

**DPA**

Wednesday, 08 November 2017

Professor Alexis Jay OBE

Chair

Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse

PO Box 722889

London SW1P 9LF

Dear Professor Jay

**Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse**

**Investigation: Cambridge House, Knowl View Rochdale**

I am writing this letter following the evidence which I gave to your inquiry on 18<sup>th</sup> October regarding the incidents and abuse which happened at Knowl View Rochdale.

Having reflected on the answers which I gave honestly and truth fully to the questions put to me by Ms Dobbin I wish to add the following:

Firstly I regret totally not agreeing to see the report into incidents at Knowl View School when given the opportunity to do so by Bill Lawley, Deputy Borough Solicitor within ten days of becoming Leader of Rochdale Council. This was a snap decision during a telephone call while I was at work and during a period when I was just becoming aware of the burden of responsibilities my new role entailed. It was not the correct decision and was one that I was subsequently to come to regret.

Secondly I accept entirely that the Council as the Corporate Parent failed those young people completely. Safeguarding procedures were not followed and there was a breakdown in communication between the various departments and bodies who had care and oversight of the young people. Support and Counselling was not made available for those young people to which it should have been offered.

As an elected member in a senior position during the period up to my assuming Leadership of the Council I was not made directly aware of the unfolding events at the school. They were not reported to the Education or Policy Committee of which I was a member. I was however told informally by Cllr Hawton what she was asking Social Services and Education to do. I relied on her judgement and expertise rather than challenging officers myself directly. This particularly relates to the Mellor report which I should have questioned why Social Services were not using Child Protection procedures.

I have thought long and hard on this since and can only reflect that it was a reaction to the Langley Abuse/ Middleton case where the authority was castigated for taking children into care.

Subsequent to my assuming Leadership of the Council regular reports on Knowl View were submitted both to the Leadership Group and committees. These focussed on moving the school forward rather than what had happened in the past.

At their request I did meet both the Chair of Governors Mr Harry Wild and the Acting Head of Care Mr Martin Digan. Mr Wild's meeting was about requesting financial support to improve facilities at the school. I wrote to the Director of Education requesting her views on this and subsequently a report was submitted to the Leadership meeting about the costs of these improvements which were primarily about living and sleeping arrangements. At that time we were being told things were being turned around at the school.

I also met Martin Digan at the school to discuss the concerns of himself and other staff members and subsequently he arranged for me to meet a parent and child in Littleborough who were alleging physical abuse by staff. Subsequently I asked the Chief Executive Mr John Pierce to ask the Police to investigate these claims. These were reported in the Rochdale Observer and the Police were reluctant to take action as they did not consider the boys to be reliable witnesses. I gave copies of the Rochdale Observer reports when I was interviewed during the GMP Inquiry.

I bitterly regretted this decision and when the future of the school came up following the resignation of the Head and Deputy I pressed for the school to be closed permanently. I believed we had failed the young people as an authority and did not want us to enter another period as had occurred in the late 1980's with no leadership. Though the closure was reported as temporary it was in fact planned to be permanent. Again we should have been open to parents of our reasons for closing the school.

Regarding the appointment of Sir Cyril Smith as a Governor of the School I recommended this though it was an appointment made by the Education Committee and approved by full Council. The appointment was I think from July 1994 until the school closed in December 1994. As I stated to the inquiry I would not have recommended his appointment had there been any suggestion of sexual misconduct. I accept that I was aware of the 1979 RAP article but given the passage of time, denial and lack of further information it was not on my radar when I suggested his appointment.

However I am confident that at no time during my time as Leader did Cyril Smith engage in any inappropriate behaviour at the school. I have confidence that if it had happened the Head would have reported this to the Director of Education.

Finally I would repeat my view that I hope this inquiry will give the victims closure and once again reflect how the elected politicians collectively and the Council failed in their duty of care.

Yours sincerely

Paul J Rowen