

## **Independent Inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham 1997 – 2013.**

### **Explanatory note for the Communities and Local Government Select Committee on the scale of child sexual exploitation.**

1. No-one knows the true scale of sexual exploitation in Rotherham over the years. The Inquiry report makes this clear.
2. The Inquiry **estimated** that approximately 1400 children were sexually exploited over the full Inquiry period, from 1997 to 2013. This is a conservative estimate. The true scale is likely to be much higher.
3. In addition to the estimated 1400 victims, an unknown number of children were at risk of being exploited. (Chapter 4 page 29).

### **Why the true scale of CSE in Rotherham is not known.**

4. South Yorkshire Police were unable to quantify the scale of the problem prior to 2013. In that year, the Force introduced a category for CSE.
5. From 2001, Children's Social Care in Rotherham did have a category for child sexual exploitation. However, the code was not correctly utilised. For example, some child victims of sexual exploitation were wrongly classified as being out of control. This tells us something about past attitudes to child sexual exploitation, and the low priority given to keeping accurate records of the problem.
6. Even at the time of the Inquiry, Rotherham Children's Services were unable to provide information about how many child victims were known, other than 51 cases that were being dealt with by the specialist CSE team.
7. In evidence given very recently to the Communities and Local Government Select Committee, the former Strategic Director of Rotherham's Children Services stated that, in total, Rotherham Council knew 145 children who were victims/at risk of CSE. The Inquiry had asked for this information and Rotherham Council did not provide it. Indeed, Rotherham managers told the Inquiry that Rotherham Council did not know how many current CSE cases were currently being dealt with, beyond cases dealt with by the central CSE team.
8. Rotherham Council provided information to the Inquiry for 11 of the 16 years

covered by the Inquiry. For these years, Children's Social Care recorded 1402 contacts and 712 cases where the child was a victim of CSE.

9. The Council's information systems were simply not good enough to provide accurate data about the scale of the problem over the Inquiry period. Data was missing for five out of the 16 years. For other years, particularly in the mid-2000s, records from inter-agency meetings showed the Inquiry that the number of children being exploited was much higher than the numbers recorded by Children's Social Care.
10. At key points over the years, for example in 2005 and again in 2007, multi-agency groups which were monitoring the problem of CSE were overwhelmed with referrals (97 cases being monitored in 2005 alone). The response of agencies was to remove large numbers of children from monitoring. This concealed the extent of the problem.

#### **Information available to the Inquiry.**

11. The starting point for the Inquiry's estimate of 1400 victims was the aggregate figure of 1402 contacts known to Children's Social Care over the period of 11 years. This was clearly an underestimate for the 16 years covered by the Inquiry.
12. In addition to aggregate data about contacts and caseloads, the Inquiry received information from case files and records of multi-agency discussions about child victims and other children known to be at risk. These were a total of 1475 children, in the following groups:
  - a) 988 children known to Children's Social Care and/or the Police.
  - b) 412 additional children known to Risky Business and/or the Police and Children's Social Care.
  - c) Approximately 75 children who were groomed and abused by a sex offender convicted in 2007.
13. Information not available to the Inquiry but directly relevant to estimating the true scale of exploitation included records of children discussed at the inter-agency 'Key Players' meetings. This group met regularly from 1999 to 2003. It

monitored children who were exploited as well as suspected perpetrators. The records from these meetings could not be traced. However, the Inquiry was told by staff who were operational managers at the time that the meetings discussed hundreds of children over a period of approximately four years.

### **Sampling and file reading.**

14. The Inquiry randomly sampled 66 cases and screened several hundred more cases from the lists of children monitored in inter-agency meetings. 5% of the cases sampled were found to be children at risk of CSE rather than victims.
15. The Inquiry also had access to residential care records for looked after children. From these notes it was clear that for several years - until around 2007 - child sexual exploitation was rife in units for looked after children and care leavers. From the records, it appeared that staff were powerless to protect looked after children. The Inquiry concluded that over a period of many years, children in residential care homes and care leavers were targeted and abused. This was not properly recorded in individual case files. A substantial number of these children will not be included in any of the above figures.
16. The file reading process is described on page 125 of the Inquiry report. The vast majority of cases sampled were children who had been victims of CSE, in many cases subjected to violence and great brutality.

### **Estimating the scale of child sexual exploitation.**

17. File reading suggested that approximately 5% of children were at risk of CSE rather than known victims. When this was applied to the total figure of 1475 children (see paragraph 12), the estimated number of victims was 1401 children. A further 74 children were considered to be at risk of CSE.
18. It is clear that there was a substantial number of additional victims in residential care who were not included in these records. In addition, there are five years of missing case files and there is no indication that the scale of CSE during these years would have been any different.
19. From all these sources, the Inquiry estimated that the scale of sexual exploitation in Rotherham comprised at least 1,400 victims, and in all probability the true number was much higher. As far as possible, records were checked for double

counting and allowances were made for that.

20. At the outset of the Inquiry, it was suggested to the Inquiry that the problem of CSE was exaggerated. The Inquiry found no evidence of this. The scale of the problem was clear from about 2003 onwards, and efforts should have been made to deal with it decisively, rather than downplay it.

21. We know that, in addition to issues of under-recording by South Yorkshire Police and Children's Social Care, the problem is hidden because many children and parents are/were afraid to come forward and make complaints. Those who did so in the past were threatened and intimidated. Here is just one comment from the minutes of a multi-agency meeting:

*"The methods are the same, e.g. where the girls are meeting, where they are picked up and girls going to Clifton Park, girls picked up at the petrol station in ..... Road. The chair said this is a fairly grim situation. The men's names don't change but the girls' names change as they become too old to be useful. None of the girls will give a statement as they are scared..." (Strategy meeting, 2007 – attended by all the relevant agencies).*

22. The estimate of at least 1400 children was the best estimate the Inquiry was able to make on the basis of the information available. It must be seen as a conservative estimate. Any errors in the estimate will have resulted in under-counting the numbers of victims.

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