated, one of the things that we will be doing is looking at how we can strengthen the scrutiny arrangements. That will of course involve stronger training and development. The point I was trying to make though, in terms of member development, is we take things like corporate parenting very seriously. It is part of our training package. Now almost all members have been trained on CSE, for example. These things, which are crucially important, are very much part of a live member development programme.

Q146 Chris Williamson: That could potentially form part of a national exemplar, in terms of support, training and development of elected members across the country.

Martin Kimber: Our training and development is very well recognised by members across the country.

Q147 Chair: Finally, Professor Jay said there were 1,400 victims. Have you actually got a record and detailed information about all the 1,400?

Joyce Thacker: No. Professor Jay looked at 66 files, as I said.

Q148 Chair: How many files do you actually have?

Joyce Thacker: I have 2,200 children at the moment. I have 2,200 files.

Q149 Chair: How many involved in child sexual exploitation?

Joyce Thacker: At the moment, 145.

Chair: You have 145.

Joyce Thacker: Yes.

Chair: You have no information about the others.

Joyce Thacker: What I said to you earlier was we have the 66. We have the young people we have identified in Operation Central, which is a historic operation, and over the years there have been other cases in Operation Central, which we talked about. We talked about Operation Chard.

Chair: There is a big gap between that number and 1,400.

Joyce Thacker: It is huge, which is why it will take a forensic exploration into the files. She has calculated that number; I am not 100% sure how, and we need to understand that before we set up our piece of work.

Q150 Chair: Do you dispute the 1,400 figure?

Joyce Thacker: I cannot. I am not in a position to do that. We accept her findings. We will look at that, though.

Q151 Chair: You are going to need some help going through that. That is back the authority saying, very quickly, "Help us. We cannot manage this alone."

Martin Kimber: We are putting a resourcing plan in place, as I have indicated, so we will not be shy to ask for help if we need it, because it is really important that we get this right.

Chair: Thank you for coming in this afternoon and giving evidence.