

## BEHIND THE STORY

Grooming scandal: Hollow denials exposed by the watchdog

Andrew Norfolk

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Local police forces were complicit in covering up the racial aspect of the exploitation in Rotherham  
TOM PILSTON FOR THE TIMES

When *The Times* first claimed in 2011 that a “culture of silence” had for years facilitated “the sexual exploitation of hundreds of young girls by criminal pimping gangs” in towns and cities across northern England and the Midlands, denial followed denial.

We reported that most of the identified victims were white and most known offenders were of Pakistani heritage, “unlike other known models of child-sex offending in Britain in which the vast majority of offenders are white”.

Police forces, local authorities and child protection charities initially denied that ethnicity had any relevance to the grooming of vulnerable girls by organised groups of men. Then they took a new line that whatever their past faults, concerns about ethnic and cultural sensitivities played no role in their failure to acknowledge and tackle such offending.

**He recalled one occasion when he phoned the police and spoke with a Chief Inspector to discuss his concerns about you. He could not remember the name of the officer. He added that the officer referred to grooming as 'Paki shagging' and told him that 'with it being Asians we can't afford for this to be coming out' as 'Rotherham would erupt'. The officer had then put the phone down on him.**

A paragraph from the IOPC report into the Rotherham sex abuse scandal, regarding a complaint from a victim's father

The hollow nature of such a claim is exposed by the police watchdog's upholding of a complaint that the father of a Rotherham victim was told by a senior police officer that riots would erupt if became public knowledge that Asian men were abusing white girls. The disclosure of his comments today supports earlier claims and statements that were reported or exposed by *The Times*:

- Confidential 2010 report for Rotherham safeguarding children board: such crimes have "cultural characteristics . . . which are locally sensitive in terms of diversity . . . It is imperative that suggestions of a wider cultural phenomenon are avoided."
- West Mercia chief inspector, Jan 2011: "It's a damaging taboo. These girls are being passed around and used as meat. To stop this type of crime you need to start talking about it, but everyone's been too scared to address the ethnicity factor . . . we need to stop being worried about the racial complication."
- Greater Manchester police source describing abandoned 2008 child sexual exploitation investigation in Rochdale, Jan 2011: "The inquiry was crippled by misplaced fears about upsetting racial sensitivities."
- Jun 2012: *The Times* reveals Rotherham council censored the report of a serious case review into the murder of a 17-year-old girl by redacting information that revealed the ethnicity of the British Pakistani men suspected of using her for sex from the age of 11.
- Jay report on Rotherham, Aug 2014: there was a widespread perception that "some senior people in the council and the police wanted to downplay the ethnic dimension . . . because it might damage community cohesion".
- Casey report on Rotherham, Feb 2015: "People were unable to tackle race issues because they were too worried about being called racist."
- Review of bungled Greater Manchester police inquiry, Jan 2020: "The SIO attended a meeting at GMP headquarters to discuss communications. This meeting acknowledged that the enquiry was sensitive due to the involvement of Asian men. Concerns were expressed about the risk of proactive tactics or the incitement of racial hatred."

## **ROTHERHAM TIMELINE**

**2012** A *Times* story headlined "Police files reveal vast child protection scandal" exposes truth about the grooming, trafficking and sexual abuse of girls by groups of men. Police and the local authority deny any failings.

**2013** *The Times* reveals that a violent adult suspected of abusing 12 under-age girls was allowed daily access to a child in the care of social services and twice made her pregnant by the age of 15. The council commissions inquiry by Professor Alexis Jay.

**2014** The Jay report rules failings by police and child protection agencies let 1,400 children suffer years of “appalling abuse” at the hands of men who were “almost all” of Pakistani heritage. The council leader, chief executive, director of children’s services and police and crime commissioner resign. National Crime Agency operation launched, leading to more than 420 suspected child sex offenders being identified.

**2015** The government rules that the local authority is not fit for purpose. The Labour-run cabinet resigns and Whitehall appoints commissioners to run the council.

**2016** Three brothers exposed by *The Times* are jailed for offences against 14 girls.

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20/01/2020 18:31