

Rotherham police dismissed

Andrew Norfolk, Billy Kenber

Sex criminals who abused vulnerable children escaped justice because police in Rotherham dismissed victims as "silly girls" and "lovesick teenagers", a secret recording reveals.

Officers from the scandal-hit town's child exploitation team admitted that until recently their colleagues ignored offences in cases where young victims were groomed to comply with the sexual demands of adults.

One of the specialist officers also said that police who failed to act after witnessing an "adult male having sex on the floor" with a 14-year-old were unlikely to confirm her claims because they would "know they're going to get in the sh**".

They were speaking last year at a private meeting with an abuse survivor. A recording of the conversation has been obtained by *The Times*. An independent inquiry, criticising police and council officials for failing to protect 1,400 children from "appalling levels of crimes and abuse" over 16 years from 1997 led to Labour party suspensions and the resignation of four senior figures linked to Rotherham council.

The conduct of individual police officers has not faced similar scrutiny but the officers' recorded admissions, plus evidence from more than 200 confidential files, confirm that South Yorkshire police left hundreds of young teenagers at the mercy of sex-grooming gangs.

The Times can now name seven officers who played a role in the force's failure to protect one young girl from horrific sexual exploitation. The force has recently referred 14 serving or retired officers to the independent police complaints commission, which has also been asked to examine 11 exploitation-linked "incidents" involving police in Rotherham. The officers have not been



Police and officials failed to protect 1,400 Rotherham children from sex groomers

identified. The IPCC said that it was still assessing the referrals.

In two of the cases sent to the IPCC, missing Rotherham girls were found by police late at night at a house in the company of one or more adults of Pakistani origin. On each occasion the child was arrested but no action was taken against the men suspected of grooming them for abuse.

One girl said that her treatment by police made her feel "more like a criminal than a victim". Their handling of her case was one example of multiple blunders, including:

- Police officers told a mother that to investigate more than 150 "Asian men" whose contact details were on her 13-year-old daughter's mobile phone would breach the child's human rights.
- Some abused children were condemned by officers as "little tarts"; others accused young teenagers of lying or exaggerating when they made

disclosures about violent sex crimes.

● A senior detective who now investigates complaints against the police opposed the prosecution of three alleged sex offenders in 2003, in part because their victim, who was 14, seemed insufficiently traumatised.

At their meeting with a former abuse victim last March, officers from Rotherham's child sexual exploitation team described a recent transformation in the force's approach to cases where a

groomed child was in regular contact with an adult offender: "Opinions have changed. Now we identify that as child abuse. Before, they'd see it as a lovesick teenager that keeps going back to this fella. We now identify that as a grooming process. In the past, people's opinions were, 'That silly girl keeps going back'. Now we understand. It's a child."

Alexis Jay's inquiry report, published in August, revealed that identified offenders in Rotherham were "almost all" of Pakistani heritage. It said that there was "a widespread perception that some senior people in the council and the police wanted to downplay the ethnic dimension to the crime".

David Crompton, the chief constable of South Yorkshire, has pledged that an external police force will examine "clear failures ... over many years" by police in the town. The National Crime Agency has agreed to lead the inquiry.

Mr Crompton also gave an "absolute commitment" to "deal with disciplinary issues" against officers who "failed to properly investigate" cases of child sexual exploitation.

The force is additionally conducting two major criminal inquiries into past sex-grooming cases in Rotherham, involving 18 suspects and 283 victims. In total, 181 offences are under investigation and 23 arrests have been made.

A spokeswoman said that the force was now "acutely aware of the grooming process" and has "a deeper understanding of child sexual exploitation". It was "considerably more creative" in its investigation of such crimes, using polygraph testing on sex offenders and placing less reliance on a child's evidence. "The Alexis Jay report laid bare the failings of South Yorkshire police over a number of years. This made for painful reading, however we are determined ... to ensure we provide the best possible service to victims in the future."

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powerful and you upset them at your peril. To avoid such problems, some senior officers went the other way."

Joyce Thacker, who resigned last month as Rotherham council's director of children's services, told a parliamentary inquiry that until Ms Burbeary retired in 2005 staff working closely with child victims "were finding it difficult for the police to take any notice of this issue".

The commander is said to have verbally attacked a researcher, who was funded by the Home Office and whose letter warned the force's chief constable in 2001 that police in Rotherham were not doing enough to "protect children at risk and target their abusers".

She was also involved in attempts to amend sections of a report in which brothers from a family of Pakistani origin were linked to sex offences against 54 young girls.

Serving under Ms Burbeary was Inspector Anita McKenzie, who also retired in 2005. She headed the district's community safety unit and received monthly reports from youth workers. These contained offenders' names, mobile phone numbers, home addresses and the locations where abuse took place. It is believed that none of the reports led to a prosecution.

The intelligence was apparently entered into "Box 5" of the force's computer network. This was said to be a secure system designed to protect the source's identity,

but in practice it meant, according to one member of staff, that it "disappeared into a black hole and was never seen again". Few police officers were permitted access to the information and most were unaware of its existence.

South Yorkshire police said that it believed Box 5 to be a grading of intelligence known as "level 5", which permits access to confidential material on a "need-to-know basis". The force said that this was an effective way to handle sex-grooming intelligence and that it also protected victims.

South Yorkshire police said that issues raised by *The Times* would "form part of" the National Crime Agency's independent investigation into the force's past handling of street-grooming sex cases.

The Police Superintendents' Association said that Ms Burbeary would give every assistance to the agency's inquiry. It would be "inappropriate to respond to questions before that investigation has taken place", it added.

Neil Bowles, the chairman of the South Yorkshire Police Federation, said that the other officers named today by *The Times* felt that "it would be inappropriate to comment on specific cases at a time when complaints may be forthcoming".

The officers were said to be concerned that "misleading, untrue and damaging allegations may be published about them based on information and documentation which we understand is incomplete and heavily redacted".



Catalogue of failure

Andrew Norfolk analyses Amy's case file to discover what went wrong

From day one, the first police officer to speak to the family makes the mistake of concluding that violent sexual attacks should not be classified as rapes if the victim remained in contact with the alleged offender.

The officer writes off the case and implicitly calls Amy a liar. The alleged rapist was the youngest of a family of brothers named in a report given to police in 2001 in which his elder brothers were linked to offences against 54 underage Rotherham girls. It is not known whether DC Norton was aware of this report. South Yorkshire Police said this would be "explored during the independent investigation" by the National Crime Agency.

The comments add weight to criticism in a Home Office-funded report that police invariably treated exploited children as "deviant and promiscuous" while "the men they were found with were never questioned or investigated".

Mr Hedges, chief constable from 1998 to 2004, says he has no recollection of this letter. He has said that sex-grooming crimes were "never raised" with him as a high priority.

Girl, 13, was blamed as men queued to assault her

Case study

abuse victims as 'silly girls'

April 7, 2003 First rape disclosure by Amy, 13, to her mother. Uniformed officers go to family home. Medical examination finds bruising to upper lip, inner thigh and buttock. **Report sent to duty sergeant by PC Susan Woods:**

"Although Amy says *** has assaulted her, which she describes as grabbing her round the mouth, round her throat, pulled her hair and grabbed her breasts, it appears this matter would be more realistically viewed as USI, unlawful sexual intercourse, as she has gone back to see him repeatedly."**

April 24 On April 14, six days after a police interview in which she described four rapes, Amy withdraws her complaint. Threats have been made. **Report filed 10 days later by Detective Constable Andrea Norton:**

"She maintained her story but stated that she did not want to pursue her complaint any further. It is my opinion that the story given by the complainant is not true. There is no evidence to support the story and no further lines of inquiry."

October 3 Two weeks after social worker receives phone call describing how Amy was "raped by young Asian men" who have been "getting in contact with [her] again", she says she is willing to tell police about a new incident in which five men sexually assaulted her in a flat. She wants to "get away from them and stop it happening to other girls". **Family support worker's notes:**

"PC Chris Barron said 'she could be prosecuted for wasting police time if she changes her mind'. Police have told Amy that 'the Asian men won't come up to your house, but if we see you in Rotherham with them we'll just think it's that little tart back again and bring you home!'"

October 10 Amy gives videoed police interview alleging sex attacks in the flat. Ten days later, her parents write to the Home Secretary, David Blunkett, and to the force's chief constable, Mike Hedges:

"This particular group of men in Rotherham thinks that they are above the law and can get away with doing whatever they like. How many more children are going to be lured into the net of these evil men before there is some justice done?"

Amy said the police made her feel like she was under suspicion the whole time



Amy's file is a training manual in how not to conduct a criminal inquiry into sex offences against a child (Andrew Norfolk and Billy Kenber write). From day one, when a 999 call was made after the 13-year-old broke down and told her mother of multiple rapes, a series of neatly typed reports laid bare the prejudice of investigating officers. South Yorkshire Police looked at

October 23 Three men aged 19, 20 and 32 are arrested and questioned. One admits having sex with Amy in the flat and that a succession of men went into a bedroom, one at a time, while she was there. Suspects released on bail.

Two weeks later, report from Detective Constable Norton to Detective Inspector Mark Foster highlights contradictions in Amy's account and states that when the parents voiced concern for her safety, she

"informed them that the police could not stop Amy from meeting these men if she wished to do so and that they had to take some responsibility for protecting their own daughter! Amy's mother has an unrealistic view of what will happen. She expects all the men to go to prison for a long time."

November 10 Family support worker notes that Amy's parents have been told that police will not be pursuing the case. **A day later, report is sent from Detective Inspector Foster to Detective Constable Norton:**

"As the file stands there is no realistic prospect of conviction. The complainant has been video interviewed. I understand that she was not traumatised and is quite dismissive regarding her relationship with the suspects. She does appear to be saying she was pressurised into performing oral sex. This was clarified and she effectively says she could have just stopped. There is no corroboration in respect of any of the allegations. She cannot be classified as a strong witness."

December 2 Family support worker's notes:

Amy's mother has been informed by DI Foster that the police "have now decided to take Amy's case to the CPS".

December 9 Letter to Amy's father from Chief Superintendent Christine Burbeary, district police commander for Rotherham:

"I refer to your letter to the Chief Constable relating to your daughter Amy. I know that Detective Inspector Mark Foster and Inspector Anita McKenzie in charge of police community safety unit have been in touch with you regarding this matter."

January 15, 2004 Five days after PC Barron tells Amy's social worker the inquiry "wasn't looking good as far as any prosecution because it was hard to prove that [Amy] had been made to do things against her will", letter is sent to Kevin Barron, MP for Rother Valley, by Ms Burbeary, rejecting his request for a meeting to discuss concerns about the handling of Amy's case:

"This matter is still being investigated by CID officers from Rotherham district ... and therefore at present it would not be a suitable time to arrange the meeting suggested by you."

2011 July Amy's mother received a letter from DC Norton in March 2004, informing her that the CPS were not taking the case to court. The family support worker noted that Amy was "very depressed" and had concluded that police "believe the men, not her". Seven years later, she received £20,900 after the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority ruled there was evidence that she was raped and sexually abused as a child.

Police took her blood-stained clothes but then lost them.

A few months later, by now aged 14, she was lured by new "friends" to a flat where, she told police, she was held in a bedroom and sexually abused by five men. Three arrests were made but no one was charged.

In despair, her parents sold the family business and moved overseas. *The Times* first told Amy's story in 2012. Today, we publish excerpts from the reports of police

The exclamation mark is significant. Her superior officer is invited to share Detective Constable Norton's view that Amy's parents are partly to blame for her encounters with men.

Amy is a troubled child steeped in a cycle of abuse. She does not fit the police's narrow understanding of how victims should talk and behave.

Detective Inspector Foster suggests she could have rejected the sexual demands of several adults. Police conclude the case should not proceed. South Yorkshire Police said this decision would be investigated by the National Crime Agency.

This seems a puzzlingly swift U-turn. South Yorkshire Police said that its decision to send Amy's file to the CPS was taken after the Home Secretary "asked" that the case be reconsidered".

The family support worker noted that Amy's parents received the letter but "have never had any contact" with Inspector McKenzie and did not even "know her name".

As Rotherham's senior police officer from 2001 to 2005, Ms Burbeary is accused by council staff of failing to take seriously reports and intelligence about the scale and gravity of sex-grooming offences. During her stewardship, hundreds of children are thought to have been exploited; it is understood that no one was prosecuted.

Amy was let down by the police from start to finish. The force even opposed, as recently as 2011, her bid for compensation for the sexual crimes committed against her. Seven officers who featured in her case, four of them still serving in South Yorkshire, are identified today: PC Susan Woods, DC Andrea Norton (now Detective Sergeant Andrea Suter), PC Chris Barron, Detective Inspector Mark Foster (now Detective Chief Inspector), Inspector Anita McKenzie (retired), Chief Superintendent Christine Burbeary (retired) and the force's former chief constable, Mike Hedges.

more important matters." South Yorkshire Police say the force will ask the National Crime Agency to examine the force's investigations into the alleged sex offences against Amy in 2003.

It says that passages from police reports published today are "a redacted version of the full rationale" for the decisions taken by officers in the case and fail to take into account the stance of the Crown Prosecution Service.

Senior police officers ignored warnings about growing scale of sex abuse, Andrew Norfolk and Billy Kenber report

Men took their pleasure as sexual exploitation became a way of life for many Rotherham children. Police watched it happen.

Junior police officers were guilty of numerous blunders but they took their lead from higher ranks whose commitment to tackling such crimes appeared barely lukewarm. In the South Yorkshire force, the rot began at the top and seeped down.

The town's district commander for a four-year period from 2001, during which police ignored a series of warnings about the growing scale and severity of offending, was Detective Chief Superintendent Christine Burbeary.

Ms Burbeary was promoted to the post after her first marriage ended and she began a relationship with Martin Davies, who was then the force's deputy chief constable and who had been on her interview panel when she was promoted to chief inspector in 1996. The couple married in 2004. It is not suggested that any of her promotions were linked to their relationship.

As commander, she played a leading role in a community cohesion task force, set up to combat Islamophobia



Christine Burbeary: accused of turning deaf ear to pleas