

**STATEMENT PRODUCED FOR INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO CHILD SEXUAL
ABUSE**

**The Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions
Hearing 9-20 July 2018 at 18 Pocock Street.**

**THIRD STATEMENT OF ALISON SYKES
HEAD OF SECURE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES
SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNCIL**

I make this statement in response to an email request from IICSA dated 14 June 2018 which attached parts 2 and 3 of the report of Alan Wood dated 21 May 2018. Also attached to the email was the letter of instruction from IICSA to Alan Wood. The body of the email requested that any responses to the report should be made by me by 4pm on 29 June 2018. My solicitor wrote to IICSA via email dated 28 June explaining that I required an extension to Friday 6 July to provide my responses.

My current role as Head of Secure means that I am the registered manager of Vinney Green. Before I commenced that role in April 2015 I was the Head of Care at Vinney Green from October 2010 until April 2015. As Head of Care I was in an operational role with duties that included ensuring there were enough staff to provide care, that case management was carried out and that there were appropriate links in place to the community and children's families. My role included safeguarding duties in the same way as other staff members but my predecessor as Head of Secure (Keith Smith) had overall responsibility for safeguarding at the Secure Unit. While I was Head of Care, I could and did get involved in some investigations into incidents or allegations. Part of my role included taking management responsibility for the staff who would have carried out internal investigations. However I did not become involved in any of the investigations related to the 6 allegations referred to by Alan Wood. The dates of all of those allegations fell within the period where I was Head of Care and before I became Head of Secure in April 2015.

In considering Alan Wood's report, I found it difficult in places to be clear about the source of his information or to which allegation he was referring. This has impacted upon my ability to respond to his comments and observations but I hope that what I

have set out below will be of assistance to the Inquiry. I have adopted the same paragraph numbering as Mr Wood.

4.1.1 The observation is made that there was a lack of child focused planning following strategy meetings. This may not have been the case but the issue may be that Mr Wood has not seen the recordings or that inadequate recordings were made. I would expect those to have been made on the child's individual record although discussions would not necessarily have been recorded in full. Either way, I note for current and future practise the need to ensure that child focused planning takes place after strategy meetings and that such planning needs to be recorded.

4.1.2 In my view Children and Young People at Vinney Green are appropriately supported within the process of making allegations of abuse. These children and young people are extremely vulnerable and have complex needs which we do our best to meet.

4.1.3 It is difficult to identify the rationale for a child or young person preferring to speak to a particular person. In my experience those at Vinney Green rarely differentiate between adults on the basis that they are or are not staff members. With respect Mr Wood's suggestion that a student social worker was "chosen" because she was not identified as part of the staff group appears quite speculative.

4.1.5 – 4.1.7 I do not accept that a different approach could have been taken which would have allowed risk to be identified more quickly. Vinney Green has a rigorous process for recruitment which aims to identify risk. The Warner interviews are used and are a useful process for revealing concepts of normality in a potential staff member. We could not have known and did not know what was contained on this staff member's computer. The images were found only after he had already been suspended.

4.1.10 The use of a complaints form to record an allegation is criticised by Mr Wood. The complaint forms are used to capture the young person's versions of events, staff members may help them to write it or may write it for them. If a

complaint form is not written and we are aware of safeguarding concerns we would still investigate without a copy of the young person's account.

4.1.12 I would agree that the letter referred to is not as empathetic in its content as it could have been. I am aware the young person concerned was a prolific maker of allegations. I anticipate that in this context the intention of my predecessor was that the letter be clear and unambiguous, which may unfortunately have impacted on the overall impression.

4.1.15 I would agree that the absence of recording of outcomes is surprising and concerning but can assure the Inquiry that this would not happen now.

4.1.16 Mr Wood makes reference to an allegation made in 2014 but that date is not referenced in the list of allegation dates he gives at 4.0.2. I note the reference to the police having been unable to proceed with their investigations due to the fact that no records of the time period could be found. I am unclear as to whether this refers to police records or Vinney Green records. The statement of DSI White records Allegations 3, 4 and 5 all of which refer to events alleged to have occurred at Vinney Green in the 1960s and 1970s. Firstly I would observe that Vinney Green did not open until 1995 as a Secure Unit. Secondly I would observe that I was not aware of the existence of Allegation 5 until reading the Statement of DSI White. Thirdly I would agree that it is extremely unfortunate if individuals are denied justice as a result of records being unavailable. However I am unable to comment upon why that happened. I can assure the Inquiry that present day record keeping is appropriate.

4.1.19 - 4.1.21 I was not previously aware of this allegation and remain unclear as to the details. This is not one of the allegations I detailed in my earlier statements. Mr Wood's report does not make clear the dates or details of the allegation he refers to but I assume it may be that referred to by DSI White as Allegation 2. Within the materials I am told were provided to Mr Wood (but unpaginated) I have seen a document which seems to refer to the same allegation and which is police owned. That document refers to a Unit Manager called Name Redacted

Name Redacted and a care worker called **Name Redacted**. Neither of these were staff members at Vinney Green. I believe the document refers to another Unit and assume that the allegation was made while at another Unit.

At Vinney Green, young people cannot spend time together in such a way that a pregnancy test would be necessary. Nor do young people have access to mobile phones. In order to be able to comment on Mr Wood's report on this issue further, I would need more information to enable me to understand whether he was correct in attributing his comments about absence of proactive and clear planning or about not following correct procedures to Vinney Green, or whether in fact this refers to another unit or placement.

Signed

DPA

Date 06.07.2018