

# Greater Manchester Police chief admits force 'were borderline incompetent over Rochdale grooming gangs'

From the [Manchester Evening News](#)

The Chief Constable of Greater Manchester Police has admitted the force were "borderline incompetent" in their handling of the Rochdale grooming gangs.

Stephen Watson also said that officers working for the police force at the time "parked an element of professional curiosity" in the way it dealt with the issue. He said it was something he had been assured is now "radically different."

It comes after GMP [agreed to pay substantial damages to three victims](#). All were children when they were repeatedly raped and sexually abused by gangs of men in Rochdale.

Mr Watson also offered the women an in-person apology for the police failings in their cases – namely mistakes in not investigating the abusers, and often treating the girls as perpetrators and not victims.

The Chief Constable today (19 April) acknowledged that his predecessors had "failed" children in the past, and said that under his leadership, cases are dealt with very differently. *(we hope; it's not a police responsibility but there is the little matter of the un-deported [perpetrators still roaming the Rochdale Asda, intimidating victims](#))*

Mr Watson became the head of GMP in 2021. Police failings, which were highlighted in previous reviews of grooming gangs operating in Greater Manchester happened under the likes of

previous chief constables including Sir Peter Fahy.

The women, backed by lawyers from the Centre for Women's Justice (CWJ) charity, brought a legal claim against GMP that said, according to legal documents, that from the early 2000s there was growing evidence from multiple allegations that gangs of predominantly Asian men were grooming, trafficking and sexually abusing predominantly white working-class girls in Rochdale.

Lawyers for the three successfully argued their human rights were breached by GMP failing to protect them by putting a stop to the abuse. This included failing to record crimes, investigate offenders, collect intelligence, or charge and prosecute abusers.

Instead of child victims of sexual abuse, the three were viewed by police as "bad" or "unreliable" witnesses and were sometimes arrested themselves while reporting abuse, the women said. Though the abuse was happening "in plain sight", a police operation to tackle the gangs was [closed down abruptly](#) in 2004, despite police and social services having the names of the men involved and their victims.