

Witness Name: David Ashton
Statement No: 1
Exhibits:N/A
Dated: 16/10/2020

THE INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Witness Statement of Detective Superintendent

DAVID ASHTON OF DURHAM CONSTABULARY

1. I David Ashton am a Constable of the Durham Constabulary, Aykley Heads, Durham holding the rank of Detective Superintendent. I was appointed as head of Safeguarding within the force in May 2018. I have worked as a Senior Investigative Officer since January 2016 and have 22 years' service within the Constabulary.
2. Following the request made by the Inquiry to Deputy Chief Constable David Orford whilst he was giving oral evidence on 23rd September 2020 for an assessment of the disruptive actions taken by the force in 5 cases I was tasked to review the cases in question and assess the force's response. It was felt that, given my specialist expertise in Safeguarding, I would be better placed to identify any shortcoming and/or good practice.
3. In order to assess the force's response I have reviewed the material held on the force systems in respect of the children referred to in the case summaries provided by the Inquiry. I have carried out an objective assessment of the actions identified in this material and set out below my assessment of each case. In considering my assessment in each the Inquiry is invited to consider the summary of steps taken recorded in DCC Orford's statement to which my statement is exhibited.

CS-A29

4. A wide range of disruption actions were taken (approximately 100 are recorded) by the force in seeking to safeguard CS-A29 from individuals identified as posing a potential threat to CS-A29. In my view, the force's response was proportionate and adequate. The records also suggest that a suitable joint approach via ERASE to work to address broader safeguarding concerns surrounding CS-A29, with issues of concerning being discussed in a multiagency collaborative way, and appropriate work being undertaken by both police and partners to safeguard this child. Officers led investigations

appropriately targeting those who posed a risk to CS-A29. Whilst there is a reference to the local authority being concerned that the child was taken to the police station when under police protection it is not possible to determine from the documents why this was necessary. The fact that officers exercised powers of police protection illustrated that they recognised the ongoing risks and prioritised the welfare and safety of CS-A29 in this situation.

CS-A114

5. Extensive disruption activity was undertaken in respect of CS-A114 in order to keep her safe. This is exemplified by positive action taken in arresting, charging and remanding into custody a perpetrator for the offence of Child Abduction. The review highlighted that this work remains ongoing and even at the present time the Child Exploitation team continue to work with CS_A114 and the force regularly reviews the tactics and actions necessary to disrupt perpetrators and ensure the risk of harm is reduced.

CS-A50

6. The level of police disruption in respect of CS-A50 was considered as being appropriate and proportionate. Overall, disruptive activity by the Constabulary has been evidenced as targeting those individuals who have posed a threat to CS-A50 and the work shows good examples of proactive policing that has been successful in keeping CS-A50 safe. These include a Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) proactively checking on the welfare of CS-A50, making immediate enquiries to identify that a male visiting CS-A50 was a Registered Sex Offender. This resulted in the immediate arrest of the perpetrator and him being remanded into custody to protect CS-A50.

CS-A118

7. A review of the police work taking place to manage the risk of harm associated with CS-A118, found that the work has been extensive; the actions evidenced on the police profile indicates actions by various departments across the Constabulary alongside the Youth Offending Service. This is exemplified by the range of measures used such as the proactive use of Child Abduction Warning Notices and subsequent investigation of breaches; the use of Claire's Law disclosures to raise awareness of those posing a risk and the use of fixed penalty notices to deter licensed premises selling alcohol to underage customers. There was clear communication taking place between professionals on a regular basis to discuss the risks posed to this child, whilst also looking at means to divert her away from criminality. Additionally the issues that presented in relation to her mental health were also being addressed through appropriate referrals into the MASH in a timely manner.
8. This case, however, demonstrates how engaging with the child was made more difficult because of the broad spectrum of issues associated with CSA-A118. In particular, CS-A118 is linked to 44 crimes (recorded as both victim and offender in similar numbers) and recognising her as a victim whilst also dealing with her as a perpetrator has been a challenge to both police and partners.

CS-A43

9. The investigation in relation to CS-A43 being a victim of sexual exploitation has been reviewed and the actions taken by the officers involved in the case were found to be extremely timely in their response to the risks. The victim was spoken the same day of the report being made, and subsequently a suspect was identified and interviewed that same day. Immediate referrals were made to partner agencies to ensure the potential risks to other children were appropriately addressed at the earliest opportunity. This case shows proportionate and justifiable actions were taken to safeguard CS-A43 and also other children who may have been exposed to the potential perpetrator.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings for contempt of court may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief of its truth.

Signed: _____

DPA

Dated: _____

16th OCTOBER 2020