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**Response to Rule 9 Questions as requested**

Introductory question:

I am happy to clarify the phrase "from that time" in line one of my signed statement by amending it to "from the time of the parliamentary by-election in the Rochdale constituency on 26 October 1972"

- 1 I first met Cyril Smith during the parliamentary by-election campaign in Rochdale in October 1972. I had been a member of the Liberal party since 1958 and by the time of the Rochdale by-election I was a city councillor in Leeds and took an active part in the by-election campaign.
- 2 I found him self-centred, curiously sensitive and on a number of issues he was to the Right of the party. I did not get on very well with him but we had perforce to work together within the party and particularly from 1983 to 1987 within the parliamentary Liberal party. He offended almost all the Parliamentary Liberal Party at its first meeting following the 1983 general election by criticising fiercely David Steel's conduct of the election.
- 3 The rules for selecting prospective parliamentary candidates were less rigorous in the 1970s than they are now. Applicants had to complete a proforma and to supply two referees; they were then interviewed by a regional panel of experienced Liberal party members who decided whether the applicant should be placed on the panel of candidates approved for selection by a constituency. Some were made available generally to any constituency but some were approved for a particular constituency. There was a different accelerated process for by-elections with additional powers given to party headquarters who were able to introduce external candidates and to prevent local candidates that HQ thought would not be able to cope with the spotlight of a by-election. Frankly, I do not recall the precise circumstances of my selection process before the February 1974 general election but I was a city councillor and a metropolitan county councillor within the Leeds West constituency and leader of the Liberal party on the Leeds city council and it was therefore generally agreed that I would contest the Leeds West constituency.

- 4 I have no knowledge of the details of how Cyril Smith was selected for the 1970 general election in Rochdale in place of the previously selected Garth Pratt. I only know that it happened and that Garth, who had been a leading and capable Young Liberal and who had contested the 1964 and 1966 general elections in the Melton constituency, was deselected. I am aware that Garth's latent alcoholism became more evident and that this provided a reason why he was vulnerable to deselection when it became known that Cyril Smith was prepared to be the candidate. In common with a number of colleagues, I was concerned at Garth Pratt's deselection in Rochdale and I brought across to Yorkshire to be the candidate in Pudsey. Garth Pratt subsequently joined the Labour party, was elected as a West Yorkshire Metropolitan County councillor and died suddenly and somewhat prematurely in January 2007.
- 5 I have no personal knowledge of this investigation. I have no information on what the party may have known about this investigation. I have set out in my witness statement the information given to me by the late Gill Pratt, the widow of Garth Pratt which may refer to these allegations.
- 6 It was a common political assessment that Smith was the only Liberal who could win the by-election for the party. Purely objectively any political commentator could see his local election successes from 1952. It is also set out in detail in Smith's autobiography, "Big Cyril", Star Book edition, pages 115 to 117.
- 7 I have no knowledge of this investigation.
- 8 I am afraid I cannot now recall the precise circumstances of this incident. I acted as Deputy Whip to Alan Beith MP from 1983 to 1986 and it was part of that job to deal with media items relating to individual MPs. The fact was, as I told the Channel 4 interviewers for their Dispatches programme on Cyril Smith, that, as far as I was aware, we in Westminster were unaware of any complaints or allegations coming directly to us from sources in Rochdale. I was uneasy about the Private Eye allegations but, at that time, I did not believe that there was sufficient evidence to take the matter further at my level. Others more senior to me may have had other, confidential, material.
- 9 Not significantly before arriving in parliament in 1983. Previously to that my main direct contact was as Chair of the Party's Assembly Committee 1979-83 when I had to negotiate with Cyril Smith over his requests to address the Assembly. Later in the 1983 parliament Cyril Smith and I were jointly responsible for a project directed at improving the Liberal performance in Labour dominated constituencies. This was a project financed by Smith for which the executive officer was the late Mike Harskin. Smith came to speak in Leeds West for me one afternoon at the 1987 election as part of his tour of the West Yorkshire area. Much later, when he was housebound, I visited him at his Emma Street home.

There were comments from time to time about Cyril liking boys but there was nothing specific. It was symptomatic of the unpleasant gossip that unfortunately permeates the palace of Westminster much of which never amounts to anything substantial. This was the case at the time in relation to Cyril Smith.

- 10 I have no recollection of there being any particular reaction to it. Certainly I had no particular feelings about it at the time. Unfortunately honours in the political sphere arrive as a consequence of length of service and often follow retirement, as with Smith.
- 11 See my response to question 8 above. As I have stated, I had no knowledge of the stories that appeared in the Rochdale alternative press and, therefore, all I had to acknowledge was what appeared in *Private Eye* and that did not result in legal action. As for Smith's electability is concerned, he held his Rochdale constituency comfortably in 1987 despite all the press references and gossip.
- 12 No, I was never contacted by the party. The only people to contact me were the Channel 4 people who told me it was because my obituary of Cyril Smith was the only one to make any reference to the allegations. I found the eventual Dispatches programme interesting in its revelation that the Greater Manchester police had done their investigations highly effectively and that it was the DPP who had marked the file "NFA". As a consequence of my interview on this programme, I was subsequently contacted by the Greater Manchester police who came and interviewed me in Leeds.

The main additional information I was able to give them was that, following the Channel 4 programme I had been telephoned by Gill Pratt, the widow of Garth Pratt. She was an old friend whom I had known as Gill Cheeseborough before her marriage to Garth when she was Eric Lubbock MP's secretary in the House of Commons. She told me that she did not want to get involved but that she had information that she wanted me to know. I went to see her at her home and she told me that when the possibility of Cyril Smith contesting Rochdale became known to Liberal Party headquarters the Chief Agent, Edward (Ted) Wheeler, came to Rochdale to check on Smith. Gill told me that Wheeler had come to see Garth and that she was present at the time. She and Garth had given Wheeler names and addresses of individuals in Rochdale who would be able to provide information on Smith. In particular she told me that they had given Wheeler the contact details for a Baptist minister whom Wheeler had visited and who she subsequently learned had provided Wheeler with details of a number of boys who had made allegations against Smith. Neither she nor I had any information as to whether Wheeler had visited these boys. Ted Wheeler died some years ago.

This was all new to me and the question arose in my mind as to who would or could have authorised the Chief Agent to go to Rochdale on this mission. It could only have been someone extremely high up in the party.

When the police contacted me I told them of my conversation with Gill Pratt. They asked me if I would contact her and ask if she would speak with them. I duly contacted her and she agreed to do so. I passed this information and her contact details to the officers who had interviewed me. I have no information as to whether they followed it up.

When the IICSA contacted me I tried to contact Gill Pratt again. After there was no reply to the telephone number I had been given and no response to e-mails I investigated and discovered that she had died.

13 No

14 Never in relation to minors. I was well aware of Clement Freud's predatory attitude towards women but never in regard to children, indeed, given his womanising with adult women, I found the allegations regarding minors extremely surprising.

I have no documents at all relating to Cyril Smith or any other case within your purview.

**DPA**

Michael Meadowcroft  
19 January 2019