



Communities and Local Government Committee

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

Tuesday 20 January 2015

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Evidence from witnesses:

Panel 1 (Questions 273-351)

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Members present: Mr Clive Betts (Chair); Bob Blackman; Simon Danczuk; Mrs Mary Glindon; and Mark Pawsey.

Panel 1 Questions [273-351]

Witnesses: **Debbie Jones**, Director, Social Care and Regional Director, London, Ofsted, gave evidence.

Q273 Chair: Welcome to the session this afternoon, our third evidence session into our inquiry on child sexual exploitation following the Jay Report on Rotherham. Before we start, I just want Members to put on record their interests. I am the vice-president of the Local Government Association. I also have a close friend—councillor Sioned-Mair Richards—who is a councillor in Sheffield but who was, for a period of time, a part-time scrutiny officer in Rotherham.

Mrs Glindon: My husband is a councillor in North Tyneside, as is a member of my staff.

Simon Danczuk: My wife is currently a councillor and some of my staff are councillors.

Mark Pawsey: I have two members of staff who are councillors.

Chair: Thank you. We have put that on the record. Thank you very much for joining us. Just for our records, could I ask you to confirm your name and the capacity in which you are here this afternoon?

Debbie Jones: I am Mrs Debbie Jones, and I am here as the National Director for Social Care at Ofsted. I am also the Regional Director for London.

Q274 Chair: I think you are here this afternoon because of your particular responsibilities for the inspection of children's services in local councils—thank you for that. I am sure you have probably read Professor Jay's evidence when she came to the Committee and, indeed, her report, which we questioned her on. We specifically asked when she came whether she believed that Ofsted had failed the children of Rotherham. Her reply was, "To some extent, yes". Do you think she was right to say that?

Debbie Jones: I think that Professor Jay's comments need to be taken in context. I have been very clear as National Director here in Ofsted that we have been public about the fact that the reports that we did in relation to Rotherham were, in parts, not good enough. We have been very public about that, and I think it would probably be helpful for the Committee, Chair, if I was to explain what I mean by that.

Chair: Yes, please.

Debbie Jones: Obviously, there have been a range of inspections into Rotherham over the last however many years. Since Ofsted has been responsible, there have been a number. As the Committee will be aware, in 2009 Ofsted actually found Rotherham inadequate and there was the improvement notice that resulted. To bring it bang up to date, what I would say is that our inspection outcomes frequently reflect the frameworks under which we inspect and, indeed, the policies of the time. That in no way is an excuse or a defensive comment. I think what Professor Jay also said to this Committee is that she would recognise that our methodologies have changed and improved. And, indeed, that would be what was reflected in the 2014 inspection, which we have just reported on.

Q275 Chair: I suppose those of us with a bit of hard-bitten cynicism might say that the 2014 inspection reflected the fact that Professor Jay had already identified the problems and therefore you could hardly produce the same sort of report as you produced before.

Debbie Jones: I think I would want to rebut that because the 2014 inspection very clearly reflected the framework—our single inspection

framework—that we were inspecting against. It was actually very different from the framework that we inspected against certainly back in 2009 and then again in 2012, illustrating the point that our frameworks were evolutionary. I think one of the hallmarks of our frameworks—actually always the hallmark of our frameworks—is our objectivity and the way in which we inspect according to what are the published frameworks of the time. One of the things that we were very mindful of was the need to be absolutely rigorous and robust. The Committee will also be aware that not only did we inspect Rotherham under the SIF—the single inspection framework—we also used Rotherham as one of the eight local authorities we went into as part of the child sexual exploitation survey.

Q276 Chair: So are you saying that you have not had to learn any lessons—new lessons—from the Jay report because you had already learned all the lessons before Professor Jay reported?

Debbie Jones: I would not be naive or, indeed, disrespectful to Professor Jay to say that there was nothing that Ofsted nor, indeed, the public sector as a whole could learn from the Jay report. There was as much in there for Ofsted as there was for the rest of my colleagues in the public sector and in the local authorities, and you will probably be aware that I was formerly a director of children’s services in a number of local authorities. So part of the value of Professor Jay’s report, indeed, was that it backed up the evolutionary changes that we had made to our framework that we introduced back in the back end of November 2013. But, in addition to that, we specifically picked up the issues that were reflected in Professor Jay’s report, and those were reflected in the survey that took place and was published in November last year.

Q277 Chair: I am trying to get my head around whether you are telling us that because Professor Jay identified problems in Rotherham you therefore in your latest report also reflected those problems—it would be surprising if you did not—or whether there are specific things you have learned from Professor Jay’s report that will influence how you do inspections and reports in the future.

Debbie Jones: Let me try and be a bit clearer then. Professor Jay focused attention and a spotlight on an issue that has been of concern to the sector and, indeed, to all of the inspectorates for a while—for very many years. I would say that, as a former social worker and a former director, what it did was focus, forensically, attention that we have then reflected both in our framework and, indeed, in the additional scrutiny that we are putting on child sexual exploitation in

the most recent guidance. Perhaps it would be helpful if I talked about the direct link between Professor Jay's report and then the increased forensic look. Would that be helpful for you?

Chair: Yes, please.

Debbie Jones: Okay. Child sexual exploitation within the SIF has always been one of the areas of required evidence. Since the publication of Professor Jay's report and, indeed, before the publication of the Rotherham single inspection framework, what you will have seen is greater attention. Some of that reflects the changes in the frameworks themselves. You will probably be aware that part of the difference between the past inspection frameworks and this one is the increased focus on the journey of the child. The inspection covers four weeks. We look at children and young people's experience from entering the system through to exit. That will mean through to services for care leavers.

In doing so, we will look at information—data; we will look at soft intelligence and hard intelligence; we will, most importantly, look at front-line practice; we will track a significant number of cases; we will sample cases; and, in areas where we know that there are particular issues around child sexual exploitation, they will get more of a forensic look. We will track that through the accountability regimes within the local authority and through the reports to scrutiny committees; we will track it through the reports to the local safeguarding children's board; and, most importantly, we will look at the experiences that children and young people have, i.e. the difference that we make, the impact that we have.

To give you a direct illustration, in the authorities that we are going into now, during the first week, our inspectors will be meeting with the most senior person in the local authority who has responsibility for missing children in that authority. Indeed, we will be meeting with the senior police officer within the local safeguarding children's board precisely to look at those issues. The emphasis on "missing" is quite simply because we know that young people who are missing, whether they are missing from education or from care, are often the most vulnerable. In addition, we look at the culture of the authority and the openness of the authority. So I hope what you are seeing is that we have responded absolutely directly to the messages within Professor Jay's report.

Q278 Chair: Before I pass over to my colleague, Simon Danczuk, can you say therefore whether if Ofsted is doing it now and it was not

doing it before, it should apologise for the way it has failed the children of Rotherham over the years?

Debbie Jones: We have publicly said that what we have done was not good enough in the same way that what has happened in local authorities has not been good enough. What we have demonstrated is a responsiveness to the lessons that have been learned. What we have demonstrated is that we have heard, we have listened and we have responded with the way in which our frameworks evolve and change.

Q279 Chair: You have learned, you have listened and you have responded. Have you apologised?

Debbie Jones: We have said very publicly, and I have said very publicly, when we published the CSE survey in November that mistakes were made.

Q280 Chair: Have you apologised?

Debbie Jones: In that respect, I cannot be clearer than that.

Chair: No, you can be. You can just say that you apologise on behalf of Ofsted for letting down the children of Rotherham over the past few years.

Debbie Jones: What I would say in response to that is what I said in November: that what we did was reflective of the frameworks at the time, of the policies of the time—

Chair: But they weren't good enough, were they?

Debbie Jones: And in that respect, I think that applies as much to other organisations in the sector.

Q281 Chair: I am going to come back to the point because I think you are using words now to avoid answering the question. Are you prepared, on behalf of Ofsted, to apologise to the children of Rotherham for past failings in failing to identify this issue of child sexual exploitation?

Debbie Jones: Chair, I believe very strongly that there are apologies due on every front—on the regulator's front, within the community, within other inspectorates. I think that is the important thing.

Q282 Chair: But other inspectorates and other regulators are not before me today and not before the Committee. I am asking you if you are now prepared to apologise on behalf of Ofsted for past failings in this matter.

Debbie Jones: I think that you are taking my comments out of context, Mr Betts.

Chair: No, I'm asking you for a straightforward answer.

Debbie Jones: I think what I will do—

Q283 Chair: I'm asking you for a straightforward answer. Are you refusing to give one?

Debbie Jones: I hear what you are saying. I have responded very clearly on what we have done.

Chair: No, you haven't. You haven't given me a straight answer. Are you prepared to apologise?

Debbie Jones: What I have said is that we—

Chair: The words are quite easy to say.

Debbie Jones: —in Ofsted, along with everybody else, feel that what we have done is not good enough.

Q284 Chair: Right. And sorry?

Debbie Jones: Of course we're sorry.

Chair: That's an apology then, is it?

Debbie Jones: We are sorry along with, I am sure, everybody else who has been presented in front of this Committee.

Chair: Yes, absolutely. Other people have apologised as well.

Debbie Jones: But I think it is important that I say that in the context of where we were then. Remember that I am also speaking to you, as I have already explained, as a former director of children's services. What I would also say—and I hope that you take this in the spirit in which it is said—is that, as a director, I think that any director that relies purely and exclusively on what the inspectorates say and do is not doing the job that they should be doing. As a director, I was always very clear that Ofsted came at a moment in time, Ofsted saw and Ofsted reported. But, as a director, what was important to me was actually what I asked, challenged and saw myself.

Chair: Okay. That is fine. The directors can answer for themselves and, indeed, they have already been before us to do so.

Q285 Simon Danczuk: Debbie, just to summarise, why were Ofsted's inspections of Rotherham from 2007 onwards so ineffective in detecting the rape of children and so ineffective in helping keep them safe?

Debbie Jones: I do not think that Ofsted's inspections were completely ineffective. Let's be absolutely clear—

Simon Danczuk: I didn't say completely ineffective.

Debbie Jones: In 2009, Ofsted found Rotherham inadequate and, as a result of that, there was intervention. In 2009, they identified that there were failures in practice, failures in managerial oversight—

Q286 Simon Danczuk: Let me just stop you, Debbie. I asked from 2007.

Debbie Jones: From 2007. Are you talking about the joint area review that was completed in 2006?

Q287 Simon Danczuk: Let me repeat the question: why were Ofsted's inspections of Rotherham from 2007 onwards so ineffective in detecting the rape of children and not helping keep them safe?

Debbie Jones: I have already explained that the inspectors inspect according to the frameworks that we have at the time.

Q288 Simon Danczuk: Right, so were the frameworks wrong?

Debbie Jones: The frameworks that we had at the time were developed according to the policies and the issues that were of concern at the time. I have been very clear that they did not focus on child sexual exploitation. They did not. They did not to the degree that they do now.

Q289 Simon Danczuk: Who designed the frameworks?

Debbie Jones: They were designed by Ofsted. At that time, as I am sure you will be aware, child sexual exploitation did not have the focus—wrongly—that it has now.

Q290 Simon Danczuk: So Ofsted designed a system that failed to spot the rape of children and they were using that framework in an attempt to convince the public that they were doing an effective job of examining whether the service was good or not.

Debbie Jones: What our frameworks did at the time was they examined processes; they examined systems; they examined strategies—

Q291 Simon Danczuk: Sorry, Debbie, but they didn't spot the rape of children.

Debbie Jones: They did not spot the scale of the issue.

Simon Danczuk: The scale—or any of it.

Debbie Jones: They spotted that there was child sexual exploitation—

Simon Danczuk: Did they?

Debbie Jones: But they did not, because of the frameworks that were there, spot the scale and I have been very clear about that.

Q292 Simon Danczuk: The Ofsted joint area review report in 2006 said, "It appeared that vulnerable children and young people are kept safe from abuse and exploitation". Professor Jay talks about "false reassurance".

Debbie Jones: What Professor Jay also said was that our methodologies changed and evolved over the years.

Q293 Simon Danczuk: No, I am not on about what happened after it changed. I am interested in what happened when you were doing the inspections when it had not changed, because that is when young children were being raped. You understand the gravity of the situation—I know you do, Debbie.

Debbie Jones: Absolutely.

Simon Danczuk: Ofsted was providing what Professor Jay calls "false reassurance"—convincing the public, councillors, council officers and everybody that the children were safe. They were not safe; they were being raped. Is that down to Ofsted's failure?

Debbie Jones: I think that it would be wrong to say that the level of child sexual exploitation in Rotherham or, indeed, in any local authority was purely down to the Ofsted frameworks, because that misconstrues, surely, the responsibility and the accountability that is on senior officers within a local authority at any given time and, indeed, of course, on local politicians. What I have explained very clearly is that Ofsted will have inspected against our frameworks. I have also explained very clearly in my earlier response—

Q294 Simon Danczuk: Sorry, let me make a little bit of progress. Councillors and officers were told that the service was adequate, were they not? At one stage, in 2007-08 I think it was, they were told that the service was adequate. Should they have assumed otherwise?

Debbie Jones: Bear in mind that, of course, I know you will be interviewing former senior officers in Ofsted and I think that those are questions that I am sure you will want to address to them. But what I would want to say—and I would not want to shirk any understanding here—is that our inspectors, as I understand it, looked and inspected against the frameworks that we had at the time. If you look at the framework under which we are inspecting now, it is very different. If you look at the way in which we look at child sexual exploitation now, it is very different.

Q295 Simon Danczuk: Do you think anybody in Ofsted should apologise for having designed frameworks that were not able to inspect and conclude that children were being raped?

Debbie Jones: I think it is important that we recognise the way in which frameworks develop, and I have already explained that. That is exactly why we have changed our framework. The framework that we have now focuses entirely on the experiences of children and young people.

Q296 Simon Danczuk: Let me just briefly use a case study that I have from Rochdale. This is in relation to a children's home in Rochdale. It was inspected within the last 12 months and rated by Ofsted as good. Three days later, a serious incident occurs involving one of the children in the children's home. Within days, Ofsted go in and decide to rate it as inadequate. Why would that happen?

Debbie Jones: I cannot speak about the specific case. In the same way as a local authority will inspect against a framework, we have, as you know, a separate framework for our children's homes inspections. Indeed, in the same way that we have toughened up and are looking in a different way at our frameworks for local authorities, come April this year, we will be introducing a different, tougher framework for children's homes because we believe it is important that the same standards that we are using should apply across the piece.

Q297 Simon Danczuk: Let me say that there are a lot of flaws in this process. You are there one day and you rate this children's home as good. An incident occurs so you decide to come back immediately and rate it as inadequate because you want to cover yourselves. That is why

you are doing it, Debbie. It is nothing to do with providing a good public service.

Debbie Jones: I think I would beg to disagree with you. It would be inappropriate for me to comment on a particular case.

Q298 Simon Danczuk: Fair enough. Let me conclude with a final point: listen, the good people of Rotherham work really hard to pay taxes. Some of those taxes are used to pay you and inspectors and Ofsted a decent standard of living so that you will keep their children safe and inspect services. This is the purpose of you guys and you are paid reasonably well for it. It is to keep their children safe and to inspect public services to ensure that those public services are not failing those children. It is fair to say that, during the course of this, Ofsted failed to do those inspections to a decent standard to the point where the children were protected. You agree with that, do you not?

Debbie Jones: What I would say is that, clearly, the frameworks that we had at the time did not get at precisely those issues.

Q299 Simon Danczuk: Listen, Debbie: you guys designed the framework. Ofsted designed the framework. Can you imagine what the people of Rotherham think about what you are saying now? You guys designed the frameworks, not anybody else. So apologise for the fact that you had the wrong frameworks designed.

Debbie Jones: I hope that the people of Rotherham were reassured by what we reported very robustly recently when we reported on Rotherham.

Simon Danczuk: Do you really think they will be reassured by what you are saying today?

Debbie Jones: I very much hope that they were and, indeed, what we reported in our survey in November. But I would also point out that the issues that were flagged up in 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012—

Simon Danczuk: Debbie, let me say: in the four and a half years that I have been a Member of Parliament and sat on this Committee, you are probably one of the worst witnesses we have ever taken evidence from.

Chair: Let's move on.

Q300 Bob Blackman: Just to build on the historical aspect, I think we should be clear around this table: no one is holding you personally responsible for what happened historically. I understand that you are going to defend the organisation you are representing, but you do have widespread experience in children's social services before coming to the position. Going back historically, between 2006-09, the Ofsted framework joined the inspection of children's services and schools with the same people. Do you think that was a mistake?

Debbie Jones: I have been inspected under all those frameworks as a director. At the time, I felt that those inspections were pretty robust. I am very clear that what we are doing now is much, much tougher.

Q301 Bob Blackman: But at the time, there were inspectors that were clearly ex-teachers inspecting particular issues. Were there, throughout those Ofsted times, people with proper qualifications in children's social work doing those inspections?

Debbie Jones: I cannot speak for the qualifications of the workforce then. It would be wrong of me to comment on that. What I can say is that one of the issues—as, of course, you would expect any public sector organisation to do—is to look at the workforce that we have. We have looked at that very intently in the same way as we have looked very carefully at the inspections that we have done precisely because of the concerns that have been raised. We have set our workforce a higher bar; we expect more; we have given increased training and preparation. I cannot speak for the processes that would have happened then; I can only talk about now—

Q302 Bob Blackman: Can I just cut across here? I understand that the organisation has learned; that is quite clear. Was there anything in these inspections going back to before 2009 that made Rotherham exceptional? According to our reports, there is nothing that made it exceptional. Is that fair?

Debbie Jones: Is it not a worry that an organisation was rated inadequate in 2009 and never actually moved from that?

Q303 Bob Blackman: Taking on Mr Danczuk's point, going back to 2006, it was rated adequate. So the report going to councillors and to the people of Rotherham was that it was perfectly okay—probably not great, but adequate.

Debbie Jones: No, I accept that. But what I also accept is that, at the time within Ofsted, as I understand it, we felt ourselves that the JAR process—the annual performance assessment process—was not necessarily reaching those parts that needed to be reached.

Q304 Bob Blackman: That is the national position. What I am concerned about is that there is a period up until 2009 when, according to Ofsted, Rotherham was adequate. Ofsted, across the nation, gave lots and lots of children's social services departments adequate ratings and if there was nothing exceptional about Rotherham, what confidence can we have as a Committee and what confidence can the nation have that the same problems that Rotherham had did not go on elsewhere?

Debbie Jones: What the Committee needs to look at is absolutely what we look at now. What we look at now, as I recounted during the earlier part of this meeting—

Bob Blackman: We are going to have a very detailed inquiry into child sexual abuse across the country. There are going to be lots of victims out there, possibly watching these proceedings, wondering whether they should come forward or not. One of the concerns will be: did Ofsted do its proper job as a monitoring group at the time when this abuse was going on?

Debbie Jones: We have already said—and I have said it here today—that we did not do the job well enough.

Q305 Bob Blackman: So we go forward to 2009 and the Minister intervened. Could you just explain the process by which that intervention took place?

Debbie Jones: That intervention took place because Ofsted had gone in to do a contact referral and assessment—a two-day inspection, an inspection of front-line services. What Ofsted found were deficits around front-line practice, what was happening on the front line, assessment of risk, information retrieval, quality assurance and performance management. It was as a result of that that the then Children's Minister issued an improvement notice, which was then lifted.

Q306 Bob Blackman: But the improvement notice did not mention child sexual exploitation, did it?

Debbie Jones: No, it did not.

Q307 Bob Blackman: Did Ofsted identify that?

Debbie Jones: Not in its inspection of the contact referral and assessment centre, it did not.

Q308 Bob Blackman: So moving forward, two years on, the notice is withdrawn, removed. What was Ofsted's role in that process?

Debbie Jones: Subsequently, Ofsted did a safeguarding and looked-after children inspection in 2010; it did another of those two-day short inspections in 2011; and a child protection inspection in 2012.

Bob Blackman: But the exploitation was still going on.

Debbie Jones: It was.

Q309 Bob Blackman: So are we saying then the improvement notice is removed, the exploitation is still going on, children are being raped and suffering, yet apparently Rotherham's doing okay according to Ofsted. That is what I have difficulty understanding.

Debbie Jones: I understand that. We have been very clear that, first of all, had we inspected under the current framework, the likelihood is there would have been a different outcome. But, certainly, as you know we have raised the bar and the "adequate" grade would have read "requires improvement". As you know, Ofsted is very clear that "good" is the aspiration. Only "good" is good enough for our children and young people. As I understand it, something like 75% of local authorities at this present moment do not hit that bar.

Q310 Bob Blackman: My final question is: up until 2013 when procedures have changed and the bar has been raised, Ofsted inspectors have been going into every local authority and doing inspections. What assurance can you give us that this was being examined by inspectors and they were trying to identify areas of child sexual exploitation, abuse, rape of young children?

Debbie Jones: I completely understand your question. The right answer is that only under our current framework with the focus that it has got, are we likely to identify the scale and the extent. We did look at child protection; we did look at risk. It would be absolutely wrong of me to give you any guarantees. As a director, I would not have given that and, as I sit here, I could not give you that.

Q311 Bob Blackman: But is it not even slightly worse that and that actually the inspectors did not look for this? Is that fair? People do not expect people to be evil, but they are. With vulnerable children in care and in other environments, we have a duty to protect them. Therefore, inspectors have got a duty to identify when things are going wrong.

Debbie Jones: Because of those concerns, we have made, over a period of time—as I said earlier, Professor Jay herself told the Committee—a number of significant changes, not just externally to the frameworks but also to the work that we are doing with our workforce.

That is incredibly important precisely to be able to provide a level of reassurance there. But one can never provide total guarantees, hence the comment that I made earlier that it is really important that, as a director, you rely on the other mechanisms that you have in place as well as the reports once every three years that Ofsted give you.

Q312 Chair: I will call Simon Danczuk in a minute, but surely the additional point is that councillors sitting on a council hear from their directors and they occasionally have concerns, but when an external body comes in and says, "Yeah, everything's okay", they are inclined to believe it. Are they not going to treat you as professional, serious people who will come in and give them a reassurance?

Debbie Jones: We believe very strongly—I understand that reassurance, but I also know from my own personal experience the level of challenge and scrutiny that leaders and lead members give their senior officers. Certainly that is what I experienced in the authorities that I worked in, and I did not just work in "good" authorities.

Simon Danczuk: I should like to apologise to Debbie for my earlier remarks, though I also think it would be helpful if Debbie apologised on behalf of Ofsted for failing the children of Rotherham.

Chair: Okay, that is on the record. Mr Danczuk has made his apology. I think we also think that words of apology from Ofsted at some point would be appropriate.

Q313 Mark Pawsey: I would like to follow on from my colleague's remarks, and just ask you about the nature of the problem across England as a whole, because we have clearly heard a lot about Rotherham. There are other authorities that have been identified, but I just want to ask you whether or not perhaps what we have heard in Rotherham may be just the tip of an iceberg of a broader problem that is happening across our country. My question to you is: is there another Rotherham or several other Rotherhams waiting to come to light?

Debbie Jones: One of the reasons that we did the survey, where we looked at eight local authorities across the country with a range of different demographics, was partly to understand the scale of the problem that we were dealing with. It would be wrong of me to sit here and say, "There will not be another Rotherham". I could not possibly say that. It would be irresponsible for me to say that. I hope very much that the systems that have been put in place both by my organisation and indeed those systems and issues that have been picked up within local authorities themselves will ensure that the

spotlight is there. However, it would be wrong of me to say, "It can never happen here".

Q314 Mark Pawsey: You have placed a lot of faith in what you described as a framework. You told us that the Rotherham problem occurred because the framework at that time was inappropriate. We went on to discuss who had set that framework, but Ofsted has now changed the framework. Are you satisfied that your current framework would identify a problem if one exists?

Debbie Jones: I am satisfied, but I have also said very clearly that I think it is important—and I hear the comments that have been made by colleagues here—that councillors and senior officers also have their own mechanisms in place. One of the things that I know Professor Jay talked a lot about is work within communities. Work with young people, work within communities and work on disruption are really important. Those were the issues that we picked up when we did our child sexual exploitation survey. When we looked at the eight local authorities, we found that whilst there was some good work going on, I do not think there was a single local authority, and, indeed, their partners, who had completely got it cracked.

Q315 Mark Pawsey: What is it within your current framework that would allow you to identify whether or not a local authority is detecting and dealing with child sexual exploitation if it comes across it? How will you do that?

Debbie Jones: It is the absolute drill-down. We look directly at a significant number of cases in detail where we discover that there are issues. We do this on a number of issues, as I may have mentioned. There are 19 required pieces of evidence that our inspectors look at. Most importantly we do not just look at strategies, plans, or cases; we look at the work that other agencies are doing, through the local safeguarding children board; we look at the challenge; we look at the hold-to-account that happens in that space; we look at the culture of organisations; we look at all of the information that we have. Now Ofsted works within a regional structure I, as regional director in London have access not just to the information from social care, but I hear what happens in schools. That is really important, because some of the very good work that we saw was happening in the schools space, in the work that is being done to prevent and to raise awareness. I am sure that the Committee has had evidence put forward on that basis.

Q316 Mark Pawsey: Within that framework, to what extent are you or your inspectors talking to children themselves?

Debbie Jones: We talk extensively to children. In the child sexual exploitation survey we talked to over 150 children as well as the professionals, as well as the partners, as well as families within our inspections. Because we are focusing directly on the experience of children and young people, which is where the real difference is, we will talk to young people. We will talk to groups of young people in care, obviously with the necessary permissions that we have to get, and we are also looking at what more they can do to garner the views of young people within local communities.

Q317 Mark Pawsey: Within our inquiry we heard about the culture in Rotherham, the macho culture, where often council officers were unwilling to report to members or members were not paying attention to what they were saying. If that is going on, how would your framework identify that?

Debbie Jones: In the previous frameworks there was probably an over-reliance on what we used to call focus groups, where you would meet with a group of professionals who were used to talking to inspectors and were trained in talking to inspectors. In our current framework, inspectors will sit alongside social workers at their computers; they will go through the records with them; they will extract the experiences of young people. In other words, they will speak directly to those on the front line, as well as to the young people, parents and foster carers. In addition to that, we also will track the experiences of young people who are placed in children's homes, whether they be children's homes within areas or, indeed, out of areas. In other words, the focus is completely different and it is through that kind of intelligence-gathering that we will identify whether or not more needs to be looked at. We are utterly forensic in what we look at.

Q318 Mark Pawsey: The former Director of Public Prosecutions, Keir Starmer, said, "The case for some form of mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse backed up by criminal sanctions is also overwhelming". Do you agree with that?

Debbie Jones: Within Ofsted we have not formed or publicly expressed a view on the issues of mandatory reporting.

Q319 Mark Pawsey: What are the pros and cons, then? Why would it be a good thing and why might it not be a good thing?

Debbie Jones: The issue of mandatory reporting is a complex issue. In one respect it would ensure that voices come forward, but the other thing that we would have to think about is that people would come

forward because they had to. One of the advantages now of the whistle-blowing policies that you already have in place is—

Q320 Mark Pawsey: Would they not come forward in the interest of the children?

Debbie Jones: One would hope that they did. One absolutely would hope that they did, but what we also want to be sure is that professionals are not afraid of either coming forward or working within these professions. There are pros and there are cons, but I have tried to be clear: at this stage, Ofsted has not come to a view. There will be a debate and the organisation will look at it in a great deal of detail to identify what the pros and the cons are.

Q321 Mark Pawsey: If I might ask you a last question, Ofsted have been looking at the issue of child sexual exploitation over 20 years and I know that you have been involved in the profession for a substantial period. Why, in your view, has this issue come to light in the last 10 years? What has started to happen in our society in the last 10 years that perhaps was not happening 20, 30 or 50 years ago, or was it happening that many years ago, and was simply not being identified at all? What is the position there?

Debbie Jones: As a social care professional I have been aware, obviously, that child sexual exploitation has been around for a very long time. Why it has not had the focus and children have not been listened to the extent which they are heard now is the policies that are in place now are very different to those that were in place when I started out as a social worker. If you look at the developments around child sexual abuse, for example, and you look at what was happening in the 1980s when that was first identified, we did not look at it in the same way. I am very pleased that we are now looking at it forensically, but what I would hope very much is that a focus on child sexual exploitation does not detract attention from all the other important things, because we need to be mindful that there may be other areas that we need to look at.

Q322 Mark Pawsey: Are you saying to us that it has been happening in broadly the same way forever, but it is only now that we have become aware of it?

Debbie Jones: It would be wrong of me to say because I do not know the full scale and extent. The experience this Committee has had in looking at Professor Jay's report would indicate a scale that we believe is probably in evidence around the country. They are not necessarily

the scale that was in Rotherham, but we know there are incidents. There have to be. That is why we have the focus we currently have.

Q323 Mark Pawsey: Is the scale that you are identifying now the scale that it has always been?

Debbie Jones: It would be wrong of me to say that. I do not know. What I know is that it did not have the focus. It did not have the focus for me then, but it does now. We have learned a lot and there will be other things that will come to the fore, and hopefully the expertise that we are bringing to bear now, both within the inspectorate and within the sector, will be used to identify and prevent in a way that has not happened up until now.

Q324 Mrs Glindon: Debbie, you have said a lot about how everything has changed, the framework has evolved and the methodologies are different to map the child's journey, etc, so it is more intense. Who would assess Ofsted's performance and challenge it if you failed?

Debbie Jones: There are two ways. If we fail, if we do not perform as robustly as we should do, we are an organisation that has no problem with looking to ourselves and identifying when things go wrong. Indeed, when things go wrong I hope that our systems are robust enough and our quality assurance systems are transparent enough to say, when we get it wrong, we get it wrong. In addition, obviously, we are accountable. The Chief Inspector is accountable to Parliament, as you know, and we believe those accountability systems have to be very strong and robust. That is why, certainly, I can assure you, that when Professor Jay's report was published, the first thing we did was to look at our previous inspections and look at our evidence bases, as you would expect any organisation to do.

Q325 Mrs Glindon: Do you think that the public can have confidence in your assessment if there was a problem again in the future, that you would be tackling it and would look at it and would be open to transparent criticism?

Debbie Jones: I hope that the public is reassured that we have learned and continue to learn, and that the methodologies that we use change and evolve through time, depending on the way that we learn from this experience, and indeed others, and that they should have confidence that as an organisation when we do not get it right we say we do not get it right, and we learn from that, and put it right.

Q326 Chair: When you get things wrong, who decides that someone will pay the price in Ofsted for getting it wrong?

Debbie Jones: As I have said, when we get it wrong, and as you would expect with any process, we look very rigorously and robustly, and independently where necessary, where we have got it wrong. We are not an organisation that is afraid to deal with poor practice. We have done. We absolutely have done. There have been many illustrations where people have been—

Q327 Chair: Nobody is going to get sacked tomorrow for it, are they?

Debbie Jones: Ofsted has sacked people where it has been proven that inspectors have got it wrong and due process has been followed, but Ofsted does not believe in hanging people out to dry for the sake of it.

Q328 Chair: One might say that sometimes, apart from some of the children in Rotherham and elsewhere. The reality is that you are accountable to Parliament.

Debbie Jones: We are.

Chair: But it is fairly nebulous, at the end of the day. You are not accountable to a Minister, are you?

Debbie Jones: Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is directly accountable to Parliament. We value our independence, as you know, very robustly. You will have heard the Chief Inspector say that repeatedly.

Q329 Chair: Let me just come back to Rotherham. Professor Jay produced a report, the Rotherham authority set up an improvement board and worked with the Local Government Association to bring in a peer review and other people involved to look at their practices and procedures, and how they could improve in response to Professor Jay. Ofsted, after that had happened, came in and produced their report and said to the Secretary of State, "We want you to intervene". Did that not look a bit like Ofsted trying to save face, rather than anything else?

Debbie Jones: No, I would not agree with you, Chair. When Ofsted went in to Rotherham, Rotherham was due its inspection anyway. It had already been programmed in. It was brought forward at the request of the Secretary of State. When we went in we inspected according to our current framework. We were sufficiently concerned by

what we found to feel that it had been necessary in the middle of the inspection, as you know, to write to the Secretary of State.

Q330 Chair: Have you not had cause to do that in any other authority?

Debbie Jones: Not so far. We have inspected, as it stands at the moment, 44 local authorities.

Q331 Chair: Right, so it is just a coincidence that this happened to happen in an authority that had had a report externally by Professor Jay?

Debbie Jones: I can assure you, Chair, that if we went in to an authority and found what we found in Rotherham, we would have absolutely no compunction about expressing our concerns, as we did, to the Secretary of State.

Q332 Chair: You have obviously indicated to us that perhaps authorities and their residents and the councillors were ill-advised in the past to have placed as much reliance on Ofsted reports, given the inadequacy of the framework you were operating to. Is there any chance in three or four years' time the successor Committee in the next parliament will have another representative of Ofsted explaining why the inspections that were being done now and in the next year or so were also flawed in some way and did not reveal the truth of the situation about child sexual exploitation?

Debbie Jones: I hope I have explained as clearly as I can that our frameworks are evolutionary, and that the framework that we have now, which we believe is very robust, will identify where there are problems. In saying that our frameworks are evolutionary, I am also saying that they will change. They will change in response to what we are learning in the same way as what the sector is learning.

Q333 Chair: So if we have another mistake like Rotherham then you will learn from it. That is what you are saying.

Debbie Jones: I sincerely hope that we do not have another mistake like Rotherham. What I am saying is that we are an organisation that learns, is not afraid to learn and is not afraid to say when there have been problems.

Q334 Chair: The Local Government Association today made comments that they thought there was a problem that there were different organisations and different inspection regimes dealing with different aspects of children's services and child sexual exploitation, which was being dealt with by a number of agencies, whether it be children's department or the police or health bodies. They felt there was a case for joining those inspections up together. You have already talked about Ofsted looking and talking to other organisations as part of your inspection. Do you think it should go further and you should be, despite past criticisms of your performance, given a wider remit, now, to try and join up inspections to cover all the agencies working with children in this way?

Debbie Jones: The Committee will be aware that we are currently concluding a pilot of what we have called our integrated inspection model. We have looked at two authorities and we will be reporting on that in February. It would be wrong of me to pre-empt what we will be saying there. We are very clear that we need to look at all opportunities where we can for the inspectorates to work closely together, whether it is in the form of a big inspection like the single inspection framework or whether it is in the form of more targeted, proportionate inspections. Indeed, it is in that arena that we are looking to have discussions with both our other inspectorates and, indeed, the sector.

Q335 Chair: Is it fair to say, then, that you are looking at options about whether one organisation should do a wider inspection or whether a number of organisations should join their inspections up together to get an overview?

Debbie Jones: No. I obviously have not been clear enough. We are looking at the framework that we have now. We are challenging ourselves in the same way as the Local Government Association and the sector generally is looking at what we need to be doing in the future to ensure that we can provide that forensic attention that deals with what different inspectorates see. We are going to be publishing our annual report, which will have some hopefully very insightful things to say about the state of play at the moment, both in relation to what we have seen as an inspectorate, but also what we need to be looking at in the future.

Q336 Chair: I am not sure I am any clearer at the end of that. I am sorry, maybe it is me just not understanding it. If one of the issues that came out of Rotherham very clearly was that organisations did not always work very well together—one organisation might have known

about the child being exploited, it passed it on, and then it had not been dealt with—and there is a need to join up the work of organisations together, which is very clear from what Professor Jay said, then is there not a need to join the inspection regimes together so that the inspection is looking overall? You were indicating that Ofsted was starting to do that. I was not clear whether that was an ad hoc response or whether you are changing your inspection, and if so do you have the powers to inspect other organisations?

Debbie Jones: As it stands at the moment, we have only the powers that were offered us under the current inspection regime. It is probably helpful for me to say that within that we obviously do share information with other inspectorates, but looking at better ways in which we can ensure that we join up our responses is something obviously as an organisation we and the other inspectorates are looking at. That is why currently we are piloting our integrated inspection model, but my view is that we will need to look at a range of ways in which we can do that to ensure that we provide a targeted proportionate response, and ensure that we do look at issues like child sexual exploitation in a joined-up way.

Q337 Chair: When will you have come to a view as an organisation about how you take that forward?

Debbie Jones: The organisation is looking at that currently with other organisations. Obviously, as you know, with our current framework, we are currently about one-third of the way through our single inspection framework.

Q338 Chair: When will you come to a view?

Debbie Jones: Well, we are looking at it currently.

Chair: No, but when will you come to a view about it?

Debbie Jones: Any changes to an inspection framework take very many months and, therefore, we will be consulting. We are looking at presenting ideas for the future of inspection within the next few months.

Q339 Chair: That does not sound like a terribly rapid response to a pretty serious situation, does it?

Debbie Jones: That assumes—and I do not assume—that the way in which we inspect at the moment is not getting at the issues that you and I are concerned about. We are.

Q340 Bob Blackman: Just moving forward to the current position in Rotherham, Professor Jay's report makes clear that she does not believe that there is adequate counselling or assistance to the victims of child sexual abuse, either historical or current. In Ofsted's view, is Rotherham providing enough counselling for mental health problems, psychological damage and, quite frankly, the exploitation that has taken place of children historically up until the current day, to assist those victims?

Debbie Jones: The simple answer to that is Ofsted would not know, but Ofsted believes very strongly that it is vital that those children, those young people and those former young people are getting the assistance and support they need, as indeed Professor Jay outlined in her report.

Q341 Bob Blackman: Professor Jay has outlined that in her report. Does Ofsted have a view and, if so, have you communicated that view to Rotherham?

Debbie Jones: Ofsted has already reported on Rotherham. Ofsted will be having discussions, along with all the other organisations who are supporting Rotherham, to see whether or not there is anything additional that Ofsted, within its remit, can do.

Q342 Bob Blackman: No, I am not saying what Ofsted need to do. What I am saying is there are the victims out there who have suffered this terrible sexual exploitation. Professor Jay is saying that they are not getting adequate support. Now, does Ofsted take a view that they are getting adequate support and have you said anything about it?

Debbie Jones: We would not know until we go back. We would not know, but we are clear in our inspections: we have already said they are not getting support. We have already said in both the Child Sexual Exploitation Survey and how we reported on that, that we do not think enough is being done either in terms of providing support to victims or, indeed, in preventing this from happening. We look at it in the inspections that we do of all local authorities as part of the things that we look at.

Q343 Bob Blackman: I just want to be absolutely clear. Have you advised Rotherham Council that you, as Ofsted, do not believe that the support that they are giving is adequate?

Debbie Jones: What we have said about Rotherham will be contained in the report that we published.

Q344 Bob Blackman: I am sorry, does that mean, yes, you have told them, or no you have not? Have you taken a view? I am not clear.

Debbie Jones: Without looking at the detail and going back to the detail of what we published in our inspection report, our inspection report would have explained what we had seen at the time of the inspection. What it will not have done is gone into any detail about what should be done for the future. It is probably helpful for the Committee to understand that one of the arenas that we work in, because we believe very strongly in improvement through inspection, is that we have identified a number of recommendations in our report and we have identified the opportunities for Rotherham, along with other inadequate authorities, to have the benefit of understanding what lies beneath. In that respect, the answer to your question is probably yes, but without having that report in front of me now it would be wrong to go into the detail. We very clearly believe in improvement through inspection, so anything we can do to throw light on that area we would do.

Q345 Chair: Maybe you want to follow up with a bit more information to the Committee on that. One thing that Professor Jay, I think, did say was that one of the problems with Ofsted's report was wherever it did indicate that there were failings, it never seemed to then identify what needed to be done and follow up to ensure they were done. Is that not part of your job?

Debbie Jones: I have already outlined what we do now for the future. Previously it would not have been seen as Ofsted's job.

Chair: Is it now?

Debbie Jones: It very much is seen as part of our remit.

Chair: You just said to Mr Blackman—

Debbie Jones: No, I have explained to Mr Blackman that as part of the work that we are looking at doing with local authorities in order to support them, we have piloted some improvement work with two local authorities, as we stand. We are looking at learning the lessons from those pilots around improvement from inspections where authorities have come out as inadequate to see what can be done. In the past, Chair, that would not have been seen as part of our remit.

Q346 Chair: You have just indicated now that it was not your job to look at whether sufficient resources were being made available to deal

with counselling, etc., on an ongoing basis. You have identified that as a problem. Should you not be ensuring it is put right?

Debbie Jones: We would pick that up in any follow-up inspection that we did—

Q347 Chair: When is that going to be happening?

Debbie Jones: And in the improvement that we do.

Chair: When will that happen?

Debbie Jones: Rotherham, as an inadequate authority will be inspected within the next two years.

Q348 Chair: Sorry, so in two years' time you will look whether your concerns have been addressed?

Debbie Jones: I have also outlined that Ofsted has been piloting an improvement offer to two local authorities and are actively considering whether we should be rolling that out in response to the positive feedback that we get and have got from our pilots.

Q349 Chair: How will that help Rotherham in the next two years?

Debbie Jones: If Rotherham chooses to take up that improvement offer then we will very clearly be looking at the recommendations that we made, the action plan—

Q350 Chair: Have you offered it to them?

Debbie Jones: We are in discussion with them as we speak.

Chair: Have you offered it to them?

Debbie Jones: We are in discussion with them now.

Q351 Chair: Is it available if they want it?

Debbie Jones: Yes. It is available there.

Chair: Okay, thank you very much for your evidence this afternoon.