

Witness Name: Dawn Godfrey
Statement No.: 1
Exhibits:
Dated:

THE INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

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Witness Statement of Dawn Godfrey

I, Dawn Godfrey , will say as follows:-

1. I am a qualified social worker obtaining a Masters in Social Work in 1999. I also hold a Masters in Public Administration obtained in 2008. I was employed by Nottinghamshire County Council from April 2008 until September 2016. My first role with Nottinghamshire County Council was as a Children's Service Manager covering the district of Newark. I was subsequently appointed as Group Manager, Social Work Services in April 2010.

2. I became Agency Decision Maker for Fostering in 2010. As Agency Decision Maker I received the fostering panel's recommendations regarding the suitability of a person and their household to foster and made decisions as required. The role of the Agency Decision Maker requires that the decision maker must take account of the fostering panel's recommendation and any recommendation by the independent review mechanism before deciding whether or not to approve a person as a foster carer, and on what terms. These terms may specify, for instance, that they may foster only a specific named child or children, or may identify a maximum number of placements which may be made at any one time or an age range for children fostered.

3. The decision maker is also responsible for deciding whether a person and their household remain suitable to foster, and whether the terms of approval remain suitable, following each review of the foster carer's approval.

4. If, following a completed stage 2 assessment or brief report, the fostering service considers that an applicant is unsuitable to be a foster carer, or where they consider that a foster carer's terms of approval should be changed, then the applicant must be given a written determination - a notice that the decision maker proposes not to approve them as a foster carer or to amend their terms of approval, together with the reasons for this and, where the fostering panel made a recommendation, a copy of this. The applicant must be advised that they may, within 28 days of the date of the notice, either submit written representations to the decision maker or apply to the Secretary of State for a review of the determination by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).

5. The Agency Decision Maker is not bound by the recommendations of the fostering panel nor the IRM. It was my responsibility to independently review the

information received by the fostering panel, and scrutinise their evaluation and process in coming to their recommendations. I rarely had cause to disagree with their recommendations, however there were occasions where I did. These were usually circumstances where there was a majority recommendation and not a unanimous one.

6. In respect of the IRM, I had to take account of the recommendation of the IRM, as well as that of the original fostering panel, in reaching a decision about approval.

7. I was also responsible for completing the annual appraisals for the independent chair and vice chair of the fostering panel. During the appraisal process, I also observed fostering panel to evaluate first hand the quality of discussions and evidence review in coming to panel recommendations. I did not have cause for concern regarding the quality of work produced by the fostering panel, although learning points were sometimes shared.

8. Other than my role as agency decision maker for fostering, I had no other roles directly within the fostering service in Nottinghamshire.

NO-F165

9. In July 2010, an allegation of sexual abuse was made against NO-F165 by a thirteen year old child looked after by him and his wife. The allegation was that NO-F165 had touched her breast and genital area, including digital penetration, and this had happened over the course of the previous two weeks. This allegation was made to the child's birth sibling during a contact visit, and subsequently reported to the Police and Emergency Duty team. A strategy meeting was held on 5 August 2010 in accordance with the procedures for managing allegations against people who work with children. This was chaired by a child protection co-ordinator but it is my understanding that the Local Authority Designated Officer did not attend.

10. I had no involvement in the management or response to these allegations and therefore cannot comment on the quality of the child protection investigation.

11. My first involvement came when the review of NO-F165 was presented to the Fostering Panel in August 2011 and, following their recommendation, was sent to me for an agency decision. The Fostering Panel carefully considered and evaluated all of the written information available to them, and NO-F165 attended Panel to contribute directly to the discussion. In my view the Panel minutes showed a balanced discussion and reflected the difficulty in reaching a unanimous recommendation. I believe the minutes reflect that NO-F165 were shown respect and given ample opportunities to contribute. I can confirm that I agreed with the Panel recommendation and wrote to NO-F165 to advise of my decision and their right of appeal direct to the Agency or to go to the IRM. The latter option was chosen and the case was subsequently heard at the IRM on 12 October 2011. I had no further involvement until the outcome of the IRM and I reviewed my decision in light of the information received.

12. I made the decision to agree the recommendation of the IRM that NO-F165 approval as foster carers should continue in light of the further information shared at the IRM and a further review of the evidence. The original decision following the Fostering Panel was a finely balanced one, and with the benefit of time and further analysis, I was satisfied that the national minimum standards for fostering were met following the IRM. I was also clear that there were important learning points for all involved, including the foster carers and Department.

13. I specifically asked that fostering staff were provided with refresher training on how to manage allegations against carers as I felt the point made by the IRM in relation