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Theresa May

May dodges questions about MI5 failure to act on MP paedophile fears

Home secretary refuses to say whether she asked security service about why it did not follow up suspicions that MP had 'penchant for small boys'



Theresa May arrives at Brixton Recreation Centre in south London where she delivered a speech on relationships between the police and the public. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

Vikram Dodd and Andrew Sparrow

Thursday 23 July 2015
12.04 EDT

 This article is 12 months old

[Theresa May](#) has refused to say whether she asked MI5 about why it failed to act on suspicions that a senior MP was a paedophile.

The home secretary – responsible for the domestic security service – ducked questions about the disclosure that the security services feared an unnamed MP had “a penchant for small boys” but accepted his denials, apparently because it feared causing political embarrassment to Margaret Thatcher’s government.

[Documents released on Wednesday](#) showed that the former director general of MI5 corresponded with the cabinet secretary, Sir Robert Armstrong, in 1986 about the concerns. The letter from Sir Anthony Duff to Armstrong said: “At the present stage ... the risks of political embarrassment to the government is rather greater than the

security danger.”

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The MP concerned was not named in the papers. The previously unreleased files also referred to figures including Thatcher’s former home secretary, [Leon Brittan](#), her parliamentary private secretary, the late Sir Peter Morrison, former diplomat Sir Peter Hayman and former minister Sir William van Straubenzee.

Asked by reporters whether she had questioned [MI5](#) about its decision not to pursue its suspicions, May said it would be a matter for the Goddard inquiry into child sexual abuse.

Pressed on whether she had asked any senior MI5 official to explain the apparent disregard for child abuse in the documents, she said: “The Goddard inquiry is the body looking into all these issues.”

She added: “The reason I set up the Goddard inquiry is to get to the heart of what was happening in the past and more recently.”

The home secretary was speaking after an address on greater transparency around deaths in police custody, where she expressed the families of victims’ desire for quick and honest answers from the authorities. Her aides stopped reporters asking more questions on the issue of historical sexual abuse.

On Wednesday, the Home Office said it had passed the correspondence about the MP, along with other papers, to the authors of an [official review](#) into whether allegations of child abuse were covered up by the Home Office in the 1980s.

The review, carried out by Peter Wanless, chief executive of the NSPCC, and barrister Richard Whittam, concluded earlier this year. The authors said they were “concerned and disappointed” about not being told about the documents earlier, and said the letter from Duff was a “striking example” of how crimes against children were not considered as seriously as they would be today.

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“The risk to children is not considered at all,” Wanless said in [a supplement to the review](#), published online on Wednesday.

The documents came to light after the Home Office conducted a fresh search of its archive.

David Cameron said the police should pursue any evidence of historical child abuse “without any fear, without any uncertainty about how high up they can go”.

“They can go as high as they like,” he said, speaking to reporters on a visit to the Royal Welsh Show on Thursday. “These are terrible crimes. That’s why we have set up the Goddard inquiry, which I think will get to the bottom of a lot of the problems in the past.

“But these are still to me, you know, live investigations. If there is intelligence, if there is information, get it to the police, and the police, where appropriate, should take action.”

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