

Press release: Investment boss banned after misappropriating client's £800,000

On 27 March 2018 the County Court at Lincoln made a disqualification order banning Stewart Mark Groves from being a director of a limited company for 10 years.

Stewart Groves (37), of Bawtry, Doncaster, was the director of Rapid Finance Ltd. Incorporated in August 2013, the company was set-up to make investments on behalf of a single investor.

With an initial investment of half-a-million pounds, Stewart Groves managed the company under a shareholder and loan agreement.

However, the court ordered the company be wound up in September 2015 following petitions by the sole investor, which triggered further investigations by the Insolvency Service.

Investigators revealed that instead of making legitimate investments, Stewart Groves transferred a significant proportion of the money he was trusted to invest into his own accounts.

To cover his tracks, Stewart Groves twice supplied false reports to the investor, including falsified bank statements and accounts, so that they believed he was investing as agreed. These reports encouraged further investments of more than £300,000.

Over the course of two years, more than £800,000 was invested in the company and more than £700,000 of it was transferred to accounts belonging to him and connected parties, without the investor being made aware.

Effective from 17 April 2018, Stewart Groves is banned for 10 years from directly or indirectly becoming involved, without the permission of the court, in the promotion, formation or management of a company.

Gerard O'Hare, Chief Investigator for the Insolvency Service, said:

Stewart Groves intentionally misled the company's sole investor into believing his funds were being invested securely and the false reports supplied even lead to more money being provided.

This behaviour will not be tolerated and this ban should serve as a warning to other directors tempted to act in a similar way that they have a duty to act in the best interests of the company – not themselves.

There has been a separate criminal investigation into Stewart Groves by South Yorkshire Police that found him guilty of fraud by misrepresentation and has led to an eight-and-a-half-year prison term.

Stewart Groves is of Bawtry, Doncaster, and his date of birth is May 1982.

Rapid Finance Limited (Company number 08632668).

The order was pronounced by Deputy District Judge Cooper in the County Court at Lincoln.

Alan Draycott appeared for the Insolvency Service and Mr Delaney the solicitor for the Defendant and the Defendant in person.

A disqualification order has the effect that without specific permission of a court, a person with a disqualification cannot:

- act as a director of a company
- take part, directly or indirectly, in the promotion, formation or management of a company or limited liability partnership
- be a receiver of a company's property

Disqualification undertakings are the administrative equivalent of a disqualification order but do not involve court proceedings.

Persons subject to a disqualification order are bound by a [range of other restrictions](#).

Further information about the work of the Insolvency Service, and how to complain about financial misconduct, is [available](#).

You can also follow the Insolvency Service on:

[Speech: Lead Commissioner's speech to the Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right Conference](#)

Thank you to Matthew, Will and the team for inviting me to the Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right's inaugural conference.

It's an honour to open such an exciting and timely event.

It is by no means easy to work in the field of counter extremism.

You are often met with abuse and hostility. So, thank you for your work and commitment to this really important cause.

I'm here – like you all – to discuss, debate and, above all, learn.

As Lead Commissioner for Countering Extremism, I want to help all of us better understand the threat of extremism and find more effective ways to challenge it.

This is an important moment in the Commission's work.

We are working on a study into all forms of extremism for the Home Secretary.

As we come to the end of our evidence-gathering, we are analysing a huge amount of material and beginning the job of crafting the findings into a major report.

An emerging picture is forming of extremism in England and Wales.

It manifests itself in radicalisation, violence and terror.

But, also in a patchwork of dangerous individuals and groups who spread hatred and intolerance.

We are also witnessing a worrying mainstreaming of intolerance and prejudice.

These different phenomena are all linked by ideas, networks and the harm they cause to individuals, communities and wider society.

I want us to develop a toolkit of tailored and effective responses to counter-extremism.

These responses should be underpinned by collaboration between academics, practitioners and policy-makers – a virtuous circle of robust research, new and improved interventions, evaluation and sharing best practice.

This is part of what I call a whole society response.

Today's conference, the speakers, the panels and the report you are publishing are an important contribution to this.

My work covers all forms of extremism – Islamist extremism, far right extremism and other forms of religious or single issue-based extremism.

Threat of the far right

Today at this conference we are considering the threat we face from the far right or radical right.

I was travelling to Birmingham in March as news broke of the terrorist attack in Christchurch.

I met with Mosque representatives and Muslim community activists – we shared in the shock that someone could target worshippers in such a horrific way.

The Prime Minister of New Zealand is today meeting with world leaders to

discuss challenging extremism online. I welcome her leadership on this issue.

The attack in Christchurch had frightening echoes of the attack last year on a Synagogue in Pittsburgh and the recent atrocities in Sri Lanka.

And such violent extremism is sadly familiar to us.

My Commission was announced a year after the murder of MP Jo Cox and shortly before Makram Ali was murdered in Finsbury Park.

Police and security services have foiled four extreme right-wing plots in the last few years.

We have seen a rise in Prevent referrals for far right concerns.

Violent far right extremism is a grave and serious threat – and one the government rightly takes very seriously.

But as I have travelled the country I have also heard about the rise of radical right activists who exploit tensions to spread anti-minority hatred.

I have been looking closely at a series of protests and demonstrations in Sunderland, for example.

I've spoken to the police, to the council, to local faith leaders, to the editor of the local paper and to community members.

Sunderland also demonstrates the role of 'radical right' eco-system.

Activists saw Sunderland as an opportunity. They came from across the country – and even from abroad – to the city to whip up hatred. They make videos and paid for billboards.

Residents, communities and the city as a whole suffered.

A mosque representative cried as he told me that because of his willingness to stand up to far right campaigners, his home and work details had been put on Facebook by far right activists alongside false claims that he was a paedophile.

In the report released today, Matthew argues that Anti-Muslim Hatred has entered mainstream discourse and he cites the appalling numbers of Anti-Muslim attacks – both online and offline.

This is borne out in the hate crime figures which show a 40% rise in religiously motivated attacks and in the many conversations I've had with community leaders, experts and activists up and down the country.

On a visit to Teesside University last week, researchers told me how narratives promoted by far right activists are also being shared widely by young people in this area.

Hope Not Hate polling shows 47% of the British public think there are no-go areas in Britain where sharia law dominates, and non-Muslims cannot enter.

I am worried that the mainstream is becoming a more hospitable place for the radical right and anti-Muslim hatred.

Intro to the Commission / our journey

These are worrying times.

It's the right time for this conference to be discussing innovative approaches.

And it's why my Commission is looking into the threat of extremism and what more we can do as a society to counter it.

I bring to this role a commitment to engage widely and take an evidence-based approach.

My first move was a tour of the country to get a snap-shot of the challenge of extremism and understand better the local response.

It helped me start to build the picture of threat.

Experts also warned that social media has been a game-changer, allowing extremists to spread conspiracy theories and disinformation, amplifying their hatred and their activities further and faster than ever before.

They described a far right online eco-system, which is thriving in a polarised environment supported by online structures that reinforces views and result in echo chambers.

And I have been inspired by the brave stories of individuals and groups – many of them just ordinary members of the public – who have stood up to hatred and extremism.

I met many unsung heroes who are the backbone of our country demonstrating unrelenting courage – often receiving more abuse than support.

I saw the power of community-based, collaborative and innovative interventions – whether it was using music to draw young people away from the far right or an Imam combining his knowledge of the Quran and social media to challenge Islamist narratives.

Call for evidence and academic papers

I wanted to give more people the chance to share their views and experiences – so we ran the first ever public call for evidence receiving almost 3,000 responses.

Thank you to those in this room who contributed.

We are currently pulling together the statistics and will publish them shortly.

I must admit that I was shocked at the number of people who said they had

witnessed extremism either in their local area or online.

I was also struck by the variety of extremisms – not just far right or Islamist, but far left, Sikh and Hindu extremism and animal rights extremism.

But what the call for evidence does above all is shine a light on the harms of extremism.

Which go beyond radicalisation or hate crime.

I've read page-after-page of powerful and disturbing testimony of the way in which extremism of all kinds has a deep impact on individuals, on communities and on wider society.

I was really struck by how hate and bigotry occur within a community, because individual identity is not respected.

Whole communities also suffer harm from extremism.

In its submission to our call for evidence, the Local Government Association said extremism disrupted the life of local communities, affecting businesses and deterring residents and visitors from going into their town centres.

I heard the powerful message that when extremism takes hold all of society suffers – it undermines our democracy, our fundamental freedoms and rich diversity.

We want to examine this in greater depth and we're now working with King's College London to analyse our call for evidence data and develop a typology of harm that will lay the foundation for a much deeper understanding of extremism and for further work.

This brings me on to the 30 academics who are working on short papers for us, that we have commissioned. On the far right, on Islamism, on the drivers of extremism, extremism online and approaches to counter extremism.

Some of them might be here today. I'm grateful for their work and to the many other academics who submitted proposals and to those involved in the peer review.

The papers have been debated at a conference and are going through a peer-review as we speak. I hope to publish them in the coming weeks.

I want to share a few talking points about the far right.

I have commissioned 3 papers – one giving an overview of the far right, one looking at the mainstreaming of the far right and one focused on National Action, and the links between far right, extremism and terrorism.

The papers underline the complexity of the far right and the need for a nuanced understanding of shared narratives but also the differences – in ideology as well as methods.

It's important to distinguish groups like National Action whose stated commitment to a more explicit and 'pure' form of nationalism and whose embrace of violence marks them out from the patchwork of radical right activists who have emerged in the last few years.

This must go hand-in-hand with a better understanding of the relationship between ideology and violence, looking for example at how the group transitioned from non-violent to violent.

At the other end of the spectrum, I was struck by the complex relationship between radical right activists and the mainstreaming of certain ideas, such as political correctness, anti-elitism and anti-Muslim hatred.

In fact, as one of our papers argues, one of the reasons the modern far right is resonating beyond its traditional base is because they sidestepped the cordon sanitaire by adopting these populist platforms.

This is not a comfortable thing to think about.

But recognising the role that wider societal beliefs can play in normalising extremism is an important first step.

What more we should do

We have engaged widely, we've gathered important evidence and we're now looking at how we can improve our response to extremism.

I believe we need a whole society response and a better, more nuanced counter-extremism toolkit.

In 2015 the government brought out the first counter extremism strategy.

It was a landmark moment, which drove work at a national and local level – including creating the network of excellent local coordinators and funding some vital community work.

But we have to ask, has the strategy itself kept pace with the changing threat of extremism, does it acknowledge the complexity of the harms and does it give us the toolkit of responses we need?

And how can we make sure we do this in a way that not undermine the human rights principles that are vital for the wellbeing of a democratic society?

But challenging extremism isn't just a job for government.

I've asked councils and the police if they have the tools they need to deal with the dangerous radical right activism we've seen in recent years.

It's crucial that we all stand up and speak out.

Some of the most effective pushbacks I have seen have come from community groups or individuals.

As many counter-extremists have told me and through my own experience of running a civil society organisation, I know we need a strong network of support (including emotional support) and long-term and sustainable funding.

But what should we do in response to a mainstreaming of hateful or intolerant ideas?

I believe countering extremism requires more not less debate.

I've come across many innovative approaches which have allowed those attitudes to be challenged.

Only recently I was shown a powerful example of how to bring together young people in FR and Islamist circles for mediated dialogue.

I've seen powerful evidence and spoken to youth workers who stress on the need for safe spaces to discuss difficult subjects including racist views.

It is in this context – of the need to open the debate, not shut it down – that I'd like to turn to the definition of Islamophobia or anti-Muslim hatred.

As I said at the start I am incredibly concerned by the threat of the violent far right, the harm caused by non-violent radical right activists and a wider mainstreaming of anti-Muslim hatred.

As a Muslim woman in the public eye I have experienced this hatred first hand for many years.

The question of a definition is being debated in parliament tomorrow.

This morning police chiefs have raised concerns about a definition proposed by the All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims.

Matthew and Will make the case for a definition with a tighter focus.

I support the need to have a definition.

A definition can help provide clarity and help us challenge better anti-Muslim hatred.

The far right exploit the lack of an agreed understanding of anti-Muslim prejudice to continue to propagate their hatred which they then disguise as 'free speech.'

It is vital that any definition is tested to ensure there are no unintended outcomes; or that the rights and freedoms of others are not suppressed.

I recently brought together a group representing the diversity of British Muslims but whose voices aren't often included in the debate – many of whom also actively challenge extremism.

The discussion raised a couple of serious concerns with the APPG definition.

Firstly, it fails to acknowledge the hate faced by minorities within minorities – such as LGBTQ+ Muslims, the Ahmadiyya Community or those who simply want the right to follow their faith in their own way.

The APPG definition talks about ‘perceived Muslimness’.

But to those Muslims I spoke to, it is precisely their ‘Muslimness’ which is called into question by Islamist Extremists, which has led to hate and threats directed at them.

We must challenge the view propagated by Islamist extremists and far right extremists: the old-fashioned, monolithic and highly erroneous view of British Muslims, who continue to be depicted as a singular “Muslim community,” who possess a singular view.

It is important that we listen to the breadth and diversity of views of individuals like these.

Many feel the space to challenge or hold differing views is shrinking and there is a genuine fear that by not conforming to a particular view, abuse is often the end result.

Secondly, an ambiguous definition may have the unintended consequence of making it impossible to expose and challenge Islamist extremism. I’ve spoken to countless politicians, journalists and campaigners who have the word ‘Islamophobe’ slung at them as they attempt to counter Islamist extremism.

This has been a growing phenomenon in our country which is designed to such down legitimate debate on Islamist extremism and vital counter extremism work, and as Lead Commissioner I am alarmed by this.

This is an important debate – but one sadly which slips into personal attacks and non-negotiable positions.

I look forward to hearing more about CARR’s work on this and I congratulate them on publishing this report. We need more debate not less.

That is why forums such as this are so important.

Countering extremism is one of the challenges of our time.

We cannot ignore the growing threat of violent far right extremism.

We have to do more to challenge the dangerous and harmful activism of radical right campaigners and protests – both online and offline.

And we have to wake up to the mainstreaming of hate and intolerance – whether it’s antisemitism, anti-Muslim hatred or any other form of prejudice.

We will only be able to do this if we work together and support each other to do more to reduce the appeal and harm of extremism.

I want to see academics and NGOs partner and join forces to make sure work on

the ground is underpinned by robust evaluation, and that best practice is shared widely.

This lies at the heart of a whole society response.

So thank you to CARR for inviting me and for hosting such an important conference. I am sure it will be a great success.

[News story: All employers in England to have better access to buy high quality apprenticeships](#)

Every apprenticeship employer in England will soon have access to the [full benefits](#) of the Education and Skills Funding Agency's (ESFA) award winning [apprenticeship service](#). With the first employers and providers commencing their use from Summer 2019.

Currently, only apprenticeship [levy-paying](#) employers – those with an annual total pay bill of over £3m – or those in receipt of a transfer of apprenticeship funds – are able to use the full benefits that the apprenticeship service brings.

Whilst all other employers (those who do not pay the levy) have had access to some of the functions, such as [find an apprenticeship](#), the ESFA is opening up the apprenticeship service to employers of all size, regardless of whether they pay the levy or not. This will provide employers with the choice over how they want to control the use of apprenticeships and make them work for their business.

Over the course of the next year, all employers will be able to control how they pay for their apprenticeship training, and assess and recruit their apprentices. They will also have access to a larger pool of training providers to deliver more relevant training for them.

Eileen Milner, ESFA Chief Executive said:

Moving non-levy employers onto the apprenticeship service will give small and medium sized businesses a greater choice of quality training providers, and the opportunity to have more control over apprenticeship training decisions for their business.

Employers understand the needs of their sector and know better than anyone about how best to use their apprenticeship funding.

By working with smaller employers, the ESFA will get insight into the skills needs of a wider range of businesses which will help us to remove barriers employers have when recruiting an apprentice.

Dominique Unsworth BEM, SME Ambassador, said:

Moving the significant numbers of employers that do not pay the levy onto the service will bring greater opportunities for employer choice; it will empower more companies – especially small and medium sized businesses (SMEs) – to connect with apprenticeships, to make more informed choices around the quality of the apprenticeship marketplace.

It's vital that we make it as simple as possible for SMEs to engage with high quality providers. As the chief executive of a small organisation myself, I am already seeing real benefits and I want others to do so as well.

To give employers and training providers time to prepare to take full advantage of the move to the apprenticeship service and ensure stability in the marketplace, the ESFA will introduce this change over a transition period, more details of which we will share shortly.

During the transition period, the ESFA will invite non-levy employers to the apprenticeship service for user testing. The ESFA will test the service with a selection of employers and partnered providers through an Expressions of Interest (EOI) phase.

Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief executive Mark Dawe said:

This is a critical and welcome advance in the reform of apprenticeships. By releasing all employers and providers from the previous contracting system, the government is enabling employers to exercise genuine choice over the apprenticeships that they wish to offer and any registered provider needed to support the training.

It will lead to increased workforce productivity among SMEs and make a real difference to social mobility with more apprenticeship opportunities available to young people across the country.

Information for providers

During the transition period, more details will be released shortly, the ESFA will continue to run contracts with providers who have won provision through ESFA procurements for apprenticeship starts with non-levy employers.

The contracts will provide stability and access to training in the marketplace to ensure a gradual and managed transition to the apprenticeship service. This will give the ESFA time to create the right service functionality to meet employer needs.

Moving employers who don't pay the levy onto the apprenticeship service will give them access to training providers who have successfully entered the [Register of apprenticeship training providers](#), not just those who were successful in previous procurements.

The ESFA will begin a staged communication process with the sector through GOV.UK and in [ESFA Update](#), this will detail the full transitional arrangements.

Apprenticeship Service

- the service won the [Digital Public Service Innovation of the Year award](#) at the 2018 Digital Leader Awards
- the service has enabled over 17,000 levy-paying employers to take control of their apprenticeships and make better decisions for their organisation
- the find an apprenticeship function on the apprenticeship service, has received 57 million visits – 2.6 million citizens have created an account and more than 6 million candidate applications have been submitted
- employer ease of use and satisfaction scores have consistently been positive since launch. The find an apprenticeship function has processed nearly 6 million transactions since its launch in 2016, and when surveyed, gained a user satisfaction rate of 90%.

Through the apprenticeship service employers can:

- manage their apprenticeship funding
- select a suitable [apprenticeship standard or framework](#) and an [end point assessment organisation](#)
- advertise an apprenticeship and select a suitable provider to deliver their apprenticeship training
- give real-time feedback on the quality of training provision they receive
- have control over the amount of apprenticeship funding paid to their training provider on their behalf, so there is better intelligence to maximise their apprenticeship training spend
- provide government with apprenticeship demand data to ensure an valuable apprenticeship market place.

[News story: RAF Typhoons scramble twice in two days to intercept Russian aircraft](#)

On Tuesday 14 May Typhoon jets launched a Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) scramble out of Ämari Air Base in response to two Russian SU-27 Flanker fighter aircraft and one IL-22 aircraft that were flying along the Baltic coast heading towards Kaliningrad.

On Wednesday 15 May Typhoons once again launched from Ämari to intercept another two SU-27 aircraft and an IL-22 and escorted the formation towards Russia.

Minister for the Armed Forces Mark Lancaster said:

At the same time as our troops forge stronger ties with NATO Allies in Estonia, our RAF Typhoons are policing Baltic skies and providing a rapid response to any approaches towards NATO airspace.

Together it sends a clear message – we are committed to defending NATO’s borders and will support our Allies in deterring any threats.

These are the first QRA scrambles since the RAF took over the NATO Baltic Air Policing mission from the German Air Force last month. Both were conducted in a safe and professional manner throughout.

The RAF operates alongside its NATO allies to deter Russian aggression and assure NATO allies of the UK’s commitment to collective defence.

This is a routine NATO mission for the Typhoons which provides reassurance that the UK is here to work in partnership with Estonia.

Wing Commander Paul ‘Pablo’ O’Grady, who was conducting QRA duty when the first scramble was called, said:

On 14 May 19 my flight of QRA Typhoons were scrambled on a Baltic Air Policing Mission tasked to intercept and identify an unknown aircraft. Six minutes after take-off from Ämari Air Base, vectored by Estonian fighter controllers, we closed quickly on a Russian IL-22 which was being escorted by two Russian SU-27 fighters.

Flying alongside the Russian aircraft at a safe distance, myself and my wingman (a United States Airforce Lt Col), ensured that the Russian aircraft were safely escorted around Estonian airspace. The Russian pilots and crews behaved in a professional and calm manner with nothing untoward. We subsequently handed the Russian formation over to the Hungarian QRA that had launched out of Lithuania to continue the escort towards Kaliningrad.

This was the first Baltic Air Policing Mission of the Typhoon Detachment providing assurance of our capability and demonstrating the UK's commitment to our NATO Allies.

Press release: HS2 Ltd opens new office in Manchester

As work steps up to extend HS2 to both Leeds and Manchester, this reinforces HS2's commitment to work with partners, including Transport for the North, in order to enable Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) services.

The company relocated its headquarters from London to the Midlands 3 years ago, and has now established a new base in Manchester city centre for its core team in the North.

Mark Thurston, HS2 Ltd CEO, said:

HS2 is crucial to delivering Transport for the North's ambitions for Northern Powerhouse Rail. By having a new base in Manchester we are able to work closer with our Northern partners. Together, HS2 and NPR will enable faster, more frequent and reliable services throughout the North.

The spare capacity released on the northern sections of the HS2 network will enable future NPR services, so the two projects work seamlessly to maximise the benefits of the UK's investment in future rail. With towns and cities set to benefit across the North, HS2 will transform rail journeys and give passengers thousands of extra seats every day.

Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, added:

HS2 will not only improve our railways from North to South but will

also lay the foundations for the east to west rail links across the North that we desperately need. HS2, linked with east to west Northern Powerhouse Rail, will make it easier for people to move between our towns and cities, help businesses connect with each other and their customers, and act as a catalyst for local growth. With new high speed rail connections, the economic output of Greater Manchester could double to around £132 billion by 2050, contributing around 40,000 new jobs.

HS2 Ltd's decision to open an office in Manchester is a real statement of intent. I look forward to working with HS2 to ensure the North gets the maximum benefit from the better connections and released capacity that HS2 and NPR will deliver.

Henri Murison, Director of the Northern Powerhouse Partnership, said:

The Northern Powerhouse Partnership welcomes the move by HS2 to have a permanent office base in Manchester, with the work on the phases to Crewe, to Manchester and to Leeds advancing.

HS2, delivered together with Northern Powerhouse Rail, will be transformational and has the potential to support hundreds of thousands of jobs. Without a new railway for city to city travel alongside our Victorian railway, to keep servicing commuters with create more scope for freight, it will be hard to attract investment and the jobs we need to rebalance the UK's economy and close the North-South divide.

Work on the first phase of HS2 from London to the Midlands is already underway at over 250 locations. Over 7,000 jobs and 300 apprenticeships are already supported by the programme, and around 2,000 business have delivered work on HS2. When construction peaks, it is estimated that HS2 will need 30,000 people to design and build the full HS2 rail network.

Hundreds of businesses in the North have already won work, and opportunities for local firms to get involved will continue as the project progresses.

Across the North, HS2 station locations have been preparing for the arrival of the new railway by drawing up economic plans to take advantage of better rail connections. The redevelopment plans for Manchester have the potential to deliver 40,000 new jobs for the city with both HS2 and NPR working together.

HS2 trains will serve over 25 towns and cities from Scotland through to the South East, joining up nearly half of the UK population, giving people more options on where to live, work and travel. It is set to deliver £92 billion of benefits to the UK economy.

Key corridors are dependent on infrastructure delivered by HS2 in order for NPR to operate, including:

- Manchester – Liverpool (via Warrington): NPR services could use HS2 infrastructure – including the 13 kilometre Manchester tunnel to serve HS2 stations at Manchester Airport and Manchester Piccadilly. Therefore, it would be possible to deliver NPR’s ambitions for a 30 minute journey between Manchester and Liverpool
- Sheffield – Leeds: NPR services could use HS2 infrastructure north of Clayton Junction to serve Leeds HS2 station
- Leeds – Newcastle via the HS2 junction: this would enable trains from Manchester, Sheffield and the Midlands to travel via Leeds and on to York and the North East. This could also release capacity for more local and commuter services east of Leeds
- Sheffield – Manchester: NPR services could benefit from investment by the HS2 electrification programme on the Midland Main Line

HS2 is scheduled to be completed by 2033, and proposals put forward by Transport for the North, including Northern Powerhouse Rail, are scheduled for completion in the next 30 years.