

Summary of An Independent Review of Two Home Office Commissioned Independent Reviews looking at Information Held in Connection with Child Abuse from 1979-1999, by Peter Wanless and Richard Whittam, November 2014

Introduction

On 7th July 2014 Home Secretary Theresa May announced two separate inquiries to address public concerns: first that in the 1980s the Home Office failed to act on allegations of child sex abuse and, second, that public bodies and other important institutions failed to take seriously their duty of care towards children.

In relation to the first concern, Peter Wanless, NSPCC Chief Executive, and lawyer Richard Whittam, QC, were asked to undertake an eight to ten week review into the Home Office handling of historical child sex abuse and how police and prosecutors had dealt with information they had received in the 1980s. That report was published on November 11th 2014.

The review was, in fact, a review of two previous reviews commissioned by the Home Office Permanent Secretary. One examined what the Home Office knew and did about cases of organised child abuse from 1979 to 1999 (Review 1 completed in June 2013) whilst the other looked specifically at whether the Home Office had ever given grant funding to the Paedophile Information Exchange (PIE) (Review 2). Both earlier reviews were published as annexes to the Wanless and Whittam report

The current review, the findings of which were presented as a single document, had been asked to consider:

- Whether the Terms of Reference of the original reviews had been appropriate and sufficient to allow a full assessment of the Home Office's handling of allegations received in relation to historic child abuse; and the findings as to whether the Home Office had ever funded PIE;
- Whether the methodology had been appropriate and sufficient to fulfil the Terms of Reference;
- Whether Home Office support for and co-operation had been appropriate and sufficient; in particular whether the Independent Investigator had been afforded sufficient access to documentation and individuals in the Home Office;
- Whether further information had been available in relation to the 114 files identified as destroyed/missing or lost and whether the original review's assessment of their significance had been reasonable;
- Whether any further information was identified which should be referred to the Police so they could consider whether further

investigation was required;

- whether the conclusions of the reviews had been and remain appropriate.

Without prejudicing ongoing criminal investigations, the Review was also to consider how the police and prosecution authorities had handled any material that was handed to them at the time.

Background

Between 1981 and 1985 Geoffrey Dickens MP campaigned against a suspected paedophile ring he claimed to have uncovered that was connected to trading child pornography (sic). In 1981, using parliamentary privilege Dickens named the former senior diplomat, civil servant and MI6 operative, Sir Peter Hayman, as a paedophile in the House of Commons, and asked why Hayman had not been jailed after the discovery on a bus of violent pornography.

In 1983 Mr. Dickens claimed there was a paedophile network involving 'big, big names - people in positions of power, influence and responsibility' and threatened to name them in the House of Commons. In 1984 he campaigned for the banning of the Paedophile Information Exchange, a pro-paedophilia activism group of which Mr. Hayman was a member.

At a short meeting in 1984 Dickens is said to have given a 40-page dossier about his concerns to Home Secretary, Leon Brittan, and a second copy to the Director of Public Prosecutions, Sir Thomas Hetherington.

Dickens is said to have described the dossier as having details of eight prominent figures, including the name of a former Conservative MP who had been found with child pornography videos, against whom no arrests or charges had been brought.

It was subsequently reported that Brittan had, in a letter to Dickens, said that the dossier would be given to police. The police later stated they had no record of any investigation into the allegations. The Home Office confirmed that no correspondence from Dickens had been retained and that they had found 'no record of specific allegations by Mr Dickens of child sex abuse by prominent public figures'.

In a detailed statement issued in July 2014 Brittan said allegations that he had 'failed to deal adequately with the bundle of papers containing allegations of serious sexual impropriety' from Dickens were 'completely without foundation'. He said that he had passed the dossier to 'the relevant Home Office officials for examination, as was the normal and correct practice' adding that 'I wrote to Mr Dickens on 20 March 1984 informing him of the conclusions of the Director of Public Prosecutions about these matters (as set out in the Interim Report of the Independent Review set up by the Home Office)'. The 2013 Home Office review concluded that any information requiring investigation had

been referred to the police but revealed that Mr Dickens' dossier had not been retained.

As part of the 2013 review the Home Office had ascertained that parts of the dossier described as 'credible' and which contained 'realistic potential' for further investigation had been passed to prosecutors and the police. Other elements of the dossier had been 'not retained or destroyed'. A letter had been found from Mr. Brittan to Mr. Dickens stating that the allegations contained in the dossier had been acted on.

It was discovered in 2013 that 114 documents that had also concerned child abuse allegations were missing from the Home Office's records (listed in the Wanless and Whittam review at Annex I).

Wanless and Whittam Inquiry report

On 11 November 2014 the report by Peter Wanless and Richard Whittam QC was published. It stated that Home Office filing procedures had created 'significant limitations... It is, therefore, not possible to say whether files were ever removed or destroyed to cover up or hide allegations of organised or systematic child abuse by particular individuals because of the systems then in place'.

They concluded that 'It is very difficult to prove anything definitive based on imperfectly operated paper records system at 30 years remove'. However, they had 'found nothing to support a concern that files had been deliberately or systematically removed or destroyed to cover up organised child abuse'. They also reported that they had found no evidence to support allegations that the Home Office had funded the Paedophile Information Exchange. They did express concern about the state of child abuse allegation record keeping in the Home Office and made recommendations in relation to that aspect.

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