

Witness Name: Alison Michalska
Statement No.: 2
Exhibits: AM88
Dated: 11th October 2018

THE INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Second Witness Statement of Alison Michalska

I, Alison Michalska, will say as follows:-

- 1.1 I make this statement, the first of two supplemental statements I intend to make, in response to observation made in the opening statements of Counsel to the Inquiry and on behalf of core participant victims and survivors, in relation to an article published by the Nottingham Post on 8 June 2018. The second supplemental statement will cover those topics identified in the list of proposed topics for my evidence which are not dealt with in my main statement NCC003691. I understand that some survivors have expressed concern about the content of the article as they felt that it was misleading and failed to recognise the reality of their experience. Having been made aware of these concerns I felt compelled to write this statement in order to set out both my reasons for giving the interview and clarify what was actually said. I hope that by doing so I will be able to address the concerns expressed by survivors and offer them some small reassurance about both my position and that of the City Council.
- 1.2 The full Nottingham Post article is exhibited to this witness statement marked AM88.
- 1.3 I was approached by the Nottingham Post as part of the work that they were doing to prepare for the Inquiry. I agreed to the request as I was aware of the level of local concern about children in care being abused and wanted to clarify some of the issues raised by the Post in a spirit of openness and honesty.
- 1.4 The focus of the discussion was on the period of time since 1998, when the City Council resumed responsibility for social care services for children, including residential care. Unfortunately some of what I said was not reported in full or was not set in its proper context and as a consequence some of what was written does not accurately or properly reflect my position.
- 1.5 The first example of this comes in the opening sentence in the article, which reports my view that "*there is no evidence which would suggest there was widespread historical abuse of children in its care by a large number of people*". The article goes on to say that "*while there had been abuse by individuals, there was no proof that it was more extensive than this*". I made this point to address a very specific issue, which was an allegation that a paedophile ring was operating in residential care in Nottinghamshire. My point in addressing that issue was simply that the evidence gathered to date did not

support that specific assertion, which as the Inquiry has heard was the conclusion of the Beechwood suspect collusion report published by the Police, which stated “the evidence is not robust enough to support the existence of a paedophile ring”. It was not my intention to suggest or imply that there is no evidence that children in the care of Nottinghamshire councils were abused. I fully accept that this is the case, that abuse occurred when the City Council was responsible for social care services and therefore accountable for the abuse that victims experienced.

- 1.6 I understand that a further issue of concern is the part of the article where I am quoted as saying “*There is no evidence that I told X and they did nothing about it*”. I have checked with a note taken by Stephan Richeux, Media Manager who was with me when the interview was given and he has recorded that I went on to say “*but they may have said something at the time and nothing was done about it.*” The second part of my answer was not set out in the article. I was responding to questions about current practice within Nottingham City and confirming that I have seen no evidence of current staff failing to act – but crucially I went on to acknowledge that this may not have been the case in the past. The fact that many people found it impossible to speak about their abuse at the time, is, as I said to the reporter, terribly sad and awful of itself. I also appreciate that some people were able to report their abuse and that the response to this was sometimes not sufficiently robust.
- 1.7 I also dealt with the issue of learning lessons about residential care from what happened up to the 1980s and stated my view that we have learnt lessons from that period. Although some lessons have been learned and policy and practice has developed in response to those lessons, I am absolutely clear that it was not my intention to imply that the work of the Inquiry is not important or that there is not still more to do or that we can ever stop learning from experience. My focus in this reported section was on the way in which we deliver residential care now and the wider context in which children’s services operates.
- 1.8 Children’s services in Nottingham City today are unrecognisable from the awful experiences the Inquiry has heard from victims and survivors. An example is that Nottingham City Council’s residential care homes are now all small units of no more than four beds, and plans are underway that will shortly mean we have no mainstream units that have more than three children living in them at any one time. There are a range of other changes that have also been introduced locally and nationally that have significantly improved residential care and safeguarding practices. However, I stated at the time, and remain clear, that the Inquiry is critically important in helping us to understand the mistakes of the past, providing assurance to today’s children and survivors that they will be listened to and that their disclosures will be taken seriously. The Council is fully committed to ensuring that recommendations from the Inquiry are implemented to further improve the quality of children’s care in Nottingham.

Statement of Truth

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

DPA

Signed:

Dated: 11th October 2018