

WITNESS STATEMENT

Criminal Procedure Rules, r27.2; Criminal Justice Act 1967, s.9; Magistrates' Courts Act 1980, s.5b

Statement of: COLLEY, RAY

Age if under 18: Over 18 (if over 18 insert 'over 18)

Occupation: BUSINESS MAN AND JOURNALIST

This statement (consisting of 4 page(s) each signed by me) is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I shall be liable to prosecution if I have wilfully stated in it anything which I know to be false, or do not believe to be true.

Signature: DPA

Date: 19/11/2015

Tick if witness evidence is visually recorded (supply witness details on rear)

My name is Raymond Douglas COLLEY and I am a Business man and Director of a company in Rochdale and previously I was a Journalist and manager at the BBC, based in Manchester.

I retired from the BBC in 1987 and then got involved in local politics with the Liberal Democrats. In 1990 I was elected Councillor for Spotland, Rochdale and sat in opposition on the Education committee. In 1992, when the Labour party lost control of Rochdale Council, the Liberal Democrats formed a coalition with the Conservatives, and I became Chairman of the Education Committee. My predecessor as Chair of the Education Committee was Mary Moffat, but there was no meeting or handover, when I took over.

I remember Knowl View School, and could not understand its purpose, as it was residential four days a week and the other three days the pupils went elsewhere. I did visit the place a few times with Diane CAVANAGH who was the Director of Education and I could not see what good was happening there.

Signature: DPA
2016

Signature witnessed by:

In fact, before I was Chairman, Diane CAVANAGH had ordered an investigation by an expert in the field whom I now recall was Val MELLOR. In my opinion, the report was damning, as the care for the children was patently not up to standard. These boys already had problems, and they were allowed to go out while in residence and suffer more problems. With them all being in a group, this just seemed to exacerbate the issue, and they seemed to act as a gang rather than as individuals. My recollection is that we tried to get the place sorted out, but it was difficult to recruit staff. There was a vacancy for a Headteacher and we could not find anybody suitable, and so in the end, the Director of Education and I came to the decision to close it. We went through the correct Council procedures and it was closed without opposition.

I vaguely remember that the Headmaster at the School when I became Chairman was Steve BRADSHAW, but I do not remember any others.

I was not aware of any earlier abuse allegations, and I do not recall the details of the Val MELLOR report, but whatever she found, Diane CAVANAGH and I did our best to react properly to it. There was no suggestion that any of the staff were abusing the children, but I do recall that some of the boys were allegedly visiting a public convenience in the town centre and acting as "Rent boys" not have any direct involvement with the staff at Knowl View School. I have never heard of Martin Digan, and I was never handed a dossier by that person.

I do not have any knowledge of the Phil SHEPHERD report, but I was briefed by Diane CAVANAGH about the Val MELLOR report when I was elected Chairman of the Education Committee.

I knew Cyril SMITH from the 1970s from when he was elected as an MP, and I remember Harry WILD and they were both Governors at Knowl View School.

Signature:
2016

DPA

Signature witnessed by:

There were never any allegations of what Cyril SMITH might have been doing in those days, and nothing was ever brought to my attention. In fact the local Labour party led by Richard FARNELL, David WILLIAMS and Jim DOBBIN were vicious opponents of Cyril SMITH and had they had a sniff of impropriety I am sure they would seized upon it. They did not oppose the closure and there was never a hint that Cyril was doing anything untoward at Knowl View School.

I found Diane CAVANAGH extremely professional, and I believed my duty was to support the officers in their role as long as their work was proper, and I never had a disagreement with her over policy, so consequently I supported her throughout.

In 1992, I was deputy leader of the local Liberal Democrat Party, but Pamela HAUGHTON was Deputy Leader of the Council as she was the leader of the Conservative group. The leader of both the Liberal Democrats and the Council was Paul ROWEN. Had Paul ROWEN been aware of any allegations against Cyril SMITH, I am sure he would have made me aware and as he did not, I believe he was not aware of any either. Paul was aware of the closure of Knowl View School, as was the Chief Executive John PIERCE as we had weekly meetings in his office.

I am unaware of any discussions that Diana CAVANAGH might have had with the Director of Social Services prior to the Val MELLOR report and obviously before my election as Chairman of the Education Committee.

In relation to Liz Lynne, as far as I am aware she had no involvement in Knowl View School or its closure. I hardly saw her as she was at parliament during the week and at weekends, I was with my family and did not go to political functions.

Signature:
2016

DPA

Signature witnessed by:

I do remember Bill LAWLEY who was the Borough solicitor but I do not recall having any dealings with him. His role was to advise the Chief Executive and other Council officers. As a politician, my fellow Councillors and I, made the policy and the Council officers implemented that policy.

I do know Colin LAMBERT who was in the Labour party, and we did have common ground over the closure of a local school; but I do not recall obtaining monies from Cyril SMITH to assist with the cost of posting out leaflets. No doubt Cyril would have been opposed to the closure, and could have raised the funds to assist the campaign. In relation to the nursery budget being cut, if Colin LAMBERT recollects we had to shave £35,000 off it then I have no doubt it is correct.

As regards, my non attendance to see Mr GARNHAM QC, in Manchester, I was not provided with any questions in advance, and so I contacted the solicitors who were acting on his behalf with a view to receiving some form of disclosure but they never came back to me.

I retired from Politics in 1998, at the age of 68. At no time, particularly whilst I was Chair of Rochdale Education Committee, from 1992-1996, was I ever made aware or informed of any allegations of abuse by staff or other adults at Knowl View School.

Signature:
2016

DPA

Signature witnessed by:

RESTRICTED

Statement of: COLLEY, RAY

Form MG11(T)

Page 5 of 5

Signature: R.D. Colley
2016

Signature witnessed by:

RESTRICTED