

**DPA**

8 February 2018

Mr Oliver Carlyon  
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Dear Mr Carlyon

Thank you for your letter (via email) of 10 January. I have always supported the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and was pleased to be able to present my evidence in person to assist the Inquiry in its work and establishing the facts in relation to Knowl View School in Rochdale.

However, I have to express my disappointment at the aggressive and overbearing nature of the questioning of me by Mr Altman. This was certainly not conducive to me being able to properly recall my understanding and knowledge of events some 26 years ago. The consequence of this confrontational examination (which no other witnesses was subjected to) is that I felt was unable to properly present and explain my evidence. As I am not a core participant to the Inquiry, I was unable to be legally represented while giving my evidence.

I am therefore writing to the Inquiry Panel to provide the following information and clarification-

### **The Mellor Report**

It only emerged during the hearings that one of the reasons the council's senior management engaged Ms Mellor was to provide a resolution to a dispute between the education and social services departments as to who was responsible for tackling the serious issues facing Knowl View.

I was repeatedly asked whether I was informed about these issues, which I was not. However, it is clear that one reason for the relevant chief officers not informing me is because of this damaging dispute. It was their responsibility not only to notify me about the situation but also to clearly set out how they were to deal with these issues; and to ensure the children were safe and well cared for by the Authority.

They were unable to do this because of the destructive stand-off between these two departments and its Directors. It was only following Ms Mellor's findings that her report was verbally presented to senior education members; and it was not until June 1992 was a council report on Ms Mellor's findings prepared for other senior members, by which time the political leadership of the council had changed and I was no longer a member of the council.

There was also a protocol at the time, loosely described as the "Chief Executive's Rule", where officers were not permitted to openly disagree in front of members of the council. I had witnessed this on more than one occasion where the council solicitor to a committee intervened to defer an item because officers from two separate departments were arguing over a report or

recommendation. There is a good reason for this rule: how are lay members expected to come to a decision when the officers advising them are in disagreement? Members require clear, unambiguous and unequivocal advice.

### **Relationship between officers and members at Rochdale Council at this time**

There is evidence that when dealing with sensitive and controversial issues, Rochdale Council's officers sought to exclude elected members until as such time the matter had either been dealt with and resolved, or a clear set of actions agreed on.

One example of this is that during the "Satanic Abuse" scandal at the council, which happened around 1990/91, members of the council representing the Langley Ward were approached by the parents of children taken into care and the issue was being extensively reported in the local media.

A special meeting of the social services committee was called and I was also asked to attend as Leader of the Council. The meeting was addressed by the then Director of Social Services and the Head of Legal Services. Members were (and what can only be described as) read the riot act. We were told in no uncertain terms not to interfere or comment on the care proceeding taking place. They were extremely sensitive cases and any interference by members could prejudice the cases currently before the courts. Members were told this was a matter for professional officers to deal with, but we were assured that the officers had acted properly and professionally throughout in dealing with these extremely difficult cases.

In her evidence to this Inquiry, the Director of Education at the time Mrs Cavanagh, stated she wished to keep the matter of Knowl View "within the department" and wrote to Mr Shepherd at the Health Authority asking him to keep his findings confidential. It is clear from evidence to the Inquiry that the only member who was kept informed about the ongoing issues at Knowl View was the chair of the education committee, Mrs Moffat. Councillor Hawton was involved solely in her capacity as the Chair of the Health Authority, and not as a councillor.

During questions put to me at the Inquiry, much was made of Mrs Cavanagh's statement that, some 26 years later, she assumed Councillor Moffat would have informed me about Knowl View. Notwithstanding the fact it was Mrs Cavanagh's professional responsibility to inform the Leader of the Council – and no one else - not once did Mrs Cavanagh say that she *asked* Cllr Moffat to raise the issue with me; nor did she ask her what was my response on allegedly being told. I find it incomprehensible that the most senior officer responsible for this establishment would expect a lay member to brief the Leader of the Council on such a serious matter.

Equally, given Mrs Cavanagh's desire to keep this matter confidential, and secret from the parents, one could reasonably assume she asked Councillor Moffat *not* to raise this matter outside the education department.

Unfortunately, Mrs Moffat is no longer alive to confirm or deny these statements. However, senior members of the council still alive have confirmed to me they too were not told of the situation at Knowl View, including the Chair of Social Services (Stephen Moore), Chair of Development Services (Vernon Earnshaw), Chair of Planning (Allan Whitehead) and the (recently deceased) Deputy Leader of the Council (Jim Dobbin).

### **Councillor Joinson**

It would be useful for the Inquiry to be aware of the extreme political divisions taking place within the local Labour Group of Councillors at the time of my conversation with Councillor Joinson in June 2014. I had only the week before defeated the incumbent, Cllr Lambert, following a bitter and acrimonious election battle for the Leadership of the Council. Cllr Joinson was the campaign manager for Cllr Lambert.

Why on earth would I contradict public statements made just days before that I was not informed of events at Knowl View during my first period as Leader of the Council to a sworn political opponent?

It is also worth noting that it was not Councillor Joinson who approached Operation Clifton to give a statement; but rather it was Councillor Lambert who suggested officers may wish to contact him. Councillor Joinson has changed his story a number of times as to the reason for our meeting.

I hope this information may be of assistance to Members of the Inquiry. May I apologise for the time taken to write this letter, but

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I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Inquiry, Professor Jay.

Yours sincerely

**Richard Farnell**