
Update – 7 January 2021

Witnesses

The Inquiry has had contact with, or attempted to contact, 145 potential witnesses and to date has met with and taken the evidence of 81 of those witnesses.

Of those 81 witnesses:

- 21 are Council, or former Council, witnesses;
- 18 are police, or former police witnesses;
- 17 are from other organisations/stakeholder bodies;
- 25 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 we have yet to hear from are being followed up and encouraged to give evidence, as appropriate. As before, the Chair continues to rely on the key stakeholders to encourage their employees, past and present, to speak to us.

Disclosure

Documents continue to be disclosed by stakeholders in response to requests from the Chair. To date, the Inquiry has received approximately 195,981 documents/1,242,426 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 185,994 documents/1,144,570 pages of material.
- The documentation received from West Mercia Police to date amounts to approximately 8,178 documents/75,796 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 1,809 documents/22,060 pages.

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

Progress with Disclosure of Documents

The Inquiry remains in constant contact with the key stakeholders about disclosure, which is ongoing. Despite the significant progress made, some original requests for evidence remain outstanding; in particular, a request made in May 2020 to Telford & Wrekin Council for an overarching statement about its relevant structures, duties, roles and responsibilities from 1998 to the present day - though its delivery is said to be imminent. Further, the Inquiry has recently made additional requests for disclosure from West Mercia Police in respect of a number of further CSE investigations relevant to the Terms of Reference, of which the Inquiry was previously unaware.

The Chair had hoped to be able to provide an update on the indicative timetable for publication of the report, but that will not be possible until all core material has been received and the need for further investigation assessed in the light of that material. The Chair undertakes to announce a revised indicative timetable as soon as he can do so with confidence.

Social Work Expert

The Chair is pleased to announce that he has appointed a social work expert, Jane Wiffin, to assist him with his work in examining whether social work practices, approach and structures reflected published guidance and contemporary practice relevant at the time. Jane Wiffin is a freelance social care consultant and has a professional background as a social worker, with extensive experience of reviewing safeguarding practice, undertaking serious case reviews/safeguarding adult reviews and developing policy.

As confirmed in the last update, the Chair is also intending to appoint an expert in policing, to assist him in relation to the relevant national policing policies and practice that applied at the relevant time, how this was interpreted and complied with, and whether the police response was appropriate and proportionate. That process is ongoing and a further update will be provided in due course.

Covid-19 and Witnesses

The Covid-19 public health crisis, and England's new national lockdown, will inevitably have an impact on the Inquiry and on the stakeholders upon whom it relies. The Inquiry will however continue to see witnesses and encourages those with relevant information to come forward. The Chair remains committed to ensuring that the expectations of witnesses around the process of giving evidence is met so far as is possible - for example, we are able to offer sessions via secure video or telephone conference, or in certain circumstances, in person in Covid secure locations; we are able to offer securely recorded sessions for those who would prefer them; and all witnesses are given the opportunity to review their evidence after time to reflect.