

THE TIMES

Crime

Calls for new inquiry into Poppi Worthington's death

John Simpson, Crime Correspondent

20 Jan 2016 16:51:08

Police and prosecutors were under pressure last night to reopen an investigation into a father found likely to have sexually assaulted his 13-month-old daughter shortly before her death.

Mr Justice Peter Jackson, a High Court judge, ruled that 48-year-old Paul Worthington, on the balance of probabilities, “perpetrated a penetrative . . . assault” on daughter Poppi but he will not face criminal action unless new evidence comes to light.

Sir Simon Hughes, a former justice minister in the coalition government, said the “very fact” that the judge had made the findings public “must give cause for the authorities who deal with criminal matters to look again at the evidence”.

The Liberal Democrat said “justice demands” that the original decisions in the criminal investigation are reviewed and called for the Crown Prosecution Service to reopen the case.

He told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: “I'm sure that they will review the case, I'm sure that that is the right thing that should happen.

“If the justice system is about not just justice for the deceased but to make sure that the welfare of the children who are still alive is best looked after, then it must be in the interests of justice that there is a review now as to whether there was any criminal liability for anything that led to the death of this poor little child.”

Poppi collapsed with serious injuries at her home in Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria, in December 2012 and was pronounced dead in hospital.

Cumbria police conducted no “real” investigation for nine months, the judge found, as senior detectives thought a pathologist “may have jumped to conclusions” in her belief that the child had been a victim of abuse.

The girl was buried in February 2013, precluding a further post-mortem examination, after her body was released by the local coroner.

There is now said to be an “absence of evidence” to find out how Poppi died, or definitively prove if, or how, she was injured.

Mr Worthington was arrested in August 2013 and questioned on suspicion of sexual assault but was not charged with any offence. He strenuously denies any wrongdoing.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has previously said that it conducted “a thorough review of the evidence” but decided it was insufficient to provide a realistic prospect of conviction.

However, on the basis of the lower standard of proof applied in the civil and family courts, Mr Justice Peter Jackson ruled that Mr Worthington had sexually assaulted his 13-month-old daughter.

Speaking in the Commons today John Woodcock, Labour MP for Barrow, urged a renewed police investigation under the lead of an outside force “to salvage some prospect of justice.”

He told Karen Bradley, a Home Office minister: “The combined failure of several agencies is every bit as serious as those which contributed to the deaths of Victoria Climbié and of Baby Peter in Haringey. Will the government make clear that it values Poppi’s life as greatly by ordering now a similarly thorough independent investigation into how the failings happened? Will they . . . order a separate force to come in and take over the investigation into Poppi Worthington’s death to try to salvage some prospect of justice for her life?”

Yvette Cooper, former shadow home secretary, also insisted that there is no need to wait for the outcome of a second inquest into the baby’s death.

“What we need is a police investigation now into this individual case — and could that be done by an alternative police force?”

Opening her reply to an urgent question on the case, Ms Bradley said the IPCC (Independent Police Complaints Commission) has investigated Cumbria police’s handling of the original investigation. “The IPCC report is completed but cannot be released yet so as not to prejudice the second inquest.”

She added: “This government is committed to tackling child sexual abuse but I know that’s of little consolation to the family of Poppi Worthington.”

Elsbeth Thomson, national committee member with Resolution, the association of family lawyers, said: “It is surprising and very difficult to see how criminal charges were not brought in this horrendously grim case. Something seems to have clearly gone wrong and the case should be referred back to the CPS, which should definitely review the file.”

However, she warned that after all the media reports, a fair trial would be impossible — even though the case was “exactly the type of case the media should be reporting on as it is legitimately in the public interest.”

The family court had acted correctly, she added. “Special care has been taken to protect the other children – and the approach in dealing with potential media cover, the extended reporting restrictions – has worked well.

Related Images



Social workers tried to keep details of Poppi Worthington's death secret

Internet

Publisher: News UK & Ireland Ltd

Published Date: 20 Jan 2016 16:51:08

Article Id: 25733891 Version: 2

Word Count: 785

Character Count: 3793



Reproduced by NLA media access with permission from the Publisher. May not be copied or otherwise reproduced without express permission.