

Witness Name: Peter John Sandiford
Statement No.: 1
Exhibits:
Dated: 7th February 2020

THE INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Witness Statement of Peter John Sandiford

I, Peter John Sandiford, will say as follows:-

1. The Independent Children's Home Association is a member led organisation representing 75% of all voluntary and private children's home providers. As such, ICHA has no direct involvement in the care of children but all of its members do.
2. The role of the association is to support members in their legitimate activity as children's homes inspected and regulated by Ofsted. This includes but is not confined to the following areas of activity:
 - 2.1. advice to those contemplating opening a children's home;
 - 2.2. individual support to a member in difficulties or in need of specialist advice;
 - 2.3. training and awareness raising about current themes and practice in children's residential care;
 - 2.4. acting as a point of contact for members with the independent regulator and DfE;
 - 2.5. availability to be called to give evidence to Parliamentary Select Committees;
 - 2.6. promoting good practice in child care;
 - 2.7. championing the value of children's homes as part of the range of services for children who are looked after in England.
3. We do not monitor practice across areas, save for monitoring Ofsted inspections and as such can make no informed comment on day to day practice.
4. ICHA is currently working with the National Police Chiefs Council and others including The Children's Commissioners Office and Ofsted on a Concordat where signatories commit to *'work together to improve the care and support for looked after children so they are kept safe and to ensure agencies have effective processes in place to maximise our opportunity to deliver impactful care. We will work together, with local organisations, to prevent exposure to risk happening whenever possible through prevention and early intervention. We will make sure we meet the needs of vulnerable*

children in urgent situations. We will strive to make sure that all relevant private and public services support a looked after child who is in need of impactful care. Jointly we hold ourselves accountable for enabling this commitment to be delivered across England.'

5. I anticipate that on completion the Concordat will include most if not all of the identified themes. It is currently at an advanced draft stage with completion anticipated within the next three months.
6. I cannot attribute responsibility to any particular initiative or priority but I am of the view that the profile of child sexual exploitation has been properly raised to a far higher level in recent years than had previously been the case. The narrative has, thankfully, been changed from some of the outrageous practice of both Police and Children's Services describing child victims in a manner so as to suggest they were 'willing participants' to one where they accept that these are vulnerable children who could not possibly be considered as having given their consent implicitly or otherwise.
7. Reporting and actions following the horrific events that are well-documented in areas such as Rochdale, Rotherham and elsewhere have begun to educate all professionals that children who are exploited for illegal activities including child sexual exploitation are victims. It would be helpful if the IICSA would make clear that victims in places such as Rochdale and Rotherham involved few if any children who were at the time of their abuse living in children's homes. This is not a defensive stance by the ICHA, rather a sensible quest for the truth to be told. By allowing a narrative that suggests a causal link between children being placed in children's homes at distance from their home area we allow a myth to be perpetuated which might well deflect us from the truth.
8. More recently 'County Lines' has been highlighted as an issue of major concern. Those involved in County Lines activities, who are, of course, victims not ready participants, are frequently also likely to be targeted as victims of C.S.E.
9. Practice within children's homes should be informed of and assiduously follow a model that always places the child's activity at the centre of practice. Staff are better trained on recognising potential indicators of the type(s) of activities and, or attitudes and demeanours that has come to be generically described as 'grooming'. Staff are on a heightened sense of alert to identify such factors and work closely with colleagues in the Police and Local Authorities in sharing information.
10. The whole sector pays far greater attention to the particular issue of children who 'go missing' and both supports and occasionally leads on initiatives to improve working together to safeguard children in this respect. The ICHA was a significant contributor to creation of the '*National Protocol on reducing criminalisation of looked-after children*' – disappointed only that it was defined as a protocol facilitating local interpretation not national implementation.
11. Particular examples of agencies working together include the Philomena Protocol in Co. Durham and the work on the Concordat identified above. We are also aware of the Initiative in Thames Valley where the Police and Children's Services have embedded the latter's 'Out of hours Duty team' within the Police communication centre which is said to have produced some excellent results.

12. One of the greatest challenges facing the sector currently has been the growth of unregulated residential settings that are frequently and erroneously conflated with children's homes. Whilst we believe it to be the case that many such premises deliver good services to children who are over sixteen they remain vulnerable children and there can now be no doubt after a series of exposures in the media – some of which we have contributed to – that some unregulated and indeed unregistered homes are targets for criminal gangs who will exploit boys and girls into C.S.E and County Lines activities and that in fact the two crimes can often be present in the same 'homes'.
13. Not until the Care Standards Act 2000 did we legislate that all small private children's homes which accommodate fewer than four children were required to register and be inspected. This Inquiry has examined multiple examples of historical 'institutional abuse' and if the issue of Unregulated homes is not swiftly addressed then we may find that history is repeated. In 2018 there were 5020 Looked After Children, aged 16-18 placed in Unregulated accommodation and a smaller number (100) of children who were under 16, effectively rendering the placement Unregistered. If we compare these figures with those in 2014, they represent a 53% increase of children living in unregulated accommodation and actually a 97% increase of those doing so out of area (i.e. placed outside of the boundary of their home Local Authority).
14. The criteria that defines whether or not a home is a Children's Home or Supported Accommodation is clearly defined in the Ofsted publication 'Introduction to Children's Homes (2018) (Annex A), the Key element being whether or not 'Care' is being provided. All placements made in such Unregulated accommodation are commissioned by Local Authorities, yet many are effectively offering 'care' and therefore operating illegally. The paradox being that the provider is liable to prosecution but not so the commissioner. Effectively we are, in part at least, operating as if the Care Standards Act had never been passed. This has been graphically portrayed by the media, notably the BBC. the situation in at least some of these 'homes' is facilitating children's exploitation and exposure to risk.
15. For the IICSA not to address or comment on this situation would, I suggest, be unimaginable. An urgent response is required from Government. We understand that DfE are currently considering options that may be taken to address the issue of Unregulated placements. It is a great shame that not until recently has this been afforded any priority at all by Government and in the context of the promised Care Review the ICHA calls for the scandal of the growth of Unregulated provision to be addressed separately, legislated or regulated for and then incorporated into the review rather than delayed for the period that such a comprehensive review is likely to take.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed: _____

DPA

Dated: _____

Witness Statement of Peter John Sandiford

3