

Witness Name:
Statement No.: 1
Exhibits:
Dated:

THE INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Witness Statement of Diane Kingaby

I, Diane Kingaby, will say as follows:-

1. The report that I have sent to the Beechwood Inquiry is a contemporaneous (1991) discussion of the challenges faced by my Local Authority (Nottinghamshire County Council) in responding to sexual abuse in children's residential care. The widespread extent of such abuse was beginning to be recognised and the various systems in the County Council were not yet able to respond in the best way. The report was an assignment written for my MBA course at De Montford University, trying to understand the challenges in terms of organisational systems theories that we were being taught.

At that time I think I was four tiers below the Director. I was Senior Professional Officer responsible for managing several children's residential homes. I was managed by Jane Williams, who reported to Denis Watson, who reported to the Director, David White. There was also a Deputy Director.

2. This report was submitted to my university tutor for formal assessment. I did not share it formally in the Local Authority. This was because all my observations in the assignment were already discussed frequently in my team and with my managers and reflected discussion more widely shared with relevant colleagues at County Hall. There was nothing new to share in terms of information and observation, but these were set in a theoretical framework for my course.

3. The role of Members of the Committee undertaking rota visits was widely perceived as a token. My writing about it in an academic assignment and then sharing it would not have added to anyone's understanding or prompted any action. When a Rota Visit was announced, we managers were expected to attend, to ensure the Members were greeted hospitably and shown round. We were told not to talk about contentious issues. Managers tried to keep Members at arms length due to lack of trust. If on their side there had been an understanding among Members of their role, they would have been concerned about the physical standards and levels of resourcing, concerned about violence and damage, issues that they could not have failed to see. Without specific training and clear expectations of the role, they would not have had a starting point in talking to children and staff about, for example, safe relationships.

4. I cannot actually say (as I did in my report, for which I apologise) that the Director of Social Services took a conscious decision not to report to Committee on the extent of abuse in Children's Homes. I do know that other managers acted to avoid Committee knowing as they believed, rightly or wrongly, that the response would be negative. Managers did not feel supported by Committee to do the right thing – for example, end an accused person's employment in case it led to an Employment Tribunal, with the associated costs and damage to the Authority's reputation. One Assistant Director, Martin Eaden, began to take a stronger line on this and he dismissed staff if he believed the case against them was sound, and his approach did help to strengthen the disciplinary process.

I offer an example of how widespread the understanding was of issues I wrote about in my university assignment: all colleagues in my team did duty once a week, hearing social workers' applications for a place in residential care for children in emergency situations. We were all instructed to tell social workers that they should try anything to avoid their child coming into residential care as they were more likely to be sexually abused than not.

All areas of support to children in care were catching up with this new world of extensive abuse in our establishments – managers, training, policy, HR, Members. There was a lot of discussion and shared understanding about the need for direction and leadership and resources, but no person took that lead at that time. If I had had some particular information or insight, I would have brought it to management attention. However, I am confident that all I have written was common knowledge at my level, and up to, but perhaps not including, Director level.

What I did do was pursue the idea of having a children's residential home staffed by women for survivors of sexual abuse, and a working group was set up, with the agreement of senior managers, which had representatives from throughout the wider County Council, to explore the desirability and feasibility of this idea. Unfortunately, as I say in my report, I felt so compromised in my post by having no means to improve the lives of children in our care, that I left after a year. This did unfortunately mean that the working group was not continued.

5. In my assignment I mention the potential of the Children Act, which was about to be implemented, to clarify roles and responsibilities within the Local Authority and its partner agencies. I hoped that the new clarity would improve resourcing and management, and lead to safer care. Poor resources did impact on the quality of care, but this was exacerbated by lack of leadership and direction in understanding how to deal with abusive staff and abused children. The fact that the Local Authority could be financially liable for failures of safe care was, I thought, helpful in bringing Committee attention to the needs of children in our care.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed: _____

DPA

Dated: _____

23 October 2018