

Written evidence from Azeem Rafiq to the Sport Governance inquiry

12.12.22.

Introduction

1. My name is Azeem Rafiq. I am a 31-year-old former professional cricketer, who played for Yorkshire County Cricket Club in 2008-14 and 2016-18.
2. Last year, I spoke at a Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Select Committee hearing, describing my many experiences of racism and bullying while employed as a cricketer and during my time around the game. Subsequently, my family and I have become targets for abuse, with an onslaught of fictions about my past behaviour co-ordinated by those who are not prepared to accept or confront institutional racism in the sport.
3. I made plenty of mistakes as a young man. I have apologised and accepted when I have been in the wrong. The fabrication of stories about me cannot change the fact that my experiences have been proven, substantiated and upheld time and again.
4. This submission provides a summary of this unarguable fact and includes examples of corroborating evidence, some of which has not been made public before. For ease of reading, this evidence has been laid out in chronological order.
5. I also provide a few examples of the abuse I have received. Unfortunately, the repeated abuse and threats of violence have forced me to relocate my family from our home in Barnsley to Pakistan.

Summary of corroborating evidence and conclusions

6. A. Apology for racist behaviour from Matthew Hoggard, September 2020
- B. Whatsapp message from Andrew Ivison, confirming the red wine incident which took place in the car he was driving at the time, November 2020
- C. Former Yorkshire players Tino Best and Rana Naved-ul-Hasan, plus ex-employees Taj Butt and Tony Bowry, give evidence about the racist culture at the club., December 2020
- D. Apology for “inappropriate behaviour” from Yorkshire County Cricket Club, first regime, August 2021
- E. Yorkshire chairman, Roger Hutton, confirms there is “no question” I suffered racial harassment, September 2021
- F. Squire Paton Boggs report concludes “bullying and racist behaviour” towards me, October 2021
- G. The panel that accompanied the Squire Paton Boggs report concludes there was “discrimination”, October 2021
- H. Apology from Yorkshire County Cricket Club, second regime, November 2021
- I. Adil Rashid and Rana Naved-ul-Hasan confirm Michael Vaughan’s comments, November 2021
- J. Witnesses to nights out confirm racist behaviour, November 2021
- K. Former England coach David Lloyd confirms racially charged comments, November 2021

L. Equality and Human Rights Commission says Yorkshire’s racism was probably “unlawful”, December 2021

M. DCMS committee concludes there is “a deep-seated issue of racism in cricket” following my evidence, January 2022

N. Former Yorkshire team-mate Gary Ballance admits to using racist language, August 2022

7. In addition, the widespread revelations from other people involved in cricket, particularly at Essex, and the report into racism in Scotland have shown this was a widespread, institutional problem – as I have always claimed
8. There are two appendices. The first provides reproductions of the original messages mentioned in sections B and J. The second comprises some of the threats I have received – or have been forwarded to me – since I spoke at the committee hearing last year.

A. Apology from Matthew Hoggard

9. I first spoke publicly about my experiences of racism in an interview with *wisden.com* and on the ‘Cricket Badger’ podcast in August 2020.
10. On 2 September, I provided a fuller account of my experiences with ESPN Cric Info. This was widely followed up by the national media.
11. Matthew Hoggard was one of the players I was referring to in these articles. For example, he had termed me ‘Raffa the Kaffir’ when I was a player, as well as referred to me as an “elephant washer” and “P*ki”.
12. Hoggard recognised the incidents when I mentioned them in an interview with Sky and called me out of the blue to apologise for his role in the racism and bullying.

B. Corroborating evidence – red wine incident

13. On 13 November 2020, my lawyers sent a press release to the media that referred to an incident when I played for my local cricket club at the age of 15. I was pinned down by an older player, Alex Morris [‘Almo’], in the back of a car, where he forced red wine down my throat. As a practising Muslim I did not drink, though I did later during part of my time as a professional to try to fit in with the culture.
14. Later on 13 November 2020 I received a series of messages from the car’s driver, Andrew Ivill. He contacted me unprompted and confirmed the incident had taken place. He volunteers Alex’s name and that he was driving, proving the incident took place.
15. The exchange has not previously been in the public domain and is reproduced below. I have provided a copy of this original message in Appendix One. The ‘statement’ I mention was my witness statement for an employment tribunal with Yorkshire County Cricket Club, which was settled in November last year.

Andrew Ivill [AI]: *Red Wine.
After we won league?
Almo???*

Azeem Rafiq [AR]: *Yh*

AI: Thought so

AR: U was there – ur name is in my statement

AI: I was there
I wasn't involved

AR: Yh
I know

AI: In fact
I was driving the car

AR: I know
Dnt worry I remember

AI: What's statement say?

AR: Lol

AI: Come on bro... spill
You alright???
I've not seen any statements just got a message

AR: All gd mate – getting abused bt dnt change facts

AI: By who?
Tell em to get fucked.
I know what happened in the early days

AR: Lol
I know mate do u think I would say anything that I can't back up

AI: Nope

C. Corroboration from former players and coaches

16. In a press release issued by my team in December 2020, former Yorkshire players Tino Best and Rana Naved-ul-Hasan, plus ex- employees Taj Butt and Tony Bowry, confirmed they had witnessed racism at the club. The release revealed some of the written evidence they provided to my employment tribunal.

17. Part of the press release is reproduced below.

Tino Best, who played 25 test matches and 26 one-day internationals for the West Indies, provided a statement to say: "My time at Yorkshire.... was a mixed bag.... some of the things I saw towards the players of Pakistani descent wasn't good. Every day I could hear them complaining about how they were being treated.... these three guys¹ never looked settled or happy and that was hurtful to see."

Rana Naveed-ul-Hassan, pointed to "systematic taunting" at Yorkshire in a September 2020 statement, which followed Mr Rafiq's disclosures. He said: "I agree with each and every statement of Azeem.... many Asian players were affected by their (YCCC) bad attitude including me and Azeem."

¹ Adil Rashid, Ajmal Shahzad and me

Taj Butt, who was employed by Yorkshire between 2014 to 2017 within the Yorkshire Cricket Foundation, offered his resignation within six weeks of joining because of the use of racist language at Yorkshire. He stated: "Continuous references to taxi drivers and restaurant workers when referring to Asian Community.... they called every person of colour 'Steve'. Even Indian Test Player Cheteshwar Pujara, who joined as an overseas professional, was called Steve because they could not pronounce his name."

Tony Bowry, who was a coach at YCCC until 1996 and cultural diversity officer at the Yorkshire Cricket Board in 1996-2011. He was then the first cricket development manager to be appointed to develop the game for black minority communities, said: "Many youngsters struggled to make progress, and the few that did found the environment of the dressing rooms very difficult and unwelcoming, as a direct result of racism they faced, it affected performance... they were labelled trouble makers."

D. Apology from Yorkshire County Cricket Club (first regime)

18. In August 2021, Yorkshire refused to publish the independent inquiry and accompanying panel findings into my allegations. The manner in which this was handled by the club was appalling, as has been widely noted.
19. The club did, however, acknowledge there had been wrongdoing and offered an apology, which is reproduced below. It is important to note that this was released during the chairmanship of Roger Hutton and when Mark Arthur and Martyn Moxon were chief executive and director of cricket respectively. Many of the problems were a direct result of the actions of Moxon and Arthur.

"It is right, however, to acknowledge from the outset that several of the allegations made by Azeem were upheld and that sadly, historically, Azeem was the victim of inappropriate behaviour.

"This is clearly unacceptable. We would like to express our profound apologies for this."

E. First Yorkshire chairman confirms racial harassment

20. In September 2021, Yorkshire provided a little more detail about the report. Again, this was handled in a poor manner.
21. Hutton, however, was clear there had been racism. His statement is reproduced below.

"There is no question that Azeem Rafiq, during his first spell as a player at YCCC, was the victim of racial harassment. He was also subsequently the victim of bullying. On behalf of all at YCCC, I wish to extend my sincere, profound and unreserved apologies to Azeem and his family."

F. Squire Paton Boggs report conclusion

22. Eventually, I obtained a copy of the Yorkshire-commissioned report into my allegations, which was produced by Squire Paton Boggs.
23. I have outlined the failings of this report and the accompanying panel Yorkshire introduced to draw its own conclusions elsewhere. I won't repeat them here, but suffice to say that the process was designed by the old Yorkshire regime to help Yorkshire and play down my allegations.
24. Although this was handled in an unsatisfactory manner, Squire Paton Boggs still concluded that I had been bullied and been subjected to racism. This is reproduced below.

“AR made a number of very serious allegations in the Complaint. We have upheld some of those concerns, including allegations of bullying and racist behaviour towards AR. We have also found reason to criticise the Club’s response to complaints made by AR during his time at the Club.”

G. Yorkshire County Cricket Club Panel

25. The panel that investigated my allegations alongside Squire Paton Boggs also reached the conclusion that I had been the victim of discrimination. The bizarre process, with the panel seemingly having access to different evidence than Squire Paton Boggs, meant that it reached the same conclusion by an alternative route - placing more or less weight on many incidents.
26. Either way, the second part of this unsatisfactory process also found that I had been subjected to discrimination. The key conclusion is reproduced below.

“The Panel has agreed with and upheld some of AR’s allegations of discrimination, either against him personally or generally.”

H. Apology from a second Yorkshire County Cricket Club regime

27. In November 2021, Lord Patel became Yorkshire chairman. He immediately apologised on behalf of the club and confirmed I had been the victim of racism. Part of his statement is reproduced below.

“Azeem is a whistleblower and should be praised as such, he should never have been put through this. We’re sorry for what you and your family have experienced and the way in which we’ve handled this. I thank Azeem for his bravery in speaking out. Let me be clear from the outset, racism or discrimination in any form is not banter.”

I. Witnesses to Michael Vaughan comments

28. In 2009, Michael Vaughan made comments to four Asian players – Rana Naved-ul-Hasan, Adil Rashid, Ajmal Shahzad and me – to single us out at the start of a match. He said: “There’s too many of you lot. We need to have a word about that.”
29. Vaughan made the allegation public ahead of the select committee hearing. He claimed then – and has continued to claim – that he did not make these comments.
30. I must state my hope that the important issue of racism in cricket does not end up reduced to one comment from a former England captain. I do understand the reasons for the media attention on this incident, but the problem is far greater than a single comment. I would be happy to accept that this was a misplaced joke. The real issue is that such ‘banter’ occurred throughout the game – most of the issues are institutional not personal, which is why I have completely accepted apologies I have received.
31. Nevertheless, first Rana confirmed the incident with ESPN Cric Info.
32. Then Adil confirmed the incident. Part of Adil’s comment is reproduced below.

“Racism is a cancer in all walks of life and unfortunately in professional sports too, and is something which of course has to be stamped out.”

"I wanted to concentrate as much as possible on my cricket and to avoid distractions to the detriment of the [England] team but I can confirm Azeem Rafiq's recollection of Michael Vaughan's comments to a group of us Asian players."

J. Two witnesses corroborate racist behaviour on nights out

33. When I spoke at the select committee hearing, two people who were regularly on nights out during my Yorkshire playing days privately messaged me unprompted, confirming the racist and bullying nature of the club. One was a player, the other a friend of a batsman who played for the club.

34. These messages have not previously been in the public domain and are reproduced below. I have chosen to respect their privacy by not naming them and redacting their names in the copies of their original messages in Appendix One.

"Rafa, I'm sitting watching the coverage of your case on the news and it's just made me re-think about all those nights out when all this was happening. I remember a lot of the terms being used and I'm sorry if I ever used them or if I ever made you feel isolated. I always enjoyed your company and like you said, and you're spot on, I would have just turned a blind eye to it all and I'm sorry."

"Hi Azeem,

"Well done this morning and well done for what you have achieved over the last 18 months. You and your family should be immensely proud.

"I asked XXXXX to ask you if I could have your email address to send this, but I am hoping it finds you on here too.

"I watched the hearing this morning and you mentioned "a friend" that apologised to you a few months ago. I hope this was in reference to our conversation in XXXXXXXX in the summer, if it wasn't, I wanted to formally say, I am sorry.

"I am sorry that I was a bystander. I am sorry that I didn't understand at that time what was happening to you. I am sorry that there is a lack of understanding and education in the sport we both love and particularly YCCC, I hope that this is now a turning point.

"If you ever need anything. Please don't hesitate to reach out.

"Your friend (Hopefully), XXXX XXXX"

K. David Lloyd confirms comments about Asian players and me

35. At the select committee hearing, I revealed that former England coach and cricket commentator David Lloyd had made racially charged comments about Asian players and spread rumours about me.

36. 'Bumble', as he is known in the game, apologised to me by phone afterwards. He also posted a message on Twitter, reproduced below.

"In October 2020, I had a private message with a third party involved in cricket, about a number of topics. In these messages, I referred to allegations about Azeem Rafiq which I had heard from within the game. I also made some comments about the Asian cricket community. I deeply regret my actions, and I apologise most sincerely to Azeem and to the Asian cricket community for doing this, and for any offence caused. I am strongly committed to making cricket a more inclusive sport. It is very obvious now

that more work needs to be done and I will do everything I can to remove discrimination from the sport I love, and the sport that has been my life for over 50 years."

L. UK equality watchdog says Yorkshire racism was "likely" to be unlawful

37. The Equality and Human Rights Commission reviewed the information around my complaint concluded that Yorkshire probably broke the law

38. A statement by Michael Boo, the watchdog's chief executive, is reproduced below.

"The accounts of racism and discrimination at Yorkshire County Cricket Club were upsetting and deeply concerning. Sports are meant to bring people of all backgrounds together. Racism has no place in any sport, business or society.

"We have now reviewed the documentation and we consider it likely that an unlawful act has taken place."

M. DCMS select committee concludes "deep-seated" issue of racism in cricket

39. Following my evidence session and the others conducted by the DCMS committee, MPs concluded that racism in cricket was clearly a problem.

40. Part of the DCMS statement is reproduced below.

"It is evident to us that there is a deep-seated issue of racism in cricket. More pertinent, it is evident to Yorkshire County Cricket Club and the England and Wales Cricket Board [ECB] that there is an issue of racism in cricket."

N. Gary Ballance apology

41. In November 2021, my former Yorkshire colleague Gary Ballance admitted using a racial slur against me and admitted to "deeply regret some of the language" he used when younger. The committee will be aware that the main slur was the use of the word "P*ki".

42. Earlier this year, Gary requested to meet me.

43. In August, this meeting took place and Gary said "sorry" and then went public with his apology. As with Matthew Hoggard and David Lloyd, I deeply appreciate this apology and they must all be treated with huge respect for their bravery in admitting what happened.

44. Gary's public apology included the admission that he used racist language. Part of this statement is reproduced below.

"I apologise unreservedly to Azeem for the words I used when we played together. I did use unacceptable - at times, racist - language. If I had realised how much this hurt Azeem, I would have stopped immediately. That's why I wanted to meet him this week and be clear in person that I intended no malice. That's not an excuse, I realise that the language I used was wrong.

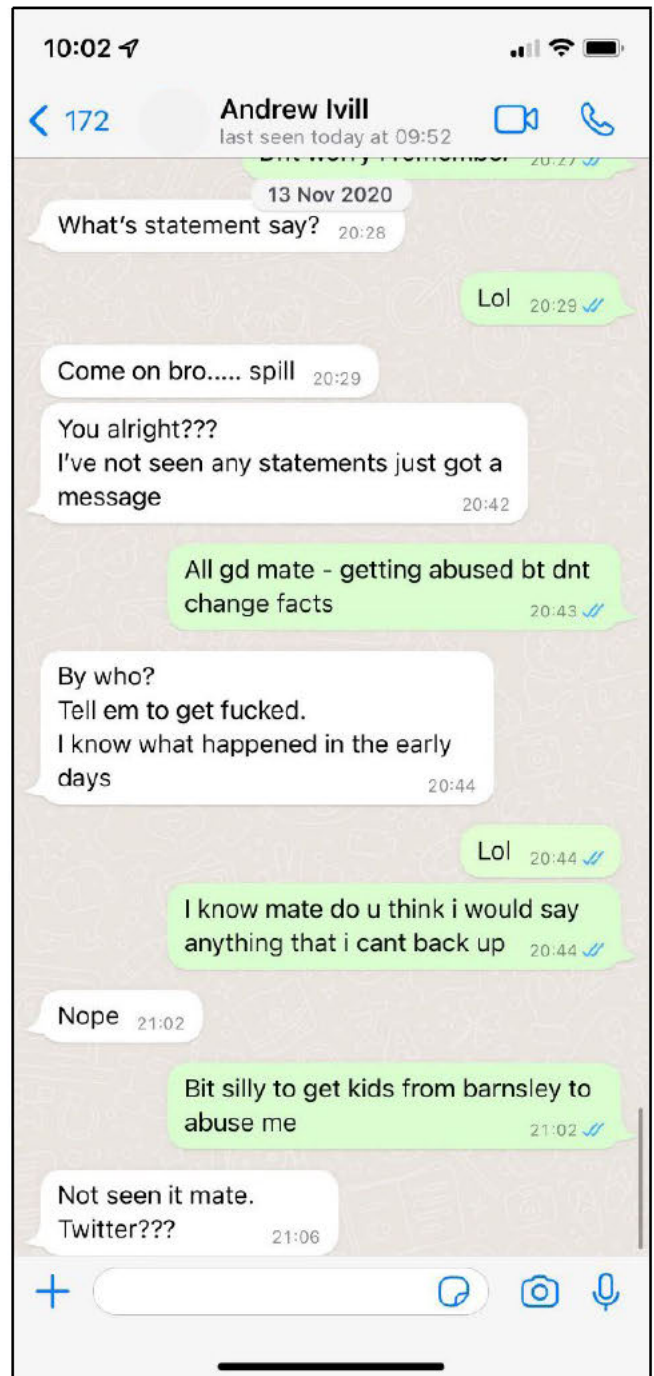
"I have accepted, from the outset, the words I used were wrong and I hope this statement brings Azeem some comfort. There is no place in our sport for this behaviour and I am determined to play my part in ridding the game from racism and make it more inclusive. To do this we all need to be honest and learn from our past mistakes."

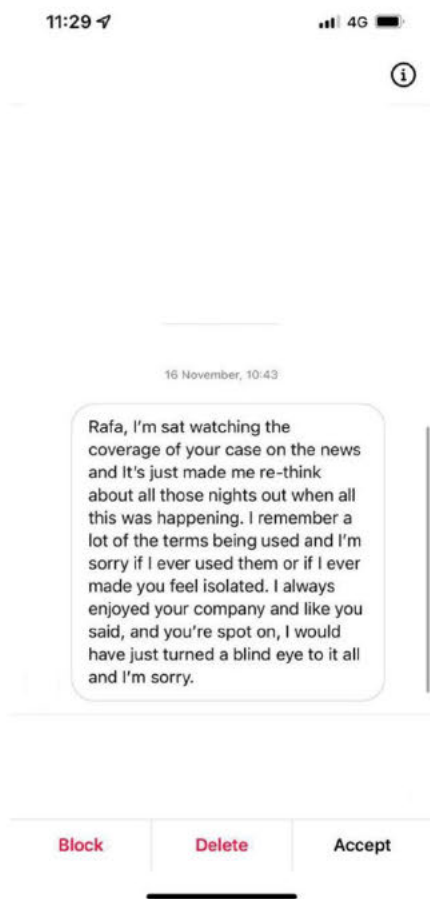
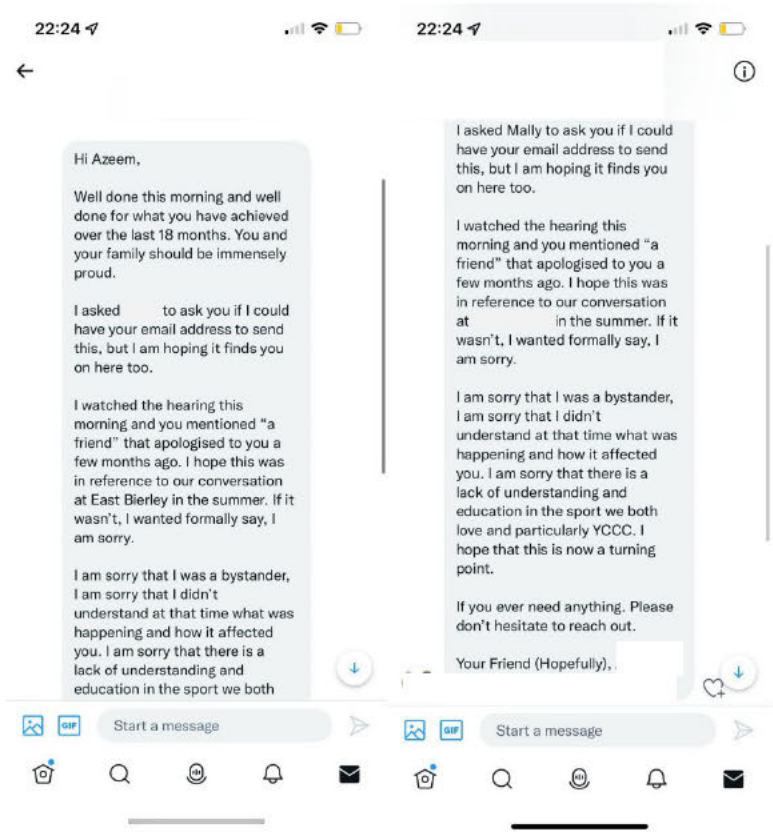
Racism in the wider game

45. I won't go into detail about racism beyond my experiences, but I was clear that this was a widespread problem in the game.
46. Examples that have emerged since my select committee appearance include the Changing the Boundaries report – which concluded governance and leadership practices of Cricket Scotland were institutionally racist – and revelations about Essex County Cricket Club.
47. In addition, the ECB's production of a 12-point action plan (November 2021) to tackle racism in cricket illustrates that even the game's regulator and promoter understands this is a serious problem.

Appendix One: Copies of the originals of messages mentioned above

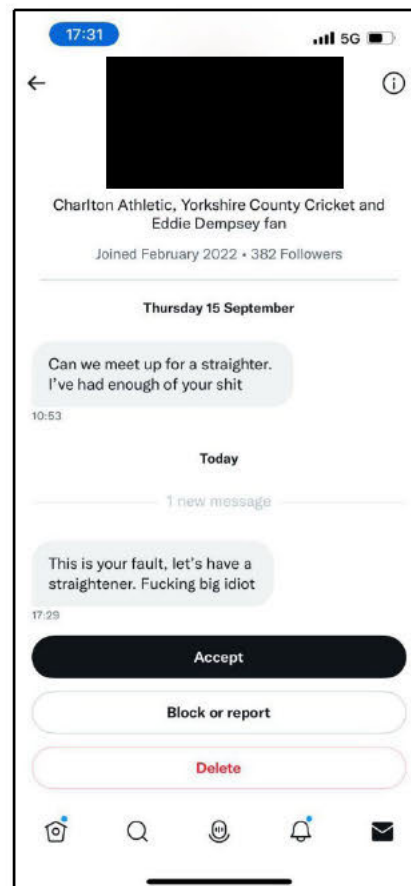
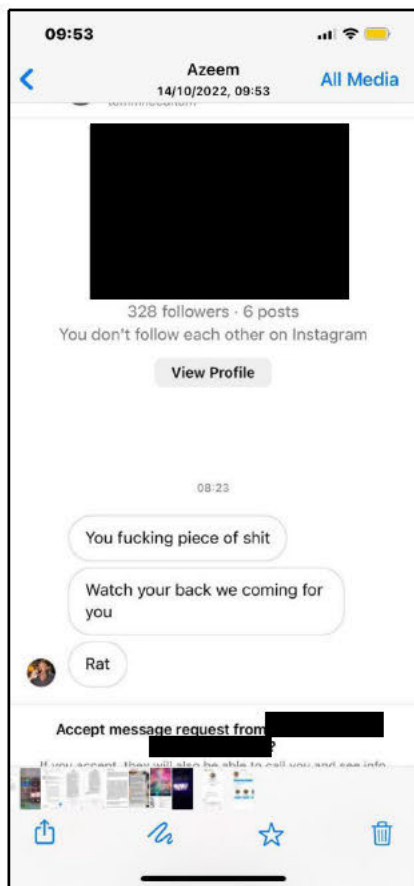
48. The copies of the original messages below relate to sections B and J.

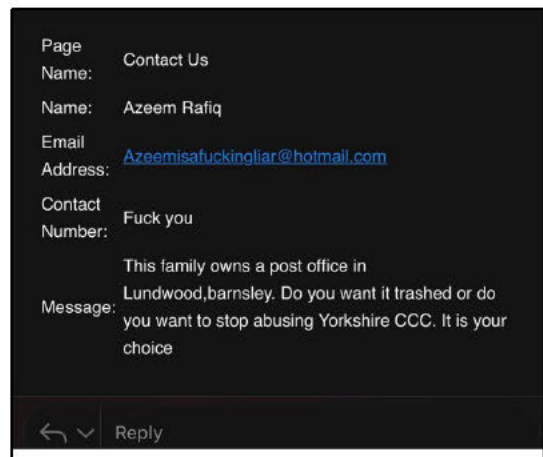
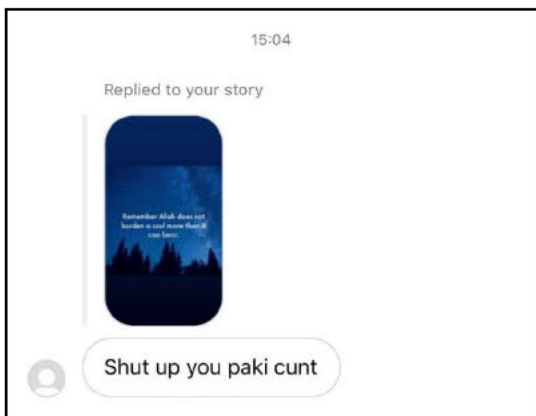
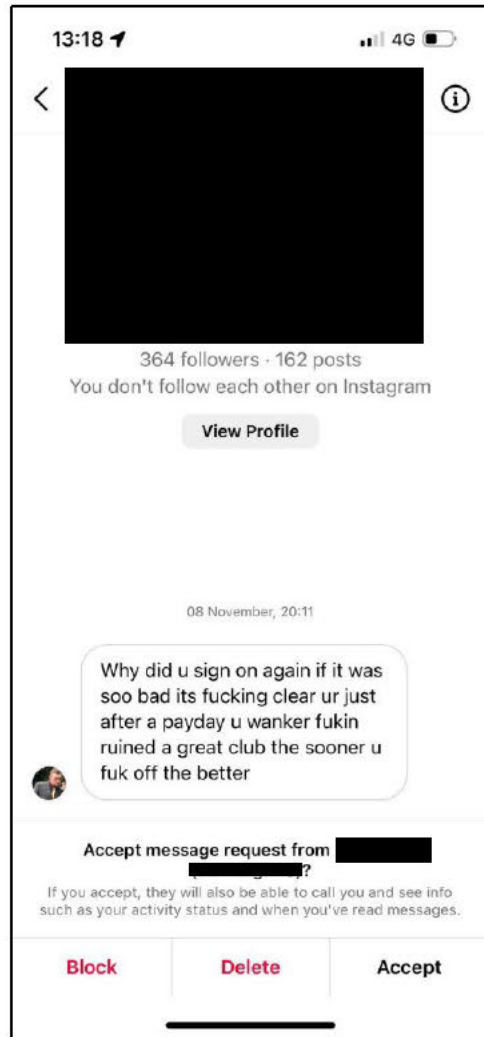
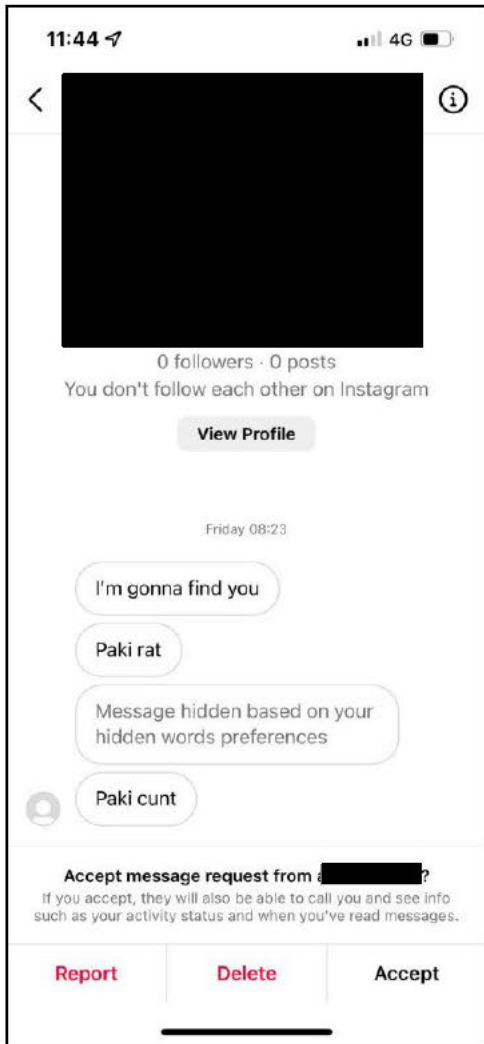




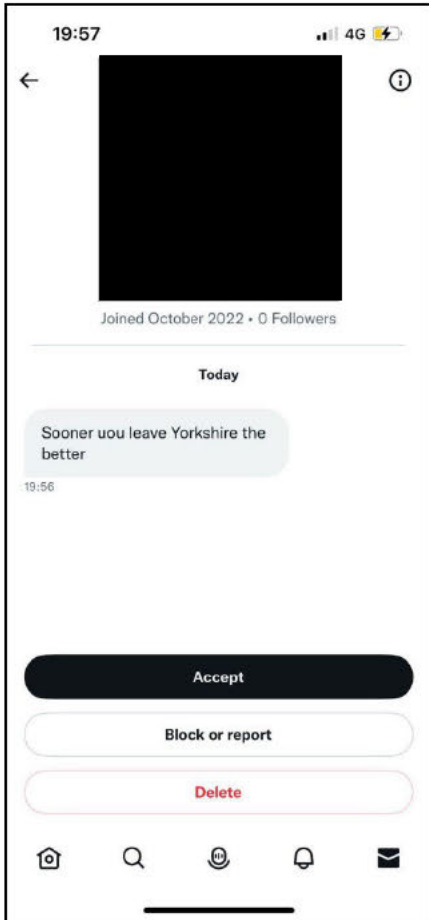
Appendix two: Threatening messages

49. Below I have provided screenshots of just a handful of threatening messages I have received in the past two years.
50. There have been numerous examples of non-written abuse as well.
51. Perhaps the worst was a man who defecated in my parents' garden in broad daylight. He was caught on CCTV. The perpetrator was on his mobile phone and scouted the house for several minutes, producing and using toilet paper after defecation. This was clearly a planned act. I can share this footage, which clearly shows the face of the individual, with the committee.
52. He is not the only person to have scouted my parents' house in this manner and is one of the reasons the ECB has assigned me 24-hour security when deemed necessary in recent months.





Name: [REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED]
Address: [REDACTED]
Contact Number: [REDACTED]
Message: I am reading you are representing that lying little scum Rafiq. There is no way he can afford your services so tell me who is paying you. You have NO chance of winning as Rafiq went voluntary back to Yorkshire for a second chance but lies that he was so suicidal during his first spell so WHY DID HE GO BACK A SECOND TIME?????
I hope Rafiq gets taken for every penny



Enquiry

Page Name: Contact Us

Name: Azeem Rafiq

Email Address: azeem@lyingbastard.com

Contact Number: 0000000000

Message: Can you tell Rafiq to go and FUCK himself. He will not get a penny from Yorkshire. I intend to file a police report for extortion and blackmail

ENDS