

Oxford grooming: Whistleblower obstructed by senior council officers

Senior council officer triggered complaint about junior member of staff who tried to spark investigation into grooming of a young girl



Oxford's county council faced serious criticism in the child sexual abuse report Photo: Alamy



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By David Barrett, and John Bingham

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A council worker who tried to raise the alarm about a 13-year-old abused by the Oxfordshire paedophile ring was obstructed by senior officers in the local authority, it has emerged.

The crime and neighbourhood nuisance officer based in Oxford – a former detective sergeant in child protection – suffered “harsh disregard and criticism” when he attempted to spark official action to protect the girl.

The former policeman – who was not named in the new report on the authorities' performance – resorted to sending emails to police contacts and child protection

staff in a bid to secure moves to rescue the girl from abusive situations.

However, his concerns were batted away and prompted Oxfordshire County Council's then head of children's social care, Andy Couldrick, to trigger a complaint about him.

Mr Couldrick is now chief executive of Wokingham Borough Council in Berkshire.

Ultimately, the abusers were convicted of 25 offences against the 13-year-old in an Old Bailey trial which concluded in 2013, five years after the officer attempted to trigger child protection measures.

"This episode is one that agencies must learn from," said the report by the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children's Board.

"A city crime and neighbourhood nuisance officer was hugely concerned about a particular child.

"In 2007-8, he repeatedly raised concerns ... describing her behaviour and associates which today would lead to a speedy recognition that something bigger might be happening, but which at the time led to rather harsh disregard and criticism."

He reported "men going into the flat every night and leaving in the early hours of morning" and seeing the 13-year-old lying under a cover with an adult male.

The officer also requested a child protection case conference after a rape allegation but his request was turned down.

"He resorted to sending emails to many senior police and CSC staff such was his concern.

"Responses from a children's social care senior manager were, in the author's opinion, rather hostile and demeaning," it said.

When he noted that the girl was spending time with "Asian and black males" one member of staff in the children's social care department at Oxfordshire County Council said: "The innuendo relating to her alleged associates I find a little presumptive and unsavoury."



The Oxford sex gang. Left to right, top: Akhtar Dogar, Anjum Dogar, Kamar Jamil, Assad Hussain. Bottom: Mohammed Karrar, Bassam Karrar and Zeeshan Ahmed

“The county’s head of adult social services was asked by the children’s social care head of service, through his contacts with the city, to complain about the ... officer’s emails and style,” said the report.

“The city senior manager apologised for “the attitude of the staff member and for the unprofessional way he has acted.

"I am most upset that an officer under my control could act in this matter, and apologise to your staff unreservedly.

"Please be assured I have taken strong action to ensure this does not happen again.”

The whistleblower was spoken to by his team leader and told “the county did not like senior staff being criticised by a junior person”.

In a statement Mr Couldrick said: “The report does not paint a picture of the concerns raised in 2007 that I recognise entirely.

“The concerns appeared to relate to noise and nuisance at the property occupied by the young woman’s father. I consulted with her social worker, and the manager of the home in which she was living, and they in turn with Thames Valley Police officers.

“Had we held a child protection conference then, the same key agencies that were already sharing information would have been brought together in a more formal

meeting.

"The concerns were not ignored, but different decisions were taken.

"At this time, the periods she was missing were becoming less frequent.

"This led to us continuing with what turned out to be the wrong approach.

"We did not understand this type of abuse and its scale at that time, and were focused on individual young people.

"Like everyone else, I deeply regret that we didn't have the correct information to enable us to see the patterns and the whole picture during this period.

"If we had, we could have done something about it and stopped it then and there.

"What happened in Oxfordshire was harrowing for the young victims.

"I've always been, and will continue to be, committed to protecting children from harm in order to help our most vulnerable."

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