

Witness name: Michael Meadowcroft

Statement No: 1

Exhibits:

Dated []

THE INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Witness Statement of Michael Meadowcroft

I, **MICHAEL MEADOWCROFT**, will say as follows:-

1. I had occasional political contacts with Cyril Smith from that time but my closer contact with him was the occasional contact in relation to his involvement with speaking at the annual Liberal Party Assembly between 1977 and 1981 when I was Chair of the party's Assembly committee, and then as a fellow member of the Parliamentary Liberal Party between 1983 to 1987. After that I can remember only one meeting with him at his home in Emma Street when he was too ill to leave the house. My obituary of him, published in The Guardian, 3 September 2010, made reference to the articles on Smith in Private Eye, commenting that the latter were never proved. That was the sum total of my direct knowledge of any involvement between Smith and children.
2. However, following my short interview on the Channel 4 "Despatches" programme on 12 September 2013, I received an e-mail from Jill Pratt, the widow of Garth Pratt who had been the prospective Liberal candidate for Rochdale but who was de-selected in effect to make way for Smith's candidature. I had known Jill since 1962 when she had been Eric Lubbock MP's secretary in parliament. She told me that the rumours about Smith and children had been circulating even before Garth Pratt had been adopted as the candidate soon after the previous election in March 1966, in particular about "Rochdale Childer" (she originally thought this was "Rochdale Kinder.")
3. Jill wrote, *"I am not sure that in this case it is even 'rumour'. Garth was asked for advice by a professional who had been approached by two boys from the home. I can't remember the man's name but he was the local Baptist minister and he was a friend of Garth's."* She went on to tell me that Ted Wheeler, who at that time was the Liberal Party's Chief Agent, *"came up to Rochdale to nose around and find out why we were winning Council bye elections. We certainly did not know that Cyril had been to see Jeremy (Thorpe - the then leader) and Ted had visited Cyril before seeing me. I told Ted about the allegations against Cyril and, in particular, about Rochdale's Kinder (I thought it was Kinder and not Childer) which was near where we lived. {...} With hindsight Ted must have been reporting to JJT [Jeremy Thorpe] so 'senior Liberals' knew well before he [Smith] became candidate."* I gathered from a later conversation with Jill that the Baptist minister she mentioned had given Ted Wheeler the names of a number of boys who alleged that they had been abused by Smith.

4. I was later contacted by Greater Manchester Police wishing to interview me re Cyril Smith. Annette Holliday and a colleague from "Operation Clifton" came to see me in Leeds on 19 February 2015 and interviewed me for over an hour. I told them about Jill Pratt and my contacts with her. Obviously, they wished to interview her. Given that Jill had said that she did not wish to be involved, I did not give the police her contact details and, instead, I immediately contacted Jill and she agreed to meet the police officers. I have no information as to what then transpired between them.
5. Since you first contacted me I have tried to re-contact Jill Pratt but without success. The telephone number I had was "unobtainable" and there was no reply to the e-mail address I had. Following this I recently made further enquiries and I discovered that she died in York on 18 August 2015, aged 72, just six months after my - and presumably the police's - last contact with her. Her husband, Garth Pratt, died on 26 January 2007, aged 64.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed:

DPA

Dated:

9th January 2019