

Police and Crime Committee – 4 December 2014

Transcript of Item 5 – Safeguarding Children and Child Sexual Exploitation in London – Part A

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): We move now to item 5, which is our main business today, and that is looking at the issue of safeguarding and child sexual exploitation (CSE) in London. The Committee will remember that earlier this year we set up a working group looking at safeguarding practices across London that was led by Caroline Pidgeon. I have to say we were very appreciative of the response that the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) gave. I believe the MPS accepted our recommendations and work has gone on to improve that. We want to follow up on some of those recommendations today.

The second part of our meeting when we will have extra guests with us will be to look at what lessons London's policing and wider agencies can actually take from the case of Rotherham and the Jay Report [Alexis Jay OBE, *Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham 1997 - 2013*] that was written into that appalling circumstance as well.

I am going to just ask our guests to introduce themselves, Helen, if I could start with you.

Helen Bailey (Chief Operating Officer, MOPAC): I am Helen Bailey. I am the Chief Operating Officer at the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC).

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): I am Cressida Dick and I am one of the Assistant Commissioners (ACs) in the MPS.

Keith Niven (Temporary Commander, SOECA, MPS): Hello there. I am Keith Niven and I am a Temporary Commander at the moment for the Sexual Offences, Exploitation and Child Abuse (SOECA) Command.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): Thank you. You are very welcome here today. Perhaps I can just start this session off with some general questions. First of all to AC Dick, if I may, could you just give us an idea about what you believe are the immediate safeguarding challenges facing the MPS at the moment?

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): Certainly, Chair. Thank you. Can I start by thanking you very much for all the hard work that went into your report? Clearly, it was before my time in this role, but it is an area that I am very interested in and have worked in before. I thought it was an excellent report and very helpful for us. Genuine thanks for that.

In relation to the challenges, I suppose I would divide them into perhaps four areas, which are fairly apparent in your report anyway, and they continue. There is a challenge around increased demand and our ability to staff sufficiently. That is both numbers and skills. I am sure we may come back to that.

Secondly, in terms of key areas for us that are particularly challenging in terms of crime type or problem that we are tackling, I know we are going to spend some time later on CSE, but clearly that is an area of great concern to us for reasons that will be extremely obvious to the Committee and an area we are putting a lot of resource and effort into, but we recognise we are probably at the tip of the iceberg. In a different kind of way,

although there are some similarities, the second one of those of course is female genital mutilation (FGM), which poses lots of challenges for us.

Finally, my fourth area is just the ongoing challenge that there always is in partnership working. This is getting increasingly better, but the whole of safeguarding depends on effective partnership and so we constantly have to calibrate and recalibrate and improve. Those would be my areas.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): Thank you. In our second part of the meeting, we do have representatives from a local authority here and so we can take up some of those issues. That was helpful.

I should just say that FGM is an issue that we have picked up and have raised questions about on many occasions and we will be taking this issue up again in the New Year once we follow the MPS's first prosecution and looking at some of the lessons that perhaps can be learned from that.

Perhaps I can turn now to Helen. From a MOPAC point of view and holding the MPS to account, how confident are you that MOPAC is in fact doing that and are you content with the progress to date and the influence that you have had on the MPS?

Helen Bailey (Chief Operating Officer, MOPAC): You are right. This is work in progress. For us, I have become increasingly confident since we have started to take up our position on the London Safeguarding Children Board that not only are we in direct contact with colleagues in the MPS and able to understand what they are doing and cross-question them about the resources they are putting on, but we also have independent sources of information and assurance from colleagues in the boroughs, both by working with colleagues at London Councils and also by understanding through our relationships with the London Safeguarding Children Board. As Cressida says, these things are all about relationships. They are all about people doing their bit and turning up and being able to share information.

For us, it is a combination of those things as well as our specific pieces of work. There are some things that are in our Police and Crime Plan that we are also pursuing with support from colleagues and that give us some assurance that there is work being done across London on this area. However, I would never offer anyone complete assurance in this area.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): Obviously, MOPAC has focused a great deal of its attention on your MOPAC seven key crimes that you want to see reduced. This falls outside that, in part because we want to encourage reporting and so a target to reduce the crime rate is not going to be effective in doing that. However, I believe that in your response to us you talked about how you were making some performance management frameworks around areas that fell outside the MOPAC seven. I am just wondering if this is one of the areas that you are looking at and how far down the road you are with that.

Helen Bailey (Chief Operating Officer, MOPAC): We are taking that at a steady pace. At the moment, we do not have a specific performance framework around safeguarding.

We are working on two fronts with that. Firstly, as I say, through the joint Audit Panel that we have, we are thinking about how issues of risk - including those things which are flagged up by, for instance, the London Safeguarding Children Board - are followed through because they are risks to both of our organisations. Then we are trying to understand what data we would best manage in order to have the right sort of dashboard around these kinds of issues. In your review you also talked about the difference between ongoing new reporting of stuff and recent historic trends of data and historic reporting of sexual abuse and sexual offences. How do we understand what is normal, what we should be expecting, what kinds of responses we should be

giving and what we should be expecting of colleagues? Those are the questions we are exploring through some of the bits of work we have highlighted in our response to you, including some of the pilots we are running.

Yes, it is our intention to have some sensible metrics about this and we are working in partnership, again, with colleagues at the London Safeguarding Children Board as well as colleagues in policing to think about what those metrics will be.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): That is helpful and I know we have some further questions on where that performance framework should sit.

One of the issues around this as well that we have heard is around data. I know the MPS has collected some data on safeguarding and particularly CSE, but it seems that health services and other agencies have not had it and there is not a complete picture, therefore, of the whole range of safeguarding issues across London. I understand that there is now a duty on all those agencies to collect data, but is that something that MOPAC is looking to hold the helm on to ensure that we have good data collection across London?

Helen Bailey (Chief Operating Officer, MOPAC): We want to ensure that there is good data collection and that we have sight of that data. We do not want to superimpose ourselves where other people are collecting it.

I just keep coming back - and I know this is a bit dull of me - to this point about the London Safeguarding Children Board because I am conscious that in each borough everybody is trying to collect complete data about their own boroughs. We do not want to collect data that we cannot manage and handle or that would get in the way of that happening locally and so that is the balance we are trying to strike in the data we are seeking. Caroline [Pidgeon MBE AM] and others have been rightly prompting us to get more and better data from the health service and we are engaged in trying to do precisely that at the moment. The responses have been, as we have admitted, differential, but we are not giving up on it and we are trying to make sure that that is triangulated. The point of us having data is not to know things; it is to make sure that things happen with that data and to make sure it is used at the right and appropriate level.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): Thank you. Could I just ask Cressida to follow up on that with regards to the collection of data? Is that an issue that the MPS has faced?

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): These are all areas - certainly the so-called even more hidden crime in 2014 areas - that are difficult for everybody. We welcome more collation and more data and we are certainly seeing that. For example, in FGM, we are expecting in the coming months - literally - to have some really useful data from health and increased referrals and reporting as a consequence as well. It is a very important issue for us. We recognise that all of us, although we have been collecting data for a long time on several issues, and all the agencies need to do more.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): Thank you.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): I just wanted to ask Helen. Who sits on the London Safeguarding Children Board for MOPAC?

Helen Bailey (Chief Operating Officer, MOPAC): Marie Snelling.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): She is one of your --

Helen Bailey (Chief Operating Officer, MOPAC): She is one of my Directors.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): -- directors and so it is that senior level?

Helen Bailey (Chief Operating Officer, MOPAC): Yes. It is a senior-level engagement.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): OK. I just wanted to clarify. They have the authority to agree to do things?

Helen Bailey (Chief Operating Officer, MOPAC): Absolutely.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): OK. I just wanted to understand what level it is. Thank you.

Tony Arbour AM: What was the name again?

Helen Bailey (Chief Operating Officer, MOPAC): Marie Snelling.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): Marie Snelling, one of the Directors, yes.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): Thank you.

Len Duvall AM: Can we turn to workforce? My first question is to AC Dick. At various times following other key cases, the MPS has increased resources to this area.

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): Yes.

Len Duvall AM: We understand that sometimes posts have not been fully budgeted for or you have had the budget but you have not been able to fill the post. Where are we now? Are you fully resourced? Do you have the increased number of officers dedicated to safeguarding children that is budgeted for?

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): Over the last, I suppose, six months - probably since just as you were beginning to conclude your report - we have taken a number of different actions to get more people into this area of business. Clearly, you cannot just put anybody in. They need to be skilled and they essentially need to be volunteers. We have moved people across from the rest of specialist crime. We have moved a significant number of people from homicide investigation into sexual offences and offences against children. We have also taken on a number of skilled contractors - agency staff - to fill some gaps that we have had, largely to do with issues you are very familiar with in terms of the MPS's profile of recruiting and growth.

We have just recently at the board agreed further increases in the staffing of this area and so we will have another 73 posts allocated to us, which I hope we will have filled by the end of this financial year with suitably skilled people. Some of them will be working on sexual offences against adults. Keith [Niven] can probably give you a rough breakdown, but a large number of those will be working in the area of child abuse in all its forms.

We think that that will take us to the same sort of level of cases per officer as we had in about 2010, whilst taking account of the very increased demand. You will be as familiar as I with the fact that one case can be very different from another. A case might be a relatively trivial matter in some senses that could be investigated very quickly or it might be a very large historic - for example - investigation involving multiple

inquiries all over the world that might take a whole team a couple of years to do. However, in terms of caseload, that is where we think we will be at the end of the year, taking account of all the changes.

Len Duvall AM: It is true to say, albeit sometimes these are very complex investigations, that you can have a mixture of non-warranted staff working with warranted officers to pursue and to take details of that. It does lend itself to that. Is that wrong or is that --

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): It absolutely does. We have a considerable cohort of police staff who are very skilled particularly in the area of working with the local authorities on case conferences and that sort of thing. We can also bring in police staff who have previously done investigative work to assist with achieving best evidence interviews and that sort of thing. We have quite a mixed economy. We do not have to have the most experienced serving detective in every aspect of the work; far from it.

Len Duvall AM: When we are looking at the figures of budgeted officers, they will be police officers. However, really, for a true picture of the team working on this, we should look at some of the non-police officer assets.

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): Absolutely.

Len Duvall AM: It might be useful to provide that to the Committee at some stage, if you can.

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): Yes. If we have not, I apologise because we very easily can. I can find it in my papers straightaway, unless Keith knows off the top of his head the number of police staff he currently has.

Keith Niven (Temporary Commander, SOECA, MPS): We have approximately 200 police staff. When we look at our police case conference liaison officers who deal with the children on plans, they are all band D members of police staff and experienced people. Most of the agency staff we have employed - and we have approximately 32 agency staff - have previous experience in child abuse investigation and so we are confident. Some of them actually have more experience than some of the junior officers we have who are actually warranted officers. We have some working purely on Sapphire, some working on Child Abuse Investigation Teams (CAITs) and some working on Yewtree at the moment.

Len Duvall AM: Presumably, again, the nature of some of these cases as they get into the judicial system means that the support required for witnesses is probably more intensive. Is it more intensive than some of the other cases the police deal with? What I am trying to get at is an understanding of the nature of investigations and staff investigating under police supervision. There must be a major element of your staff who do that role of supporting witnesses as they go into the judicial system.

Keith Niven (Temporary Commander, SOECA, MPS): Absolutely.

Len Duvall AM: That is dedicated in your unit, some other unit.

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): They are our people. Of course, there are also some specialist assets that we would use. For example, the paedophile unit is largely about the forensic examination of digital data in one big chunk of the business and there is quite a lot of other specialist support as well. I am very happy to send a note with more detail.

Len Duvall AM: We just need to get the broad range of issues. I am a great supporter of police numbers, as you all know, but this is an area where the heavy-lifting work can also be done by specialist police staff. You are all on the front line of policing. They just happen to not be warranted police officers. Do you know what I mean in that sense?

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): Exactly right, yes.

Len Duvall AM: I just wanted to understand that. Thank you for that. Is there not a special case to be made in this section of almost overstaffing so that you have a budgeted level of officers or police resource but, because of circumstances of leave, maternity cover and other issues, you will never fall below because of the day-to-day issues of working organisations and meeting the obligations of the workforce? Is there not a special case here to be made for this type of work to have a percentage of overstaffing so that you are never going to fall below at any one time, whatever the reasons?

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): Broadly, my answer to that is that we have taken that into account in this type of work and some others. However, you are right. It is different from some other areas of work where you perhaps need to have somebody sitting in that seat and rostered each day. This is where people have continuing caseloads and they have to work in teams. There is huge responsibility on the shoulders of the officers, a huge responsibility. It is a different type of workforce planning. We do take that into account.

However, you will have noticed in the belly of the recommendations response, one of the things we have done within this area is reduce the amount of people who are working entirely flexibly. Because we have been in a difficult place with demand, we have had to, but it is not something I am particularly pleased with in a sense. We have had to do that. However, that aside, we do account for leave. We do account for having to have the resilience and the ability to deal with what is coming through the door and the court cases.

Len Duvall AM: Thank you. A question to Helen. In response to this panel's report, we said we wanted you to monitor staffing levels and you came back and the response was that you would take it up and it would be used in the bilateral meetings with the Commissioner. There must be some long list that you are talking to the Commissioner on around those issues. Is it not time to do something a little bit different and what could you do differently, other than use the bilateral meetings? I suspect those bilateral meetings deal with a number of very important issues. Is there not another way of monitoring what is going on here about staffing from a MOPAC point of view?

Helen Bailey (Chief Operating Officer, MOPAC): There are two answers to that. The first is to let me assure you that there is a long list of things that get raised at bilaterals but workforce is always there. It is a consistent conversation between the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor [for Policing and Crime] and the Commissioner on every occasion that I am aware they have met and it is always supported by paperwork.

Again, MOPAC itself has been a work in progress and this issue about workforce is a work in progress for us. We are now in a better position to understand how the MPS is deploying its workforce and its staff. Some of our information that we provide and seek to support - those bilaterals and other interactions around this - speaks to what Cressida has just been talking about: understanding not only the volume of cases but the nature of the work they need to do. For us at the moment, we are having those kinds of conversations at an official level as well as that public level, but I do not think we are in the position and I do not think at the moment on the basis of the information we have to date that it would be right for us to set precise targets about different units and the staffing levels of those units.

However, as I said when I was answering previous questions, we are keeping our eyes and ears open for colleagues in London to say to us whether they are getting the right kinds of engagement around these issues and whether they feel supported through the Safeguarding Boards. As we move to adult safeguarding as well, do we believe that the right kinds of engagement are available to boroughs and that the structures reflect the capacity of organisations on both sides to manage to respond and to protect at the moment children but increasingly adults as well. We are reliant on some anecdotal information as well as some actual practical information about the numbers available.

Len Duvall AM: Just to summarise - and please correct me if I am wrong - we have the bilateral meetings where workforce issues are on the agenda and are asked about and specifically this issue is raised because of the sensitivities around it with Rotherham and others in terms of the national situation.

Helen Bailey (Chief Operating Officer, MOPAC): Certainly, yes.

Len Duvall AM: You then have officer intrusiveness within MOPAC that will raise workforce issues generally. Then we are relying on the Safeguarding Boards and the people on the ground to raise issues and concerns if they think it is not --.

Helen Bailey (Chief Operating Officer, MOPAC): I would put it slightly differently. I would say that one of the things that triggers those intrusive discussions is if we are getting from colleagues in Safeguarding Boards or colleagues in London Councils a sense that they have concerns about the police ability to respond to the concerns they are raising. It is one of the indicators that we have and one of the ways of chasing back and saying, "Are we asking the right questions about this?"

Len Duvall AM: There lies the question, unless the Safeguarding Children Boards are really talking about the resources on the ground, which they do not tend to ask. It is usually about quality, is it not? It is usually about an investigation that is triggered. It is usually about dissatisfaction or satisfaction with the way that has been carried out. No one asks if you have enough staff unless the police report to the Safeguarding Board, "We do not have enough staff". It is very unusual for them to say that in this current climate, considering the Mayor's particular view on staffing and the numbers we have tried to get through, as you know, around some of those issues. There is a degree of honesty here on both sides to actually ask about that issue.

Where I am coming from and where I suppose the panel would be coming from in its previous report is to say that that is fine, but are there some checks and balances that do not rely on some human behaviour about the levels of staffing here and the current demand issue, and that MOPAC gives that lead both at local and at national level? I could talk about the quality of Safeguarding Boards across London and the quality of the debate that may be taking place or not taking place on the ground. I understand why you are saying there is a very important issue of picking that up, but it seems to me that there must be some better ways and some surer ways we can understand what is going on in terms of how the cut is made of the staffing use geographically and understand how that has worked. Boroughs are interesting, but this is cross-borough work, this is sub-regional work in some cases and it is London-wide work. It is very hard to pick that up and hard for people to track through some of these cases and some of the issues about whether the right resources, both from the councils as well as from the police, are being put into this. It is really that.

How are you going to develop this a little bit further? Maybe there are not any answers now, but I suspect that you might want to think about it.

Helen Bailey (Chief Operating Officer, MOPAC): I fully agree with you certainly on two of the points you make. This is really hard to have an absolute right answer on. That is right. Cressida has already said and we all know, do we not, that this work varies hugely in its complexity and volume at any given time.

I slightly disagree with you on this point about whether Safeguarding Boards locally know what is going on. I know from my own bitter experience of chairing one that your first sign that something is not right is when people stop turning up and they start sending junior staff and they start walking backwards. Every now and then, I will get a call from a Chief Executive of a borough who says, "We are a little bit worried about the police response here", and I have certainly raised that with senior colleagues in the MPS and said, "Hang on. Is this just a blip and a bad day or is there something going on here?" If you get a little thing like that, of course you are reliant on the Chair then thinking, "OK, I am going to raise this and I am going to own it".

I am also conscious that we are doing a lot of work on the moment in talking to colleagues in London about safeguarding because from next year of course we have the adult safeguarding and taking on a statutory responsibility as well. At the same time as everybody is looking at even greater pressures on budgets, we have a wider arena in which safeguarding needs to take place. There are a lot of conversations going on at borough level about how they manage that and what we are trying to do in MOPAC is not to impose an answer on that but to hold a ring and understand that those conversations are coming to an intelligent response which may be borough-specific and may vary from borough to borough but they mean that colleagues and the police are engaged with both of those issues - adult and child safeguarding - in a way that is realistic for both them and the other partners to engage with.

If your premise is that we need to keep watching this and worrying about it, I fully agree with you. I would be very uncomfortable about designing a complete right answer. Therefore, we are always going to be a bit reliant on multiple sources of information to alert us flexibly as senior people to whether things really are happening on the ground in the way we are encouraged to believe they are. I would be saying that to you if I were back in a local authority just as I am saying that to you in MOPAC because, as one very wise Director of Social Services once said to me, sometimes the process of management is the process of reassurance and then you have to wander around sniffing for things that make you feel a little less reassured and just check them out.

Len Duvall AM: I do not wish to prolong it and thank you for the way that you have answered the question. There was just one bit that just sent warning bells to me and it was about learning lessons from the past. Safeguarding Boards are about different partners around the table and you hope they are dealing honestly with the situations they face, whether they are the resources they are allocated or the work they are undertaking towards the safety of young people in terms of those issues. Do you know what I mean?

Helen Bailey (Chief Operating Officer, MOPAC): Yes.

Len Duvall AM: Sometimes you have to be prescriptive and every lesson says that. All the lessons have said how things slipped through some of those partnership bodies, warnings bells or whether procedures are being followed. The holding of the ring is a very worthwhile issue in terms of that but, when dealing with the safety of children, there comes a time when someone has to take it by the scruff of the neck. At a local level, that is the Chair of the Safeguarding Board, I presume, and the different partners coming together and the local councils play a leading role in that. However, actually, London-wide, MOPAC is probably in a position to say, "Hold on, we are not comfortable with some of those processes". The holding of the ring is not a question of whether you feel like doing it. You have to do it. Have I misunderstood what you said?

Helen Bailey (Chief Operating Officer, MOPAC): Slightly. How best to answer this question? I will start in a slightly different place. I do not think that the world of safeguarding is short of people in a position to impose prescriptive solutions. The statutory responsibility sits with the London Safeguarding Board and with the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). Our responsibility in MOPAC - and I am clear about it - is to contribute to that, to make sure our colleagues in the police and the rest of the criminal justice system insofar as we have convening power play their role and to work constructively with those charged with safeguarding. You are right. Everybody has to play their part and sometimes that does have to be prescriptive.

From my own experience, one of the first things I ever did as a consultant 20 years ago was to do a review of joint safeguarding arrangements, which - to put a rather complicated bit of prose very briefly - said to me that if every social worker and every police officer filled in every form they were supposed to, they would spend so long filling in forms that they would never get around to meeting children. There is a degree to which this is an over-regulated rather than under-regulated area and people are being forced to make very difficult choices about the focus of their work. We cannot and should not likely add to that prescription. We can and should get engaged and make sure people are doing their stuff.

When I read the Rotherham report, one of the things that really hit me, interestingly enough, was this dilemma about Safeguarding Board chairs. Again, I am paraphrasing a lot of well-thought-out stuff into my own words. What it said was that one of the developments of recent years was to have independent chairs to do precisely what you have talked about, Len, which is to make sure everybody plays their role and comes to the table honestly. The downside, of course, is that if your chair is independent, they sometimes have fewer levers. Therefore, again, my thinking about our role is how we help those people collectively come together through the London Safeguarding Board - because we simply do not have the resources to be in every borough and neither should we - to find the levers to pull to make sure they have the resources they need to have.

However, this is tough stuff and anything with multi-agency involvement is, as you say, reliant upon the honesty, engagement and quality of every individual concerned. I have read so many of those safeguarding reports and they all come down not even to one weak link but to people not recognising the significance of relatively small pieces of information and not recognising they should pass them on. You can never legislate for that. You can only create an environment in which people are more likely to behave in that way. Our role is to be a part of that in the most productive and proactive way we can.

Len Duvall AM: Thank you.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): I just wanted to pick this up. Cressida, you said that by the end of the financial year you hoped the officer posts would be filled and you will go back to the same caseload per officer as you had in 2010. What is that caseload that you are hoping to get to and what is it now?

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): In the child abuse world, we are expecting to be at 30 cases per officer at the end of the financial year.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): At the moment, what are you at?

Keith Niven (Temporary Commander, SOECA, MPS): At the moment, actually, it has reduced slightly. At the moment it is about 25. We have seen a reduction in some parts of the work and an increase in others, but that is the figure that it was in 2012. We want to try to at least be no further or no greater than that number and those figures were calculated on an analysis we did earlier on this year from one of our --

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): You think up to 30 cases per officer is reasonable?

Keith Niven (Temporary Commander, SOECA, MPS): Up to 30, yes, given that some of those are serious cases and some are a lot less serious. It is a range that they deal with. We calculated 123 new members of staff for that. We brought in 53 people from the homicide teams and we have been now granted authority for another 70 who we will try to recruit between now and the end of the financial year. We will review this again in March to look at those figures and look at how cases have either grown in numbers or reduced. Then we will have another review.

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): Chair, if I might, I suspect I have slightly downplayed what we have been doing. It is actually fairly drastic action that we have been taking in the face of the increased demand you observed when you did your work, which we knew was there, particularly from the historic cases. There was a massive increase in workload across both sides of the command as a result of the cases that seem to have flowed from greater awareness in a number of areas, particularly post-Savile [Jimmy Savile, British entertainer and alleged sexual offender]. To collapse homicide teams and move them into this is a significant thing to do. To take people from all sorts of other areas of crime investigation and to put them in here on a temporary basis before we can recruit people permanently has been a very significant thing to do and the Commissioner has been very supportive of that.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): Thank you. One of the workforce issues, of course, is not just new members coming in but the leadership that is offered from the top. Cressida, we are aware that you will be leaving the MPS shortly.

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): Indeed.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): Keith, I also noticed that you have - I do not know - a temporary promotion or a permanent promotion as the Head of SOECA. You were a rank below. Does that indicate that you may be moving on soon or is that rank going to keep you where you are?

Keith Niven (Temporary Commander, SOECA, MPS): No. There is an anticipation that I will probably return to SOECA as the Chief Superintendent. That is anticipated in the near future. This has been very much a temporary position but, as you know, I have been the Chief Superintendent in charge of the CAITs since 2012 and then we amalgamated with the rape command and I have had that responsibility as well, but I have been a permanent fixture there.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): Continuity of leadership is going to be vital in this area as well, particularly as new changes come forward.

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): Absolutely, Chair. As you know, Graham McNulty, who was the Commander, has gone to Hampshire on promotion and we are likely to have a new Commander coming in. I am very hopeful that that person will be not only a good leader but really skilled in this area. Keith [Niven] will become the Chief Superintendent and so we will have lots of resilience in the leadership.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): That was helpful.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): I have become a bit confused because my understanding is that there has been an increasing workload in this area and yet there are fewer cases being done by a smaller number of officers.

Keith Niven (Temporary Commander, SOECA, MPS): By the CAITs.

The numbers fluctuate. The CAITs more recently are dealing with on average 25 cases but of course we have now CSE cases coming in as well from our paedophile unit. The numbers do fluctuate across the board. Overall, there is an increase in the workload for the CAIT officers and it does change. We monitor this every month. We have a performance meeting every month.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): How many cases are considered 'serious' cases? Very roughly. I am not trying to trick you. I am just trying to get an idea.

Keith Niven (Temporary Commander, SOECA, MPS): Yes. I am not sure of what the breakdown is of those 25 cases and so I would be guessing if I gave it to you. However, as I said, there is a range and so there might be minor assaults. Assaults at the moment are going up. That is the area where there has been some growth, but I would not say that they are all serious assaults that are taking place. We are finding more reports that are coming through, but there is not an increase in really serious offences that has caused us any alarm. It has been very much on the same sort of level that it has always been.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): The proportion of serious is the same as it has always been?

Keith Niven (Temporary Commander, SOECA, MPS): Yes.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): AC Dick, we have been told as a Committee that there are only two officers at the moment dealing with serious case reviews. We all understand that this is a very difficult area and mistakes can be made because we are dealing with vulnerable people and all sorts of human aspects. Is it right that there are only two officers?

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): You were right when you did your report that there were two officers, but there are not now.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): How many is it now?

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): Serious case reviews, as I am sure all of the Committee is aware, are things which are conducted on a partnership basis. The officers for us who contribute to those are in our serious crime review broader team and so they are people who deal with homicide as well as these serious case reviews within the team. At the time you did the report, two members of that team were fulltime on serious case reviews of this sort. Keith [Niven] has in the intervening months put another three people into that work who have a background in child abuse and so they have boosted that area.

The whole organisational learning and review work in the MPS now comes under my colleague Martin Hewitt [AC, MPS] and so, any domestic violence murder or anything like that where there is learning for us, he is the one who extracts it out and brings it back. I checked with him yesterday. He is very comfortable with the resourcing he has to be in the serious case reviews. He is also comfortable with the way in which we extract learning that is police-specific. That learning goes straight into Keith's team and he has a nominated superintendent who makes sure those lessons are implemented. It is a good process.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): I have no way of knowing if five officers are enough or not, but perhaps other Members of the Committee do.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): It is more than two.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): It is more than two, yes. Substantially more than two, in fact. I wanted to ask Ms Bailey. MOPAC reports that it expects its Audit Panel to ensure the MPS has effective risk management and organisational learning mechanisms in place to respond to serious crime reviews. How does MOPAC ensure that this happens?

Helen Bailey (Chief Operating Officer, MOPAC): In that particular process, we are part of the joint Audit Panel. We have just been doing some work - which is actually, of course, facilitated by the Directorate of Audit, Risk and Assurance (DARA), which is part of MOPAC and which provides the reports and analysis that come to the Audit Panel - to ask, "What is the process?" What is the process of doing precisely what Cressida [Dick] has described, taking the learning, taking the things which are the biggest risks for the MPS and for all of us and making sure that they are followed back into the organisation and those lessons are learned? We get a report on that --

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): I want the precise mechanism, not the overall aim but the precise mechanism with which you ensure that this is happening.

Helen Bailey (Chief Operating Officer, MOPAC): I am not sure I can be much more precise than that. We get an exception report at the Audit Panel on things that are risks in that particular respect and we follow that through and say, "Have those actions been taken?" That is a joint responsibility between MOPAC and the MPS.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): I see. You get a report and you ask the MPS if it has followed through on it?

Helen Bailey (Chief Operating Officer, MOPAC): That is audited because it is part of our audit framework and it is audited by DARA. If they simply said they had done it and they had not, they would need to be able to demonstrate to the auditors how they have followed that through and how that learning follows into the organisation.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): The process takes how long from you getting the report to the Audit Panel actually confirming?

Helen Bailey (Chief Operating Officer, MOPAC): Frankly, it would depend on the seriousness and the nature of the risk involved. If it was an urgent risk, we would expect that somebody has picked it up and run with it immediately, before it even comes to the Panel.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): When you get the report, how long does it take you? Is this a serious reading of the report and serious questioning or is it --

Helen Bailey (Chief Operating Officer, MOPAC): We have an independent Audit Panel. This is not just about us as MOPAC sitting there and getting reports from the MPS and asking, "Are you doing what you should be doing?" We have four members on the independent Audit Panel who are also asking, "What are you doing in order to manage risk in the organisation? This is a very serious risk. Have you followed up on this?"

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): All right. I do not know. Somehow, there are so many aspects to this work and so many aspects to the problems and I just wonder if the Audit Panel is genuinely the best place for it or if there is other work going on elsewhere to actually ensure that the MPS is dealing with these cases appropriately and not just number-crunching.

Helen Bailey (Chief Operating Officer, MOPAC): You asked me about the Audit Panel process and that is what I have been answering you about - of course there is - and in the conversation I have just been having with Len. The work we are doing with the London Safeguarding Board, the work we are doing directly with colleagues in the MPS and the work we are doing through the London Safeguarding Board is all part of making sure that these processes are being followed and that the MPS is putting the right resources into these cases, absolutely.

Again, the statutory responsibility for making sure that lessons are learned from safeguarding reports sits with the London Safeguarding Board and with Ofsted. What we are doing is making sure that where processes identify that there is a risk to the organisation of not being able to do that, they are picked up and followed. We sit on that London Safeguarding Board and so we absolutely get early sight of a serious issue, where a serious case review is happening, the learning that is going to come out of that and what we need to do as MOPAC to make sure colleagues here are following up on it.

There is also of course the involvement of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC). They came to see us the other day because they are going to be doing regular reviews of this area of activity on an unannounced basis. They came to say that they were going to be doing unannounced reviews of all forces and they have already done reviews of some forces, including some of the larger ones. At some point in the next year or so, they will also be looking at the MPS. They can get into the organisation in a way that we cannot because they have that professional access.

If HMIC says to us, "There are problems here", it will be our job to have some very robust conversations with colleagues about how they restructure and re-organise themselves to do that. Therefore, absolutely the point of talking to them - as I was doing just two days ago - was to say, "Frankly, here are some things we think we would like you to look at a little more. We have a couple of concerns. Here are some things that prima facie we think are going reasonably well. You tell us whether or not we are right. I hope they will over the course of the next year.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): Obviously, what we are trying to get here is some reassurance that Rotherham could not happen here in London.

Helen Bailey (Chief Operating Officer, MOPAC): Indeed.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): Perhaps, AC Dick, you could just tell us a little bit about the HMIC process. Is that starting now or is it --

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): As ever, MOPAC is slightly ahead of us.

Helen Bailey (Chief Operating Officer, MOPAC): Sorry.

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): I know that Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), Dru Sharpling, is meeting with the Commissioner in about a week - and me as well - about child abuse and how they intend to do their inspections in the future in relation to this. However, I am absolutely certain, as Helen has implied, that it will include the learning from serious case reviews and we welcome them coming in. I am sure it will also be looking at the joint approaches, particularly with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): Thank you.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): I want to pick up the work of the Multi-agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASHs), which are supposed to allow for really timely intelligence-sharing. One of the issues that we picked up was a concern about the CAITs being disjointed, as it were, from the MASHs and some weaknesses there. I wonder whether, AC Dick, you could outline what you are doing in terms of looking at how you could bring the CAITs and the MASHs closer together and whether CAITs should actually sit within the MASHs.

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): Again, we are grateful for your report and you highlighted some concerns that you had. It is fair to say that in a sense, however we structure things within the MPS, we are always going to end up with boundaries which may not be ideal. You cannot have a totally permeable system. As an example, as you are well aware, domestic violence is dealt with primarily by our borough teams. There is a very big overlap between domestic violence, social violence and child abuse and so it is absolutely vital that we integrate work on victims and offenders together. Sometimes that can be difficult.

With child abuse investigation, it is absolutely and utterly fundamental that we are in effective partnership arrangements. We have come up with a structure which we think is working well for the CAITs and the Safeguarding Children Boards and we think it is the right structure, but it is a different structure at the moment from the MASH structure. As we look towards the MPS developing in the next few years - and there is a lot of thinking going on about that - clearly one of the issues is the structures within the MPS. I have no doubt how we best support and protect victims and how we best deal with offenders in this area is absolutely high on the agenda there.

Meanwhile, accepting that these arrangements are not all perfect and that the MASHs themselves are still different, as you observed, there is a review going on of the MASHs as we speak. I wrote to the Chair just to mention that and we are looking forward to their report. One of the things it is very crucially looking at is how we can better integrate the MASHs and the CAITs. I do not want to prejudge that, but Keith might have some views that would cover this.

Keith Niven (Temporary Commander, SOECA, MPS): Yes. I fully support the MASHs because MASHs have been born out of mistakes of the past and it is that information exchange. I am very supportive of that.

I have a team of officers that works within the CAITs to take a look at this. We have referral desks that are managed by a sergeant and the MASHs have a sergeant in the MASH itself. Their liaison is quite frequent because they have discussions around that. Because we have somewhere in the region of referral desks, we are looking at whether or not we should have one referral desk that MASHs can then link into so that there is some consistency across our referral desks or whether or not we should embed staff into those MASHs or whether or not the MASHs might join up together. Therefore, all of these issues at the moment are being debated.

We are currently running surveys of MASH staff and our own referral desk staff and there is a whole range of questions that we are asking around that, what the future should like and what their issues are. Then we can judge that.

There is also a strategic board that Cheryl Coppell (Chair, London Safeguarding Children Board) is holding around reviewing the MASHs and the first meeting of that is on 28 January 2015. I am going to go to that meeting because it is going to look at how the MASHs are operating at the moment. They are fairly recent and they are now all in place but they are within their infancy and so there will be a review of that, but we are conducting an independent review of that as well which we will feed into Cheryl and see where that goes.

It could be that we do put CAIT staff into those MASHs. At the moment, as I said, we have only 13 referral desks and there are 30 MASH desks and so we need to work the numbers out. At the moment, we are just

looking at efficiencies and what the best process is: one centralised referral desk for all the CAITs feeding into the MASHs or those CAIT referral desk staff going into the MASHs themselves. However, the relationship between the two managers is on a very frequent basis. The sergeant in the MASH contacts the sergeant in charge of the referral desk and they have those conversations.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): It is good to hear that you are doing a survey of staff because it was quite apparent that the CAIT staff we spoke to did not have much time for the MASH, could not really understand it and were getting the wrong sorts of things referred. On the other side, we saw a MASH where the officer clearly was not senior enough, was not asserting themselves and was not able - as the other agencies were - to say, "Yes, we will take that. We will take this action". Having always been told, "Do not worry. We have an officer in the MASH and everything is now fine", we felt that they were not senior enough and were not able to take on the right level of work for the CAITs. It is how you improve that going forward.

Keith Niven (Temporary Commander, SOECA, MPS): That work should come. We are starting to look at training for the sergeants in the MASHs because our sergeants have been at that level since the CAITs have had referral desks, really, and they have that relationship with the local authority social services. Those sergeants are the managers of those referral desks and they have good relationships with the local authority social services. They make decisions. They have strategy discussions and they make those decisions.

In relation to the MASH, it is in its infancy and so maybe there is some room for training there - which we are trying to get involved in at the moment - to probably bring some more confidence around those sorts of conversations. However, we are available for advice and we do liaise with the MASHs and they know they can contact us at any time if there are issues. The MASH desk will take a referral and will exchange information with the other agencies that are there and then decisions are made about where that would be. Would it be a single-agency investigation? Would it be joint and come to the CAIT? Would it go to the borough for further investigation? That is the process, but I totally accept that the experience and knowledge of the individuals in there is something that training should be able to rectify and certainly address.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): It is a question whether a sergeant is the right level of post in there and also whether the person in there is someone who is, as it were, on desk duty and heading for retirement or someone who is really proactive. That is it because we did observe exactly that exchange of information and that debate and discussion about who would take on actions and it felt to us that the police were not as engaged as they should have been in that debate. Obviously, it was an afternoon we observed, but --

Keith Niven (Temporary Commander, SOECA, MPS): The review will bring that out and then those areas that we need to address. Training is certainly fundamental, but we should pick up whether there are any issues as well that we can look at and see if we can identify.

However, I am very much a supporter of the actual MASH process because it is a safeguard that we have needed. I do support it and we need to continue to support it.

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): Chair, if I may, I would probably push back a little bit on the rank question but we absolutely need the right people with the right skills and with the right purchase in the organisation. We do have that in some places, but we probably do not have it everywhere. We need to put that right.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): Thank you.

Len Duvall AM: Can we turn to the issue of the specific crime of witchcraft and some of the complex challenges you are facing with that? In terms of some of the issues that I would like to ask you about, what do you think are the specific challenges for the MPS in investigations linked to allegations of witchcraft and spirit possession?

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): Chair, perhaps I might kick off and Keith will tidy me up, no doubt. It is a very challenging area. Firstly, we are talking about people's beliefs and these beliefs are genuinely believed. Some of those beliefs are related specifically to religion and some are beliefs that are very strong in particular groups or particular communities.

The first thing is that often the issue is hidden from the authorities and from the police for a variety of reasons. Gaining intelligence and understanding what is going on is certainly a challenge here.

The second thing is that the 'crime', if you like, can have very few hints that it is going to happen beforehand. You can go from nothing to something that is sometimes absolutely terrible in a very short space of time.

Thirdly, we have a challenge across the partnership in terms of our officers broadly, social service and everybody understanding and their ability to see the signs. We have been doing a whole load of work on that recently, as you probably are aware.

Fourthly, of course, it is a very emotive issue which can easily get front-page news and can cause divisions within communities or rifts between groups or between groups and the police or social services.

This is a sensitive area. It is a hidden area, often. It is potentially a very dangerous area and it is one where we are still getting increasing referrals coming in. We do not really understand the whole scale of the problem, but there is a huge amount of momentum behind it now within our communities and we are beginning to get a lot more help from the public in helping us to identify and intervene.

Len Duvall AM: Is it fair to say that the majority may well come from African Christian churches, but you also have evidence of it taking place in European and South Asian communities as well? It is not prevalent just in black African communities. There are a smaller number of cases --

Keith Niven (Temporary Commander, SOECA, MPS): It is across the board. It is. Just recently we launched a protocol around witchcraft and faith-based abuse, which was something that we launched here. That was really to give professionals an understanding of what the signs are that they may need to look for because they are very hidden and disguised in many ways behind a shroud of religion.

What needs to be made very clear is that there is absolutely no justification. This is child abuse. There is no cultural defence to this. This is child abuse. From my own experience when I investigated the murder of Victoria Climbié [Ivorian girl murdered in London], it was the claim as well that she had been possessed by evil spirits. She was just a little girl growing up. That was the reality. They abused her physically. That is what this is. It is physical abuse. In her case, it was being made to stand in front of a lot of people in a church and being exorcised. That was abuse.

What was really very moving when we launched the protocol was that we had a Congolese lady who gave her account. We may have supplied the video to you. It is a very moving account. She was there. She was live. She talked very passionately about the abuse that she suffered in a variety of ways. It is about spotting the signs and we have launched that protocol. What was quite pertinent about it was that at the end of that particular week we had a referral from social services and it was actually in relation to faith abuse.

We are very strong around this. We want to encourage more people to report. It is very under-reported. Communities tend not to report it to us. If we do not see the physical signs, there is difficulty around that, but there is psychological damage here as well. It is around education, health and police officers themselves so that they can spot those signs when they go into the addresses, which they do on a regular basis, and what they need to look for. It is not all physical abuse. It can be psychological as well.

Len Duvall AM: To be fair, while the professionals are doing that, the communities are actually having their own conversations. There are specific groups that you are working with. Africans Unite Against Child Abuse is one of those groups.

Given that conversation and given what you said, Cressida, about the sensitivities around that, the MPS does respond really well. Yes, sometimes it does not get it right, but in the majority of cases it does. In the preventative work here in terms of policing, is there more that we can do on the awareness of professionals to identify issues and actually having the conversation and explaining to people what abuse is?

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): Yes.

Len Duvall AM: It is a difficult one because of beliefs and all the rest of it. One of the central charges against agencies from the media and people thinking about Rotherham was this reluctance of state agencies to intervene because it was sensitive. Whether it happened or not, whatever the case may be, particularly in terms of this crime, what can the police do to reassure that there is not that reluctance? You investigate crime. Where does the preventative side come into this strategy?

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): Of course, I could be proven wrong, but we were discussing this a few days ago and whether we could think of examples where we felt that the charge could properly be laid at our door that the MPS has flinched from a difficult issue - and we were talking specifically about this one, actually - because of the reaction we might have or the misunderstandings there might be. We do not feel we have been flinching. I would take you back to the case of the boy who was found in the Thames, 'Adam' [Nigerian murder victim]. The MPS was absolutely at the forefront of setting up and working with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and new communities arriving in London to do more and more conversation and prevention to work and to explain to people that abuse is abuse is abuse. We will investigate it and people will be prosecuted and they will go to prison.

I have no doubt that there is more we can do to reach into communities, but we do have a lot of support. I do not think we flinch at all and I do not think we will. I am sure we will not.

Keith Niven (Temporary Commander, SOECA, MPS): If you take FGM, for example, we certainly have not flinched with FGM. We have been right out in the centre there. There are cultural issues there that we know we have to address, but we certainly have not shied away from that. We have been very forward-facing.

Len Duvall AM: Helen, it is not just the police in terms of dealing with this. It is all agencies. Is this not one where there is a bit of proactivity around saying that, actually, you need to be on top of this? Part of the Safeguarding Board is about prevention. How are you engaging with those communities in terms of the religious institutions where this may well be taking place? What information are you providing to them? Are we being very clear and identifying good practice? In London in terms of 30-odd London boroughs, where is the good practice on this and where is the preventative role?

Helen Bailey (Chief Operating Officer, MOPAC): You are completely right and I completely agree with you. Our contribution to that - because it can only be a contribution to that - is that we have commissioned a harmful practices pilot. We are going to be working with two parts of London, two groups of boroughs. One is the 'tri-borough' - Westminster, Hammersmith and Fulham and Kensington and Chelsea - and the other is Waltham Forest and Tower Hamlets. We are commissioning at the moment.

As I sit here and speak to you, we are out looking for a third sector partner to work with us to try to understand how best we both get information out to communities and information back in from communities about exactly those issues and to have those conversations. I can - and I am sure we are saying on every occasion - that this is something we should look at and something we should be worried about. It is not just witchcraft. It is not just FGM. It is everything that gets that 'cultural difficulty' label. It is honour-based violence. It is forced marriage. It is all of those things as well. How do we get those conversations going? Is there something we could learn? We are very much hoping that over the next weeks and months when we have that provider in place, we will have somebody who can on our behalf say what good and bad practice is so that we can share it around the place. We are very much looking forward to taking from that.

Len Duvall AM: That sounds like an excellent project and no doubt at the right time it will be shared with this panel because it does have wider implications in terms of other crimes and prevention of other crimes.

If we look at the nature of child abuse, there are the features of control, intimidation and - though it might be the wrong word - manipulation in many ways. If we accept and if we seem to be moving to learning that actually domestic violence is not just physical and if there is talk about creating laws around that, is it not time that we started to think that way about the issue of 'witch-branding' - being named and being put in front of a group of people or others and being branded as a witch - as part of a charge to try to get the courts to understand the real nature of this abuse? It is not just physical. It is not just sexual. It is mental as well. Somehow, should those professionals not all be coming together to say that actually we now need to start challenging that?

Maybe you tell us some of the challenges for police officers trying to determine if it was in a legal view because I know that it has probably been discussed in other places in terms of the professional issues around that. Is this one area where, if there was a piece of legislation that went through Parliament in relation to domestic violence, we should seek to put an amendment related to issues of child exploitation and child abuse?

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): I would say that your analysis is exactly right and I would add one extra bit into it, which is that very often the person who tells the parents or the family that this child is possessed by a spirit, let us say, and needs a certain type of activity is often actually someone who is extraordinarily manipulative and is frequently making a great deal of money out of this. There is something there for us to investigate as well. They have their congregation under their spell, if you like, and they are doing very nicely out of it.

It is absolutely the full gamut of abuse: physical, yes; neglect sometimes; sexual abuse frequently; and as you say, sometimes purely emotional and psychological. We will always intervene and deal with anything and we will always see what has happened. If, for example, some poor child - and we have all seen videos of this - was being put in the middle of a room and was being shouted at and was terrified, we would see that as abuse and we would investigate it as abuse.

I have not put my mind to whether we need any change in law. I do not know, Keith, whether you have.

Keith Niven (Temporary Commander, SOECA, MPS): The memories are still raw of Victoria [Climbié] and Kristy Bamu [French boy murdered in London] because they are the cases that obviously come to light.

I am just looking in front of me at some of the offences that are associated. There is the sexual abuse, the grievous bodily harm (GBH), the murders and the common assaults. There are the offences of allowing or causing the death of a child and allowing or causing GBH to a child as well. These are all parts of the law that are available to us.

As to whether we need to move to another piece of legislation as well, I am not sure that we do, but it is certainly something that we could look at and consider. If we feel restricted by the laws we have and if there is a case that we deal with where we think that actually there should be an offence that covered exactly what you are saying, then that is a discussion for us to have with the CPS. At the moment, some of these are at the most serious end of the laws we have and so homicide is --

Len Duvall AM: There is no specific law covering the issue of 'witch-branding', if we can call it that, the naming of --

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): No, there is not, Chair. I rather rudely looked to my colleagues behind, who are frontline practitioners, and ask what they think because, as you very well know, Len, they usually know better than us. Ian thinks the law is broad and strong for us in this instance and he does not immediately think we need that specifically. We could still deal with it without having that. We should think about it.

Len Duvall AM: If there were changes in relation to domestic violence and a move towards that - and there does seem to be a trend in Parliament towards looking at that, whether there has been a discussion with professional police officers or others - and if it was drafted in a way, would this be an area for contention to be added to it?

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): Perhaps we should go away and answer more thoughtfully, Chair, but actually we have a lot that helps us deal with emotional abuse of children already.

Len Duvall AM: Thank you for that. It might be useful to let the panel know what those bits are on the emotional side and how that would reflect in the courts and what charges you would lay. Maybe it is the case that if we have it for children, we might well have it somewhere in the bylaws for women facing domestic violence.

Keith Niven (Temporary Commander, SOECA, MPS): Certainly physical and emotional abuse can form part of legislation because the damage and the impact can be very significant. Although physically it might not be seen, it actually still forms part of the physical and emotional abuse.

Len Duvall AM: In the existing law?

Keith Niven (Temporary Commander, SOECA, MPS): Yes, in the existing law.

Len Duvall AM: Thank you.

James Cleverly AM: I know it was mentioned that whilst this issue is not entirely restricted to African communities and black African-majority churches, in the cases thus far it has been the single largest

demographic indicated and it dwarfs the others by quite some margin. Do we run the risk of shying away from intervening more directly because of concerns around cultural sensitivity?

I know you are going to say 'no', but how can we really test that? I know we are coming on to Rotherham in the future questioning, but there have been a number of examples where agencies including police forces have said very categorically, "We go where we see indications of criminal activity", and then we look back at incidents and see that whilst that has been said very passionately and regularly, there is evidence that there have been some massive failures to pursue potential cases because of cultural sensitivity. Therefore, I do not want a quick 'no'. I want to know exactly. I want an evidence base. How can you convince me that we will not, when we look back at a serious case, see evidence that the MPS or other agencies in this area have shied away because of cultural sensitivities?

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): I am not going to give you a quick 'no', but we dealt with this to some extent in an earlier question. I would absolutely accept that there are communities in London, newer communities in particular, that we do not have sufficient understanding, sources of intelligence or co-operation in parts for us to be absolutely clear about what is going on. I have been a chief officer in the MPS for 13 years. We have been working away all the time to try to keep up with the changing demographics of London and to get support and access and our advocates, if you like, within communities to help explain the law, to help us understand what is going on, to give us intelligence and to help us be able to prosecute.

I accept there are parts of some communities - including some black African communities - where we are not sufficiently yet trusted and sufficiently knowledgeable to be certain of what is happening and as certain of what is happening as we are in some other communities. As I said before, I could be proven wrong but I cannot think of an instance when we have flinched away and I am certain that we will not. I just do not think that fear of cultural sensitivities puts off investigating at all.

What it may do is make us think that we need to take some further advice and we need to understand those sensitivities and we need to be sure that we can stop the ridiculous headlines by explaining ourselves better. We may stop and think, but we will not deviate and we will carry on and investigate things. However, I would accept that there are parts of our communities that we do not know as well as we should and all the agencies would say the same.

James Cleverly AM: One of the big challenges - and I know you mentioned it specifically - of course with this is that, unlike many other crime types, there are often very few ways of detecting an escalation of severity. Even with things like domestic violence and with a lot of murder cases, there is an escalation of offences. Often with witchcraft-related abuse, it can go from absolutely nothing at all to very severe abuse very quickly. That does not give you or other agencies very much time.

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): Absolutely. That is true.

James Cleverly AM: What key indicators at a very early stage have been identified or could be identified that could give a clue about who the future victims are? As I say, from that initial exposure to the very severest end, sometimes those timescales can be days.

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): Yes, that is absolutely right. I have said that. We both have spoken to officers who have gone to scenes of terrible crimes and have been really astonished to realise that there were no signs that that escalation was about to happen or was happening until, as you say, just a few days before.

We have produced a video, which, as we said, we launched here not long ago and which is going to all our frontline officers and all our social services colleagues. We have a checklist that is available on our intranet everybody with signs and tips to look out for. There is a very good book, actually, that I was just thinking I would send to you, Chair, which has been written by a former police officer who is now very heavily involved with safeguarding in churches. We are finding that the churches are getting very heavily involved in their duty to safeguard and also their duty, if you like, to go and look at other more 'informal' churches, for want of a better word.

There are some clear areas. We both have the list in front of us. I am not sure whether you want us to read it out, but there are some things we are saying to our staff that they just have to be looking out for. If they are in any doubt at all, they should put their hands up and say, "I am concerned about this".

Keith Niven (Temporary Commander, SOECA, MPS): Chair, we need to demystify it a little bit. It is child abuse. For example, schools are the eyes and ears of child protection. That is why we have launched the protocol around professionals so that they can spot the signs, but it just reinforces to people that it may be signs of other abuse. It does not necessarily have to be related to faith-based abuse. It could be any abuse at all as long as people are aware of what those signs are. Is that child acting any differently? Are there injuries suddenly appearing on that child?

There are very well-laid-down referral processes with safeguarding leads in schools as well, but we want them to know that actually for this, like for many other crimes, we should create environments where people feel comfortable to talk about it. There is terror at the heart of all of these. I will go back to FGM as well. People are terrorised into not talking about it and not understanding what it is. If you are led to believe that this is the way we grow up, you might not see that as being different and may not tell anyone about it. Yes, we have to enforce the law, but also we have to educate not only communities but children as well so that they feel comfortable to talk about this and disclose. Very few children disclose abuse to the police. It is normally a third party who will come in and disclose it. We need to make sure those third parties understand what it is.

Therefore, yes, there is a community issue there, but it is child abuse and a lot of those signs are the same as they would be for any form of child abuse.

James Cleverly AM: The majority of African pastors are not involved in these kinds of practices, but the majority of these practices do involve African pastors. They are pretty well publicised. That is very much part of the cultural realm. There are billboards. I live in Lewisham and there are very high-profile and quite expensive advertising campaigns for them. Although it is a subset where the problem lies, in totality it is not a hidden set of people and it is growing very significantly. It is a very fast-growth area.

Are you allocating resources? I suppose, Cressida, it is you that I am focusing on here. Are you allocating resources, whether that be people, time or whatever, to match that very dramatic increase in the universal set of people from which this subset is, unfortunately, typically drawn?

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): I am not sure I have looked at it quite like that. Maybe I should have done. As Keith says, when we think of it as safeguarding or offending, it is a subset of other safeguarding and offending. It is, as you say, concentrated in certain groups and certain communities and we are putting a huge amount of effort in this issue. That includes working incredibly closely in a number of boroughs, with the other agencies and also with churches and with community groups, and we do recognise that it is a crime that we are going to understand more and we are going to get more reports of. I do not know whether there is getting to be more of it, but we are definitely going to be dealing with more of it and we want

to get better and better at dealing with it. I do not have the intelligence that tells me that there is more of it happening now than there was five years ago, say.

James Cleverly AM: OK.

Keith Niven (Temporary Commander, SOECA, MPS): The reporting numbers are still very low, albeit that they are --

James Cleverly AM: They are so low that any kind of trend analysis is almost impossible, is it not?

Keith Niven (Temporary Commander, SOECA, MPS): It is very difficult.

James Cleverly AM: The variations from one year to the other are --

Keith Niven (Temporary Commander, SOECA, MPS): Yes.

James Cleverly AM: OK.

Keith Niven (Temporary Commander, SOECA, MPS): It is very difficult. Again, it is under-reported, but by bringing this to the fore - and this is something that this group is doing, which is to be welcomed, and the launch that we had a month ago - it is about providing people with knowledge and education and that actually if you see something that might fit the criteria of child abuse, however it is disguised, it needs to be reported to local authorities or to police so that we can actually do something about it. In there are the same offences as there are for all levels of child abuse.

James Cleverly AM: Thank you.

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): Taking Len's point, it is all about prevention. Having listened to you, we will go back and ask ourselves if we should be doing more to go head-on into some of these groups as the police or if we should, as we have been, relying more on others to do that for us and with us.

James Cleverly AM: It just strikes me that - and I understand you are saying you need to be careful about what we explicitly criminalise - if a child is named as a witch in a church, then that is not going to have a good outcome.

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): It is not, no.

James Cleverly AM: It might not have as severe an outcome as some others. It may well be that that pastor sells a bottle of medicine oil for £500, and all we have seen, and so is perhaps something which might be thought of as fraud, and that might be the best outcome --

Cressida Dick (Assistant Commissioner, MPS): Yes, and we have talked about that already.

James Cleverly AM: -- or it could be that we find that child abused to death a week later. We know there is not going to be a good outcome if someone is named as a witch in a church.

Keith Niven (Temporary Commander, SOECA, MPS): If I can interject, if a child is named as a witch, it is emotional abuse.

James Cleverly AM: Thank you.

Helen Bailey (Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime): Can I check that you have finished with me? I was advised that you would have at this stage.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): Yes, we have.

Helen Bailey (Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime): Thank you very much.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): Thank you for your attendance, Helen. It has been appreciated today.

Helen Bailey (Chief Operating Officer, MOPAC): No, thank you.