
Update – 7 April 2021

Witnesses

The Inquiry has had contact with, or attempted to contact, 168 potential witnesses and to date has met with and taken the evidence of 103 of those witnesses.

Of those 103 witnesses:

- 31 are Council, or former Council, witnesses;
- 24 are police, or former police witnesses;
- 21 are from other organisations/stakeholder bodies;
- 27 are survivors or victims, or family, friends and supporters of survivors or victims.

There are further interviews arranged for the coming weeks and witnesses who the Inquiry has yet to hear from are being followed up and encouraged to give evidence, as appropriate. However, as the Chair approaches the latter stages of the evidence gathering phase of his investigations, there will soon become a point at which the Inquiry cannot accept any further witness evidence. Therefore, the Chair is encouraging anyone with relevant evidence to come forward as soon as possible.

Disclosure

Documents continue to be disclosed by stakeholders in response to requests from the Chair. To date, the Inquiry has received approximately 197,148 documents/1,256,354 pages in total, which are potentially relevant to its Terms of Reference, broken down as follows:

- The documentation received from the Council to date amounts to approximately 186,177 documents/ 1,147,624 pages of material.
- The documentation received from West Mercia Police to date amounts to approximately 9,152 documents/ 86,660 pages of material.
- The documentation received from other stakeholders, including relevant NHS provider organisations, Telford & Wrekin Clinical Commissioning Group, West Midlands Police and NHS England amounts to approximately 1,819 documents/ 22,070 pages.

The Inquiry continues to work through this material to help inform its investigations and allow the Chair to make further requests for information and witness evidence.

Statements from Stakeholders

The Chair is now in receipt of the overarching statements requested from key stakeholders, including Telford & Wrekin Council, as mentioned in the last progress report.

Upon review of those statements, in a number of instances further information has, or is, being requested to ensure that all core material has been provided, which again may lead to further requests for witness or documentary evidence. It is an iterative process and the Inquiry is working hard to ensure the evidential picture is as complete as possible.

Police Expert

The Chair is pleased to announce that, in addition to the social work expert, he has now appointed an expert in policing, Andy Baker. Andy was a career detective in the Metropolitan Police Service where he attained the rank of Commander (equates to Assistant Chief Constable). In the MPS, Andy investigated all types of crimes including offences against children. He was a member of the Command Team in the Serious Crime Directorate which oversaw all Child Protection units across London and he was a detective inspector on the Bexley Project; which focussed on intra-familial child sexual abuse and child sexual abuse generally.

Andy then moved on as a Deputy Director in the Serious Organised Crime Agency that is now known as the UK's National Crime Agency. Andy led a number of commands, including those that were responsible for covert policing, intelligence, surveillance and was the Deputy Director/Chief Operating Officer for the Child Exploitation and On-Line Protection (CEOP) Unit and the National Child Protection Unit. He oversaw all the investigations conducted by CEOP and was the lead liaison for policing across the UK and abroad.

Andy chaired a number of key EU initiatives in tackling child sexual abuse, and joined strategic groups, such as those led by the MPS investigating subjects accused of abusing or grooming children by using their position in society; and Thames Valley Police in the grooming gang cases in Oxford. Andy also led the team that reviewed South Yorkshire Police's handling of the grooming cases in Rotherham.

Next Progress Report

As the Government Covid-19 restrictions in England begin to lift, it is hoped that the Chair may be able to deliver the next progress report in person in Telford, at a suitable venue where arrangements can be made to ensure the health and safety of all in attendance. In the event this is possible, further details will be published on the Inquiry's website in due course.