

Update – 26 February 2020

Progress

The Chair is undertaking his investigations in three stages:

- (1) Obtaining evidence through witness testimony and documents from stakeholders;
- (2) Review of material obtained and distillation; and
- (3) Report writing.

The Chair does not expect to wait for one phase to be complete before beginning the next; for example, the Chair has received a great many documents from Telford & Wrekin Council and the review for relevance of that material is well under way, while the Chair continues to call for and take witness evidence and to request documentary material from other stakeholders. Of course the Chair's investigations will almost inevitably lead to further enquiry. That is an ongoing, and rolling, process.

Disclosure

To date, the Inquiry has received approximately 135,000 documents which are potentially relevant to its Terms of Reference. The source of this material includes individual witnesses, Telford & Wrekin Council, the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner and a small volume of documents from West Mercia Police. The Inquiry continues to work through and analyse this material to help inform its investigations.

The documentation received from the Council amounts to approximately 780,000 pages of unsifted material. This material has been provided in response to wide-ranging requests for relevant documents made by the Chair in July 2019; the Inquiry understands that the disclosure of all documents potentially relevant to the requests made to date will be complete in the coming months. The Chair will however continue to make further, specific requests for Council documents as necessary, as his investigations continue.

The Inquiry continues to work closely with West Mercia Police to identify and gather relevant material. This has inevitably taken some time as a result of ongoing discussions around data protection issues and the protection of information, not least to ensure the integrity of ongoing investigations is protected, as well as navigating a number of IT and physical storage systems to identify relevant material and ensuring that this is done in a managed way. The necessary arrangements are however close to being agreed, and the Chair expects further relevant material from West Mercia Police to start to be disclosed shortly.

From ongoing discussions with Stakeholders, it is clear to the Chair that he expects to receive significantly more material than that received to date.

Witnesses

The Inquiry continues to meet with, and take the evidence of, witnesses who have information to provide that is relevant to the Terms of Reference. Whilst the Inquiry has now taken evidence from a number of witnesses, the levels of engagement from witnesses that have suffered child sexual exploitation and/or witnessed or had concerns about potential child sexual exploitation in the community, are lower than the Chair had anticipated. The Chair therefore intends to make a further call for evidence in the coming months, but continues to encourage anyone that has information to share to come forward.

IITCSE and IICSA

The Inquiry has met again with IICSA (the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse), which is a national public inquiry undertaking a number of different investigations in relation to child abuse, including one investigation into child sexual exploitation by organised networks. The Inquiry has worked with IICSA to ensure the complete separation between IICSA's Truth Project and the work of this Inquiry is made clear, and a further update will be provided in due course.

Stakeholders

The Chair and the Commissioning Body continue to work with key stakeholders to gather material and information that is relevant to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference. At this stage, those stakeholders include Telford & Wrekin Council, West Mercia Police, NHS Telford & Wrekin Clinical Commissioning Group and NHS providers/GP Practices, NHS England, the Crown Prosecution Service and the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner.

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