

<p>1 Wednesday, 13 March 2019</p> <p>2 (10.00 am)</p> <p>3 THE CHAIR: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to Day 8 of</p> <p>4 this public hearing. Mr Henderson?</p> <p>5 MR HENDERSON: Chair, our first witness today is</p> <p>6 Baroness Brinton.</p> <p>7 SARAH VIRGINIA BRINTON (BARONESS BRINTON) (sworn)</p> <p>8 Examination by MR HENDERSON</p> <p>9 MR HENDERSON: Good morning, Baroness Brinton.</p> <p>10 <b>A. Good morning.</b></p> <p>11 Q. Hopefully, you should have in front of you a file of</p> <p>12 papers. We will bring relevant documents up on the</p> <p>13 screen just to your right as well. Can you tell us your</p> <p>14 full name?</p> <p>15 <b>A. Sarah Virginia Brinton (Baroness Brinton).</b></p> <p>16 Q. Baroness Brinton, can you give us just a little bit of</p> <p>17 personal background: tell us briefly what you did before</p> <p>18 you got involved in politics?</p> <p>19 <b>A. I trained as a stage manager and I worked at the BBC for</b></p> <p>20 <b>some eight years and then went on to be a mature student</b></p> <p>21 <b>at Cambridge, moved into business and then I was bursar</b></p> <p>22 <b>of two Cambridge colleges for over a decade and then</b></p> <p>23 <b>continued in education thereafter. I joined the</b></p> <p>24 <b>Liberals in 1974, after the elections. Because of my</b></p> <p>25 <b>job at the BBC, which was in production, I couldn't be</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 1</p>	<p>1 <b>more active than that, so I saw everything only from my</b></p> <p>2 <b>local party perspective. I was an agent in the GLC</b></p> <p>3 <b>elections in 1977 to my first husband, but apart from</b></p> <p>4 <b>that and delivering leaflets, going on demonstrations,</b></p> <p>5 <b>I didn't do much else.</b></p> <p>6 <b>I became much more active --</b></p> <p>7 Q. Let me just pause you there. Thank you. Could I just</p> <p>8 ask you, thank you for all of that, but could you keep</p> <p>9 everything a little bit slower? You will see the ladies</p> <p>10 in front of you are taking a transcript and it helps if</p> <p>11 we slow down. Thank you.</p> <p>12 You said you were involved in local politics and you</p> <p>13 were involved in the Liberal Party before it then became</p> <p>14 the Liberal Democrats in 1998 to 1992?</p> <p>15 <b>A. Yes.</b></p> <p>16 Q. Just tell us a little bit about the roles that you</p> <p>17 played in the party?</p> <p>18 <b>A. At that stage, very, very little, because of my job.</b></p> <p>19 <b>I mean, I was travelling all over the country, I was</b></p> <p>20 <b>working in the studio long hours. So I would go to</b></p> <p>21 <b>executive meetings of my local party. I had no contact</b></p> <p>22 <b>at all either with the London party, which was what we</b></p> <p>23 <b>would now call the region, and certainly not with HQ.</b></p> <p>24 <b>But my first husband was more active. He was approved</b></p> <p>25 <b>as a candidate, and he certainly stood, as I say, for</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 2</p>
<p>1 <b>the GLC elections.</b></p> <p>2 Q. So it was London that was your main focus at that point?</p> <p>3 <b>A. London was my base, yes.</b></p> <p>4 Q. You are currently president of the Liberal Democrats.</p> <p>5 When did you start that role?</p> <p>6 <b>A. I started that in January 2015, the campaign was for</b></p> <p>7 <b>2014. By that stage, I had ceased to be a councillor,</b></p> <p>8 <b>which I'm happy to go back over, if that is helpful.</b></p> <p>9 <b>But in my role as president, I chair the party's federal</b></p> <p>10 <b>board and I am voted for by all the members, so it's</b></p> <p>11 <b>like the leadership of our party. It's a full campaign</b></p> <p>12 <b>and I represent them. I'm now in my second and final</b></p> <p>13 <b>term of office, due to end at the end of this calendar</b></p> <p>14 <b>year.</b></p> <p>15 Q. What are your responsibilities as president?</p> <p>16 <b>A. Well, apart from the practical ones of chairing the</b></p> <p>17 <b>board, I would describe myself as holding the ring on</b></p> <p>18 <b>everything to do with the federal party. The party, the</b></p> <p>19 <b>Liberal Democrats as well as the Liberals, are very</b></p> <p>20 <b>devolved and the members and the local parties would</b></p> <p>21 <b>certainly regard as giving the power upwards both to the</b></p> <p>22 <b>state parties and the state parties -- England, Scotland</b></p> <p>23 <b>and Wales -- are the federation, and the president must</b></p> <p>24 <b>come from one of those three state parties.</b></p> <p>25 Q. Do you have responsibilities for matters such as</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 3</p>	<p>1 discipline or safeguarding, child protection policies,</p> <p>2 any of that kind of thing?</p> <p>3 <b>A. I have no formal role, as the leader doesn't either, in</b></p> <p>4 <b>discipline, and that's never been the case. Currently,</b></p> <p>5 <b>we are in the middle of changing our processes. Over</b></p> <p>6 <b>the last five to six years, we have recognised that</b></p> <p>7 <b>having discipline processes either run by local parties</b></p> <p>8 <b>or at state levels where elected members, elected onto</b></p> <p>9 <b>committees, may have some role in discipline has not</b></p> <p>10 <b>been good, and as a result of that, we have now --</b></p> <p>11 <b>through the membership, agreeing it at conference --</b></p> <p>12 <b>moved to a new system of an independent parallel</b></p> <p>13 <b>structure headed up by members of the party who are</b></p> <p>14 <b>lawyers but who are not allowed to be elected in any</b></p> <p>15 <b>other role in the party. That's just about to start</b></p> <p>16 <b>happening.</b></p> <p>17 Q. Thank you. We will come back to that at the end of your</p> <p>18 evidence, if I may.</p> <p>19 But can I firstly, and for the bulk of your evidence</p> <p>20 we are going to look at some things that happened in the</p> <p>21 past?</p> <p>22 <b>A. Yes.</b></p> <p>23 Q. You have kindly provided two witness statements to this</p> <p>24 inquiry, and I would like to bring up the first of them</p> <p>25 now, please -- there's LDP000018. Chair, I would invite</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 4</p>

<p>1 you to adduce this statement in its entirety.</p> <p>2 Baroness Brinton, in this statement, you have dealt</p> <p>3 with a number of subjects that the inquiry has asked for</p> <p>4 a senior member of the Liberal Democrats to address.</p> <p>5 I am going to take you through them in stages.</p> <p>6 Firstly, if we look at the start of the statement,</p> <p>7 paragraph 1.6 on page 2, you have explained that you</p> <p>8 didn't compile this statement alone?</p> <p>9 <b>A. No.</b></p> <p>10 Q. You had a small working party to do. Can you just</p> <p>11 explain for us how you went about producing the</p> <p>12 statement?</p> <p>13 <b>A. For something serious like this, the obvious people to</b></p> <p>14 <b>speak to would be, first of all, those who are senior</b></p> <p>15 <b>officers of the party, so the chief executive would be</b></p> <p>16 <b>the person I would want to automatically include,</b></p> <p>17 <b>because he obviously has access to records of anything</b></p> <p>18 <b>that happened via the staff at HQ. But I would also</b></p> <p>19 <b>turn to our senior people in parliament, those who have</b></p> <p>20 <b>been, or currently are, Chief Whips or leaders in either</b></p> <p>21 <b>the House of Commons or the House of Lords.</b></p> <p>22 <b>So Sir Nick Harvey, as our current chief executive,</b></p> <p>23 <b>was also an MP for some years, and certainly -- although</b></p> <p>24 <b>I don't think that he overlapped with Cyril Smith, he</b></p> <p>25 <b>certainly was around with a lot of the MPs who did.</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 5</p>	<p>1 <b>I also asked Lord Newby to assist, because he had</b></p> <p>2 <b>been general secretary of the SDP prior to the merger,</b></p> <p>3 <b>and very involved in the party from the merger days, '88</b></p> <p>4 <b>on, and had been in the House of Lords for most of that</b></p> <p>5 <b>time as well, and indeed had been Chief Whip in the</b></p> <p>6 <b>House of Lords.</b></p> <p>7 Q. Thank you. Am I right to understand, then, that the</p> <p>8 statement you have provided is a joint effort drawing on</p> <p>9 not just the corporate record, but also the memory of</p> <p>10 those individuals you have named?</p> <p>11 <b>A. Yes.</b></p> <p>12 Q. I understand as well that you actually spoke to a number</p> <p>13 of other people?</p> <p>14 <b>A. Yes.</b></p> <p>15 Q. If we turn to LDP000010 at tab 4, on the second page</p> <p>16 there, we have a list of other people that you spoke</p> <p>17 with. If we look down the list, we will see the thing</p> <p>18 in common seems to be a lot of them were around at the</p> <p>19 relevant time; is that right?</p> <p>20 <b>A. That's right, yes.</b></p> <p>21 Q. When I say "the relevant time", I mean, in particular,</p> <p>22 the 1970s and '80s?</p> <p>23 <b>A. Correct. Because, sadly, obviously, a lot of the key</b></p> <p>24 <b>people are no longer with us.</b></p> <p>25 Q. If we can go back to your main statement, please, and if</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 6</p>
<p>1 we can go on to paragraph 3, which is on page 3, I would</p> <p>2 like to ask you, Baroness Brinton, firstly about the</p> <p>3 historic structure and the procedures of the Liberal</p> <p>4 Party. There are three broad periods I would like to</p> <p>5 ask you about. The first is pre 1969, briefly; then</p> <p>6 1969 to 1988; and then again, briefly, 1988 onwards.</p> <p>7 Firstly, can we have a look at pre 1969. This is</p> <p>8 your paragraph 3.2. You explain here that the Liberal</p> <p>9 Party in the 1960s was very decentralised. Can you just</p> <p>10 give us a flavour for what it was like?</p> <p>11 <b>A. These days, decentralisation, you would talk about</b></p> <p>12 <b>a local constituency party, and mostly around the</b></p> <p>13 <b>country we have got those, but in these days, Liberal</b></p> <p>14 <b>associations were not necessarily consistent across an</b></p> <p>15 <b>area. They were usually where a number of people had</b></p> <p>16 <b>come together and started to campaign and work. They</b></p> <p>17 <b>didn't have to affiliate to the main national party, so</b></p> <p>18 <b>they could operate completely in isolation, and, as has</b></p> <p>19 <b>been said in some of the statements that have been made</b></p> <p>20 <b>that are presented here today, there were some arguments</b></p> <p>21 <b>about, you know, new Liberals and Liberal federations</b></p> <p>22 <b>and all of those things.</b></p> <p>23 <b>I think it was recognised that that basically</b></p> <p>24 <b>19th century system needed to change and Jo Grimond was</b></p> <p>25 <b>the last leader who was beginning to talk about changing</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 7</p>	<p>1 <b>that and bringing it up to date in the 20th century.</b></p> <p>2 Q. You describe here, just at the end of that paragraph:</p> <p>3 "In the mid 1960s, the party commissioned</p> <p>4 a constitutional review to bring the constitution up to</p> <p>5 date. This was debated and voted on ... in 1969."</p> <p>6 Is that right?</p> <p>7 <b>A. Yes.</b></p> <p>8 Q. I understand a lot of this information was drawn in</p> <p>9 particular from the recollections of a gentleman called</p> <p>10 Michael Steed?</p> <p>11 <b>A. That's right.</b></p> <p>12 Q. If we could have a look at what he says, it is tab 5,</p> <p>13 chair and panel, and it is LDP000011. If we could turn</p> <p>14 to page 3 of that.</p> <p>15 If we zoom in on the second half of that page,</p> <p>16 beginning, "Perhaps it was". Thank you. Mr Steed was</p> <p>17 involved in the Liberal Party in quite a significant way</p> <p>18 from the 1960s onwards, as I understand it?</p> <p>19 <b>A. Yes.</b></p> <p>20 Q. In particular, he was involved in a lot of this</p> <p>21 organisational change, and he describes it here. That</p> <p>22 first paragraph you have already summarised in the</p> <p>23 statement that we have looked at, but I just want to</p> <p>24 look down at the second paragraph there. He describes</p> <p>25 something called the Seear Review. Can you tell us</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 8</p>

2 (Pages 5 to 8)

<p>1 a little bit about what that is?</p> <p>2 <b>A. Nancy Seear was, at that point, one of the senior</b></p> <p>3 <b>members of the party. In fact, she was then elevated</b></p> <p>4 <b>into the House of Lords and our first woman leader in</b></p> <p>5 <b>the House of Lords. So a woman who -- and, indeed, had</b></p> <p>6 <b>stood for Rochdale in the 1960s.</b></p> <p>7 Q. I noticed that. A slight ironic twist.</p> <p>8 <b>A. Indeed. But she was accepted as somebody who was</b></p> <p>9 <b>capable of doing -- undertaking such a review because</b></p> <p>10 <b>she had known many of the people in the party over many</b></p> <p>11 <b>years, and it was her review that started the process,</b></p> <p>12 <b>but, as you will see from Michael Steed's statement, it</b></p> <p>13 <b>was a very, very slow process.</b></p> <p>14 Q. Indeed. I wanted to zoom in, if I may, on a statement</p> <p>15 he makes at the second-last paragraph there. Do you see</p> <p>16 right at the end he says:</p> <p>17 "It is clear that the changes were being brought</p> <p>18 into effect patchily and slowly and were certainly not</p> <p>19 fully effective until after the 1970 General Election."</p> <p>20 <b>A. I understand. This predates my involvement with the</b></p> <p>21 <b>Liberals.</b></p> <p>22 Q. Of course.</p> <p>23 <b>A. I understand that part of the problem was, they just</b></p> <p>24 <b>didn't know where local associations were, and they</b></p> <p>25 <b>needed to be able to sort all of that out, and to try</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 9</p>	<p>1 <b>and draw people together to make sure that everybody had</b></p> <p>2 <b>bought into things.</b></p> <p>3 Q. Actually, we can see contemporaneous proof of that. If</p> <p>4 you turn to tab 27, and for the Relativity operator it</p> <p>5 is INQ003964. We have here from the Liberal Party</p> <p>6 archives minutes of a meeting of the National Executive</p> <p>7 Committee. Who are the National Executive Committee at</p> <p>8 this stage?</p> <p>9 <b>A. That is the equivalent of the current Federal Board, or</b></p> <p>10 <b>the Federal Executive, as it was before the board</b></p> <p>11 <b>changed its name and remit.</b></p> <p>12 Q. So this is as close as we got to a sort of central --</p> <p>13 <b>A. Correct.</b></p> <p>14 Q. -- executive --</p> <p>15 <b>A. Yes.</b></p> <p>16 Q. -- function?</p> <p>17 <b>A. Yes.</b></p> <p>18 Q. We see this is dated 30 October 1970, so some months</p> <p>19 after the 1970 election?</p> <p>20 <b>A. Correct.</b></p> <p>21 Q. If we turn over the page to page 2 -- sorry, just for</p> <p>22 a second, if we could go back for a second to page 1, it</p> <p>23 would be useful to see -- we see some familiar names</p> <p>24 here, don't we --</p> <p>25 <b>A. Indeed.</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 10</p>
<p>1 Q. -- in that list? Thank you. We can see</p> <p>2 "Mr M Meadowcroft" about halfway down?</p> <p>3 <b>A. Correct.</b></p> <p>4 Q. We have a statement from him. We will come to that. We</p> <p>5 can also see Mr Lishman, who I understand you have</p> <p>6 spoken to and we will hear about that?</p> <p>7 <b>A. Mmm.</b></p> <p>8 Q. Then, down the bottom, just above "Jeremy Thorpe",</p> <p>9 Mr M Steed?</p> <p>10 <b>A. Indeed.</b></p> <p>11 Q. Again, if we can turn over the page to page 2 and zoom</p> <p>12 in on the section that says "Candidate's committee</p> <p>13 report". What we see here is essentially a discussion</p> <p>14 about trying to standardise how candidates are selected,</p> <p>15 and this is in October 1970.</p> <p>16 <b>A. Yes.</b></p> <p>17 Q. If we look in the middle of the paragraph, we can see</p> <p>18 a reference to, "This is still with the aim of producing</p> <p>19 a uniform standard and pattern of interview throughout</p> <p>20 the country"?</p> <p>21 <b>A. Correct.</b></p> <p>22 Q. So even in October, it's still not happened?</p> <p>23 <b>A. Still not happened.</b></p> <p>24 Q. Can we go back to your statement, please, LDP000018_003.</p> <p>25 So that's the pre 1969 process. You make a comment,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 11</p>	<p>1 Baroness Brinton, at paragraph 3.3. You say:</p> <p>2 "It is worth noting that there was still a strong</p> <p>3 residual belief that parliamentary parties were governed</p> <p>4 by the British constitution rather than party</p> <p>5 structures ... MPs in those days were not accountable to</p> <p>6 their political parties as they are now."</p> <p>7 Can you just explain that: what does that mean? In</p> <p>8 particular, if an MP was found guilty or suspected of</p> <p>9 misconduct?</p> <p>10 <b>A. I think it means absolutely generally that the MP was</b></p> <p>11 <b>representing their electorate, and it was in some ways</b></p> <p>12 <b>almost coincidental that they were a member of</b></p> <p>13 <b>a political party, and certainly from the leaflets that</b></p> <p>14 <b>we may or may not come on to later about Cyril Smith --</b></p> <p>15 Q. We will, yes.</p> <p>16 <b>A. -- that's what you see: he is saying, "I am your</b></p> <p>17 <b>candidate". We have always been clear, and we still</b></p> <p>18 <b>remain clear, that the party cannot mandate MPs on how</b></p> <p>19 <b>to vote, and so although the members make policy in our</b></p> <p>20 <b>party, and indeed at this stage made policy in the</b></p> <p>21 <b>party, it was up to the MP to make their own decision,</b></p> <p>22 <b>and certainly that was also true at the time in terms of</b></p> <p>23 <b>behaviour as well. There was no power over the party at</b></p> <p>24 <b>all. The only relevance at that stage would have been</b></p> <p>25 <b>if there had been a problem with the Chief Whip, which</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 12</p>

<p>1 is why obviously we were asking the Chief Whip.</p> <p>2 Q. Would that mean that there was a reluctance to confront</p> <p>3 a member of parliament, a Liberal member of parliament,</p> <p>4 about misconduct because it was felt it wasn't really</p> <p>5 a matter for the party?</p> <p>6 <b>A. I can't comment on that because I genuinely don't know.</b></p> <p>7 <b>I mean, I think the only parallel that I could draw is</b></p> <p>8 <b>when the Jeremy Thorpe problem emerged prior to the</b></p> <p>9 <b>charge, and that was mainly dealt with by the Chief Whip</b></p> <p>10 <b>rather than the party.</b></p> <p>11 Q. We will come on to that in just a moment. Just zoom</p> <p>12 back for a moment and look at the period 1969 to 1988.</p> <p>13 If we can look at your paragraph 3.1. Essentially, in</p> <p>14 this period, the party is still very decentralised.</p> <p>15 There is a new constitution, but, as you say here, it is</p> <p>16 a mix of lots of different organisations, effectively,</p> <p>17 stitched together?</p> <p>18 <b>A. Yes.</b></p> <p>19 Q. In many ways, the key person is the Chief Whip -- is</p> <p>20 that right? -- in terms of selecting candidates and</p> <p>21 having strategic responsibility?</p> <p>22 <b>A. Having responsibility for a matter. I think I would</b></p> <p>23 <b>want to make it clear that the Chief Whip did not select</b></p> <p>24 <b>candidates or approve; they delegated others to go and</b></p> <p>25 <b>do that. In fact, the decision to select candidates,</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 13</p>	<p>1 <b>with the exception of by-elections, where a different</b></p> <p>2 <b>procedure was followed, was entirely in the hands of</b></p> <p>3 <b>the local association.</b></p> <p>4 Q. That's fine. We will come to that as well. All right.</p> <p>5 Am I right that there was no major change until 1980, so</p> <p>6 between 1969 and 1980, there was no major change to the</p> <p>7 structures?</p> <p>8 <b>A. No.</b></p> <p>9 Q. Thank you. Can we move on, then, to your page 4, and</p> <p>10 just look at how allegations of misconduct would have</p> <p>11 been dealt with. Very broadly, if we have a look at</p> <p>12 paragraph 4.1, since 1988 and the merger, there are much</p> <p>13 more formal procedures and membership rules, as</p> <p>14 I understand it?</p> <p>15 <b>A. Yes.</b></p> <p>16 Q. We will look at those a little bit at the end of your</p> <p>17 evidence. But, very briefly, is there a procedure now</p> <p>18 for dealing with a member, whether that's an individual</p> <p>19 member or an MP or a councillor or an elected member,</p> <p>20 who has been found guilty of some kind of misconduct?</p> <p>21 <b>A. Yes, there absolutely is. Perhaps I could distinguish</b></p> <p>22 <b>between two things. This is about any complaint about</b></p> <p>23 <b>misconduct, which may or may not get to the point of</b></p> <p>24 <b>going to the criminal -- through the criminal process.</b></p> <p>25 Q. Yes.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 14</p>
<p>1 <b>A. And what's more, it's all available on our website. So</b></p> <p>2 <b>if a member of the public wished to make a complaint</b></p> <p>3 <b>about a member of the party, whatever their role, they</b></p> <p>4 <b>can access that and support in how to make a complaint</b></p> <p>5 <b>through the party's pastoral care officer, who is there</b></p> <p>6 <b>to help complainants.</b></p> <p>7 Q. But prior to 1992, as I understand it, there were no</p> <p>8 established procedures at all; is that right?</p> <p>9 <b>A. It was in the hands of a local party association or</b></p> <p>10 <b>a state party to take whatever action they felt</b></p> <p>11 <b>appropriate. The vast majority of cases were dealt with</b></p> <p>12 <b>by the local association, and it would be only likely to</b></p> <p>13 <b>go up to the state party or the regional party, in the</b></p> <p>14 <b>case of England, if key officers were involved in one</b></p> <p>15 <b>side or the other of whatever the dispute was. But it</b></p> <p>16 <b>very rarely got to HQ. And I think the big difference</b></p> <p>17 <b>between now and then is that we quite often at HQ would</b></p> <p>18 <b>never have been aware of complaints and about processes</b></p> <p>19 <b>of discipline because it was all dealt with at a local</b></p> <p>20 <b>level.</b></p> <p>21 Q. Let's look again, if we may, at Michael Steed's</p> <p>22 recollections on this, because, as we have seen, he was</p> <p>23 there at the time and he supports exactly what you have</p> <p>24 said. Could we go again to LDP000011, and that's tab 1,</p> <p>25 chair. We will look at page 4 this time. Just down the</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 15</p>	<p>1 bottom there, there's a heading that says "Conduct of</p> <p>2 members of the Liberal Party".</p> <p>3 Mr Steed says:</p> <p>4 "The Seear Review [which you have already explained]</p> <p>5 did consider whether the party should have a procedure</p> <p>6 for expelling members; up to then I think dealing with</p> <p>7 members who were politically embarrassing or whose</p> <p>8 behaviour was unacceptable seems to have been a matter</p> <p>9 for the rules of the Liberal body they had joined ..."</p> <p>10 That's what you have told us. If we can go on to</p> <p>11 the next page, page 5, up the top, that first paragraph,</p> <p>12 he says now:</p> <p>13 "I cannot recall whether our consideration of an</p> <p>14 expulsion procedure embraced what to do about serious</p> <p>15 criminal or other objectionable behaviour."</p> <p>16 So even at that point, it wasn't clear if there was</p> <p>17 any real procedure?</p> <p>18 <b>A. Yes.</b></p> <p>19 Q. The main focus seems to be political views that didn't</p> <p>20 fit with the rest of the party?</p> <p>21 <b>A. Yes.</b></p> <p>22 Q. Then, right at the bottom of that page, he summarises</p> <p>23 his recollections, the final paragraph, by saying --</p> <p>24 although he explains he was involved in some of these</p> <p>25 disciplinary or misconduct-type investigations, he says:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 16</p>

1 "I cannot therefore say what action would have been  
 2 taken in response to an allegation of child abuse on the  
 3 part of a prominent member of the party. Given my  
 4 involvement and experience at that period, I doubt that  
 5 there is anyone else who can truly say. I think that if  
 6 such an allegation had come to me whilst holding  
 7 a responsible office, I would first have considered it  
 8 is a matter for the police and looked to their guidance.  
 9 I would also have observed the important principle  
 10 'innocent until proved guilty'.  
 11 But that seems to be about as far as we can take,  
 12 Baroness Brinton, it in terms of what would have  
 13 happened?  
 14 **A. I think that's probably right. Other people have made**  
 15 **statements to say -- Ted Wheeler and John Spiller, when**  
 16 **they had heard things, said, "You must go to the**  
 17 **police", rather than taking it back to HQ, and that is**  
 18 **certainly the practice, as Michael Steed has said, that**  
 19 **it was about making sure that something for the police**  
 20 **went to the police.**  
 21 Q. But that would have meant, as you have said earlier,  
 22 that the central party, such as it was, might not even  
 23 have known about it?  
 24 **A. Indeed. Indeed.**  
 25 Q. Can we look then finally at what would have happened --

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1 a by-election was that the local association would  
 2 advertise amongst their members and probably through the  
 3 association of Liberal candidates at the time that there  
 4 was a vacancy to be candidate.  
 5 **If somebody had already been approved as**  
 6 **a candidate, that would not have been an issue, but**  
 7 **it -- there wasn't, certainly in the 1970s, very much**  
 8 **structure. A lot of it was word of mouth.**  
 9 **In order to become approved, you had to have an**  
 10 **interview, and you had to have two nominees -- these**  
 11 **days I think we would say references.**  
 12 Q. Who was the interview with?  
 13 **A. The interview was most likely with a regional officer,**  
 14 **who may or may not have been the regional candidates**  
 15 **officer, who had some idea, particularly after the**  
 16 **Seear Review, of what we were looking for in**  
 17 **a candidate, but it was nothing more formal than that,**  
 18 **and certainly not the sort of process that I went**  
 19 **through in the early 1990s, which was much more formal**  
 20 **and tested a range of skills.**  
 21 Q. Any involvement at all from the central party, from the  
 22 National Executive Committee or the parliamentarians as  
 23 they were?  
 24 **A. Very, very unlikely, other than the Chief Whip at**  
 25 **a probably once or twice a year meeting asking how many**

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1 if we go back to your statement, LDP000018 in tab 1, and  
 2 page 4 again, what would have happened if there had been  
 3 an allegation made against an MP or a peer? You have  
 4 touched on this with the Jeremy Thorpe scandal, but at  
 5 paragraph 4.3, you say a number of the people you had  
 6 discussed this with said allegations would simply be  
 7 considered by the officers or Whips of the parliamentary  
 8 party?  
 9 **A. Yes.**  
 10 Q. Is that right? What kind of action would they take?  
 11 **A. They would have talked to the individual and they would**  
 12 **probably have also talked to anybody else who was aware**  
 13 **of what was going on, because, other than the**  
 14 **Jeremy Thorpe example, I can't give you any examples,**  
 15 **I don't know, but it would have been the responsibility**  
 16 **of the Chief Whip to do that, and certainly to question**  
 17 **the parliamentarian concerned.**  
 18 Q. Finally, then, in terms of understanding all the  
 19 background and the structures, I want to look at the  
 20 selection of candidates in the 1970s. You have dealt  
 21 with this at paragraph 5.1 onwards of your statement.  
 22 Can you just take us through briefly what you found out  
 23 about how Liberal Party -- prospective parliamentary  
 24 candidates, PPCs, were selected in the 1970s?  
 25 **A. Again, the responsibility for anything other than**

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1 **vacancies had been filled, whether we had candidates in**  
 2 **the key seats, but there was no practical involvement**  
 3 **about, "We need to get X into seat Y".**  
 4 Q. You say at paragraph 5.5, on page 5, that the  
 5 arrangements for a by-election were different, however?  
 6 **A. Mmm.**  
 7 Q. Just tell us about that?  
 8 **A. It's still true today that a by-election is a very**  
 9 **different type of election. There is a very high media**  
 10 **coverage, whether it is local media or national media,**  
 11 **and the level of campaigning, particularly if it is**  
 12 **a hotly-fought seat, is likely to require a lot more of**  
 13 **a candidate. As a result, particularly for one where we**  
 14 **think we might win, then HQ does have a hand.**  
 15 Q. Does get involved. Is there any chance that that would  
 16 be the same not in a by-election, but  
 17 a General Election, but where it is a very marginal seat  
 18 or where there was particular interest?  
 19 **A. I don't believe so; mainly because, even with this**  
 20 **arrangement where HQ is involved in the early stages,**  
 21 **the final decision is still made by the members of that**  
 22 **local association.**  
 23 Q. Can we look at Michael Steed again -- this is for the  
 24 second-last time. We are going to go back to him one  
 25 more time after this. But LDP000011\_004. That's tab 5

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1 again. Under the heading "Candidate selection", he  
 2 gives his recollections. I just want to pick up on  
 3 three comments briefly. That first paragraph he says  
 4 essentially what you have just told us:  
 5 "My own recollection of becoming a candidate at that  
 6 period (I stood in a by-election in April 1967 and again  
 7 at the 1970 General Election) is of how informal the  
 8 process was."  
 9 He goes on to explain having a chat with both HQ and  
 10 the regional party, but that was about it. Then if we  
 11 could go further down the page, and to the third and  
 12 fourth paragraphs, he says two things here. First of  
 13 all:  
 14 "... it would be very difficult to state who ought  
 15 to have exercised national authority over the candidate  
 16 selection process in ... 1969/70."  
 17 Because of all these complications and the  
 18 informality. Then he says in the next paragraph:  
 19 "... it would also be very difficult to state who  
 20 ought to have exercised regional authority ..."  
 21 Is that the stage we have got to: it is all a bit  
 22 murky?  
 23 **A. Absolutely. And later on, he goes on to talk about how**  
 24 **the perception was from Michael and his colleagues who**  
 25 **were friends of Garth Pratt, who was the candidate who**

Page 21

1 Q. Why was that?  
 2 **A. Hard-fought elections, very tribal politics on both**  
 3 **sides, and absolutely no love or caring to try and**  
 4 **compromise at all. I think -- Chris Davies, who has**  
 5 **a statement later on, actually says they hated each**  
 6 **other, and that is not far from the truth. So to have**  
 7 **somebody who moved from being a Liberal to Labour would**  
 8 **have meant that, when Cyril Smith did that, the Liberals**  
 9 **in Rochdale would have been appalled and horrified.**  
 10 **Labour would have been equally appalled when he left**  
 11 **them, briefly became an independent and then came back**  
 12 **to the Liberals. So there would have been quite a lot**  
 13 **of people who were trying to work out what on earth had**  
 14 **happened when he just came back into the fold.**  
 15 Q. What did you find out about how that happened? Tell us  
 16 about Garth Pratt. It seems that he persuaded Smith, or  
 17 was part of the persuading of Smith, back into the  
 18 Liberal --  
 19 **A. The irony is that he persuaded him back in because he**  
 20 **recognised that Cyril was well known, an excellent**  
 21 **campaigner and, therefore, would be an asset to the**  
 22 **Liberals. If you've been involved in a party structure**  
 23 **locally, to then become an independent can be quite**  
 24 **difficult, even if you are well known.**  
 25 Q. Simply because there is no support?

Page 23

1 **was displaced, that HQ must have had a hand in it.**  
 2 Q. Yes.  
 3 **A. I have to say that the moment you have been elected into**  
 4 **a senior position in the Liberals or the**  
 5 **Liberal Democrats, you become the establishment, and our**  
 6 **members love nothing more than blaming the establishment**  
 7 **for things that go wrong. I think it would be very**  
 8 **unlikely that HQ, which had a maximum of ten staff,**  
 9 **including field agents, would have had the capacity to**  
 10 **start to intervene in places like this.**  
 11 Q. Thank you. Let's turn now, then, to the selection of  
 12 Cyril Smith, because even with all that background,  
 13 there are some strange features about it which we just  
 14 want to explore.  
 15 Cyril Smith was selected as the PPC for Rochdale in  
 16 1970, as is now well known. The background was,  
 17 Cyril Smith had been a Liberal member between 1945 and  
 18 1950, as I understand it. He then joined the  
 19 Labour Party and was a Labour councillor from 1950 to  
 20 1967 and was very successful, as I understand it. He  
 21 made quite a splash in Rochdale.  
 22 **A. He did.**  
 23 Q. What was the relationship like between Labour and the  
 24 Liberals in Rochdale, from what you have gathered?  
 25 **A. It was not good.**

Page 22

1 **A. Because there is no support, yes.**  
 2 Q. You said it was ironic. Why was it ironic that  
 3 Garth Pratt did that?  
 4 **A. Because Cyril, however he did it, managed to get Garth**  
 5 **displaced and to take his place in the run-up to the**  
 6 **General Election of 1970.**  
 7 Q. We will look at that in just a second. The other bit of  
 8 the background, however, which is of course relevant, is  
 9 that we now know that in 1969 Cyril Smith was  
 10 investigated by Lancashire Police over allegations that  
 11 he'd sexually abused teenage boys at the Cambridge House  
 12 Hostel. On 24 January, he'd asked the police officers  
 13 who were investigating for a quick decision on whether  
 14 he'd be charged because he knew he might have to be the  
 15 PPC for the Liberal Party?  
 16 **A. Yes.**  
 17 Q. What actually happened was, slightly more than three  
 18 weeks later, which is the time period he'd said, the DPP  
 19 advised he shouldn't be prosecuted, no further action  
 20 would be taken, and he was informed of that. Then he  
 21 went to stand in 1970. So that gives us the question,  
 22 obviously, what was known in those early months of 1970?  
 23 Can we have a look again at what Mr Steed says. If  
 24 we could turn to page 6 of his statement, and zoom in at  
 25 the top of that, Mr Steed explains he was in the area,

Page 24

1 he moved to South Manchester and got involved in the  
 2 politics in the Manchester region, and became familiar  
 3 with what he describes as the "towering personality and  
 4 media impact of Cyril Smith". If we can then go down  
 5 a couple of paragraphs, he says he became involved with  
 6 the local Liberals, especially the Manchester region  
 7 Young Liberal Organisation, and the senior party at  
 8 Manchester City, Greater Manchester and north-west  
 9 region levels. He visited Rochdale in 1966 and it was  
 10 a prime Liberal target because Ludovic Kennedy I think  
 11 had come quite close to winning the seat?  
 12 **A. He had.**  
 13 Q. He met Garth and Jill Pratt, who he describes as hard  
 14 working and trying to sort of get involved in Rochdale.  
 15 He describes the unusual politics of the time. Do you  
 16 know what he means by that?  
 17 **A. Very tribal, very hard.**  
 18 Q. So what we have referred to already?  
 19 **A. Yes.**  
 20 Q. The hatred between Labour and Liberals?  
 21 **A. Yes.**  
 22 Q. And Garth Pratt obviously was hoping to be the PPC in  
 23 1970 in Rochdale?  
 24 **A. (Witness nods).**  
 25 Q. He then says, at the second paragraph there, he had

Page 25

1 What was that a reference to?  
 2 **A. Cyril was quite blatant about his support for capital  
 3 punishment and corporal punishment. Can I comment on  
 4 this paragraph?**  
 5 Q. Go on. The third one as well, because in some ways this  
 6 is the most interesting:  
 7 "... many in the north-west resented a coup that  
 8 they thought had been staged centrally. It was widely  
 9 believed that Jeremy Thorpe, notorious for bypassing the  
 10 Liberal Party's rule book when he wanted something, had  
 11 fixed it."  
 12 Please do comment. What do you think of those?  
 13 **A. I find that extraordinary, that Jeremy would have done  
 14 that. Even if Jeremy had come across Cyril, what we  
 15 know from later on, I think the phrase has been used  
 16 "they cordially loathed each other". I mean, they  
 17 really did not get on, could not --**  
 18 Q. Thorpe and Smith?  
 19 **A. Thorpe and Smith. So if they had met before, and  
 20 I don't know if they did, if there's any evidence at  
 21 all, then Thorpe would certainly not have supported it.  
 22 Would Thorpe have supported somebody saying,  
 23 "Cyril Smith has come back into the fold. We have got  
 24 a much better chance of winning Rochdale with him than  
 25 we have with this young Liberal who has come in. He's**

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1 moved away and he slightly lost touch with the  
 2 Manchester area, but then, "Cyril Smith suddenly and  
 3 controversially became Liberal PPC for Rochdale,  
 4 displacing my friend Garth". He qualifies what he is  
 5 about to say by saying it is one sided --  
 6 **A. Yes.**  
 7 Q. -- it's from sort of his, Garth's, supporters. If we go  
 8 on and see what he says, he says:  
 9 "I don't know how the deposition of Garth Pratt as  
 10 PPC and his replacement by Smith was effected. It was  
 11 strongly resented by many, not just Garth's friends.  
 12 Filtered through nearly 60 years of memory, I recall the  
 13 grounds as threefold. First, many candidates or  
 14 would-be candidates thought it was scandalous that  
 15 a talented candidate who had decided on his home and job  
 16 to nurse a constituency for several years should be  
 17 summarily sacked; that would deter others from giving  
 18 that commitment ..."  
 19 That seems quite a reasonable point to make?  
 20 **A. (Witness nods).**  
 21 Q. Secondly:  
 22 "... many on the [Young Liberal Organisation]  
 23 network or the radical wing of the party thought  
 24 Cyril Smith was too right wing, especially his known  
 25 views on capital and corporal punishment."

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1 **moved in but he's not known, he's not perceived to be  
 2 part of the town"? It wouldn't have been particularly  
 3 Jeremy -- Jeremy's role to deal with that. I mean, that  
 4 would have been much more about the region, the  
 5 north-west region saying, "Actually, we need to think  
 6 about that". I don't think that's what happened here,  
 7 because this I have seen in lots of places, where the  
 8 local association know, particularly for Liberals, where  
 9 we don't have many MPs, and I think we had about the  
 10 same as we do now at this stage, actually a local  
 11 candidate, well known, well liked -- for whatever he  
 12 did, Cyril was liked in the town -- would have a much  
 13 better chance of success than a young person, and you  
 14 have to select a candidate for each General Election.  
 15 So Garth knew that there would be a selection process  
 16 coming up, and it is, I'm afraid, not unlikely that  
 17 people would have said locally, "We really need Cyril.  
 18 He can actually make this happen for us".**  
 19 Q. So you think it is more likely that just the local  
 20 party, sad to say, just said to Garth Pratt, "No, we  
 21 want Cyril"?  
 22 **A. Yes.**  
 23 Q. Rather than that Thorpe got involved?  
 24 **A. Yes.**  
 25 Q. Do you think that's true, even though in 1970, as you

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1 have alluded to, the Liberals were at quite a low ebb  
 2 and there might have been real pressure on Thorpe to try  
 3 and get a win, and that therefore Smith was worth  
 4 pushing for?  
 5 **A. Leaders did not get involved in this. The leader of**  
 6 **the Liberal Party at that point was almost entirely**  
 7 **focused on the Commons and the politics of the Commons**  
 8 **rather than the workings of the party. Very few MPs**  
 9 **having to cover three or four different areas of policy**  
 10 **as well as the general leadership too. That was left to**  
 11 **others, including the president of the day and also to**  
 12 **the people like Ted Wheeler, who was our chief agent.**  
 13 **Now we would call him director of elections.**  
 14 Q. Baroness Brinton, if I may just push you on that, you  
 15 have given a very clear view of it. What's that based  
 16 on? As you have explained, you weren't involved in the  
 17 national politics or in this region at that time at all.  
 18 Is this from speaking to everyone else? Tell us where  
 19 you have got it from?  
 20 **A. It's from my memories of the '70s in London, but it is**  
 21 **also my experience over succeeding years as we have had**  
 22 **very bright, very able young candidates who, when we**  
 23 **have got to key elections, have discovered that they**  
 24 **have been displaced by a well-known local councillor,**  
 25 **and, you know, completely understandable, these were**

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1 explained, was the chief agent -- that's a national  
 2 party --  
 3 **A. It is the equivalent of director of elections these**  
 4 **days.**  
 5 Q. -- had come up to Rochdale after Garth Pratt had been  
 6 deselected. That's interesting. So this is after the  
 7 decision has been made. And asked about rumours about  
 8 Cyril Smith's activities. Those activities I think are  
 9 the same allegations that were made in the 1969/70  
 10 police investigation and in the RAP article we will come  
 11 to in 1979. So allegations of sexual abuse of boys at  
 12 Cambridge House?  
 13 **A. Yes.**  
 14 Q. The Pratts gave him the names and addresses of a number  
 15 of people they said he ought to visit, including  
 16 a Baptist minister. Do you have any idea who that was?  
 17 **A. No. I'm afraid we believe Ted Wheeler is dead.**  
 18 Q. So there has been no chance --  
 19 **A. There has been no chance to find that out.**  
 20 Q. Mr Meadowcroft advised he passed that information on to  
 21 Greater Manchester Police in 2013, which we know he did.  
 22 But, as you say, there is no way we can find out more  
 23 because Ted Wheeler is dead?  
 24 **A. We believe he's dead. We just can't track him. We have**  
 25 **tried.**

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1 **young Liberals, they at the time were seen as the future**  
 2 **of the party, the very clear view they took on**  
 3 **anti-apartheid, they were beginning to change things**  
 4 **nationally. Of course they would have wanted their**  
 5 **candidate to remain. But I'm afraid the machinations of**  
 6 **what went on locally were likely to mean Cyril was**  
 7 **deemed to be a safer pair of hands. It would have been**  
 8 **very bruising for Garth and his friends, very bruising.**  
 9 Q. Thank you. A further bit of the picture is potentially  
 10 filled out by Michael Meadowcroft. If we can go back to  
 11 your statement, LDP000018\_007, paragraph 5.13. Now, we  
 12 have actually obtained a statement from Mr Meadowcroft,  
 13 and, chair, I would invite you to adduce those  
 14 statements in full. They are at INQ003803, INQ003870  
 15 and INQ003871. There is no need to bring them up  
 16 because very helpfully Baroness Brinton has summarised  
 17 what he says here.  
 18 Let's look at that, if we may, Baroness Brinton.  
 19 Mr Meadowcroft says that whilst at the time he didn't  
 20 know what went on in Rochdale, following the Channel 4  
 21 Dispatches programme in September 2013, when the  
 22 Cyril Smith allegations were put out and discussed in  
 23 that programme, he had contact made with him by  
 24 Jill Pratt, who was the widow of Garth Pratt, and she  
 25 told him this, that Ted Wheeler, who, as you have

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1 Q. Unfortunately, Jill Pratt has passed away as well, as  
 2 I understand it?  
 3 **A. Yes.**  
 4 Q. Was there any suggestion, either from Mr Meadowcroft or  
 5 from anyone else you have spoken to, that Garth Pratt  
 6 passed on this information to anyone else at that time?  
 7 **A. Again, not that we can find. We know Ted Wheeler went**  
 8 **up there because there is a report in the National Exec**  
 9 **minutes, which is in the papers here. The logical**  
 10 **reason for Ted going to Rochdale at this time --**  
 11 Q. Yes, I was going to ask you.  
 12 **A. -- was because Cyril had been selected and the local**  
 13 **association and possibly the region would have said, "We**  
 14 **think we can win this". So he was going up to scout**  
 15 **around to see whether the organisational structure could**  
 16 **deliver a win, because a lot of local parties would like**  
 17 **to believe that they could win, but if you don't have**  
 18 **the full support, you're not going to be able to deliver**  
 19 **leaflets, you're not going to be able to canvass and get**  
 20 **the data that you need to be able to get your vote out.**  
 21 **So that's why Ted would have gone. From the evidence**  
 22 **that we have received, we believe Ted was -- including**  
 23 **from Michael -- from what Jill Pratt said, that he did**  
 24 **hear of some rumours, and he said, "Go to the police".**  
 25 Q. It seemed that Ted Wheeler knew about those rumours

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<p>1 before he spoke to the Pratts, according to                  2 Michael Meadowcroft's evidence anyway, because it says,                  3 "Ted Wheeler asked the Pratts about it"                  4 <b>A. I would suspect that to be the case, but I can't confirm</b>                  5 <b>that. But if Ted said that, it logically -- absolutely</b>                  6 <b>logically, he had heard it from somebody else in</b>                  7 <b>Rochdale.</b>                  8 Q. But we haven't been able to figure out who?                  9 <b>A. No.</b>                  10 Q. Just to conclude this, then, it seems we haven't been                  11 able to find anyone who can give a definitive answer                  12 about who made the decision Cyril Smith would be the PPC                  13 rather than Garth Pratt in 1970?                  14 <b>A. Correct.</b>                  15 Q. Nor can we find out how Ted Wheeler knew about those                  16 allegations and when he found out about them?                  17 <b>A. Correct.</b>                  18 Q. Smith then, of course, did stand in the 1970 election.                  19 He lost, but he increased the vote.                  20 <b>A. Yes.</b>                  21 Q. One point that's interesting is, if we could have a look                  22 at tab 22, and that's INQ003959, we have here one of                  23 Cyril Smith's election leaflets from that election. Two                  24 things to note. Firstly, as you, yourself, mentioned,                  25 Baroness Brinton, it is all about him, isn't it --</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 33</p>	<p>1 <b>A. Yes.</b>                  2 Q. -- rather than about the Liberal Party?                  3 <b>A. Yes.</b>                  4 Q. Secondly, if we go over the page, and we zoom in on the                  5 paragraph beginning, "I am of working class background",                  6 four paragraphs down?                  7 <b>A. Yes.</b>                  8 Q. Cyril Smith made quite a big deal, even in his election                  9 leaflets, about the fact he'd done lots of work with                  10 young people and children, it appears, and the                  11 Labour Party, who were obviously the incumbent MP at                  12 that point, and the main opposition to the Liberals,                  13 don't seem to have made any mention of these allegations                  14 in this election campaign, do they?                  15 <b>A. No.</b>                  16 Q. Is there any explanation for that?                  17 <b>A. No. I have no idea why they didn't do it. I can't say.</b>                  18 Q. Can we now, then, look at the allegations of involvement                  19 in child abuse that have been made against Cyril Smith                  20 from that point on, so in the '70s. The first period                  21 I want to look at is the 1972 by-election, when                  22 Cyril Smith got elected. If we could go back to your                  23 statement, LDP000018_008. You describe the 1972                  24 by-election here at paragraph 5.18.                  25 <b>A. Yes.</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 34</p>
<p>1 Q. Jack McCann, who was the Labour MP, died in 1972. There                  2 was a by-election and you say it was considered obvious                  3 that Smith was the only viable candidate for the                  4 Liberals?                  5 <b>A. Yes.</b>                  6 Q. So he stood. And this is useful information. You                  7 managed to contact John Spiller who was the election                  8 agent for Smith in that campaign. Now, Mr Spiller told                  9 you that early on in the by-election campaign, the                  10 editor of the Rochdale Alternative Press contacted him                  11 and made allegations about Cyril Smith along the lines                  12 of what emerged later. "Later" meaning in 1979; is that                  13 right?                  14 <b>A. Yes.</b>                  15 Q. "Mr Spiller considered this was a wild allegation of                  16 a sort not uncommon in by-elections in those days,                  17 particularly when a candidate had defected ... he                  18 reported to us that he told the editor that if he had                  19 any evidence he should give it to the police. He never                  20 heard any more and thought no more about it. In the                  21 years that followed, he never heard any repeat of that                  22 sort of allegation and during his tenure as general                  23 secretary -- which was only 18 months -- nothing                  24 relating to it ever crossed his desk. He says he                  25 basically forgot about it until the last two years."</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 35</p>	<p>1 <b>A. Yes.</b>                  2 Q. That, again, does seem to be backed up by the                  3 contemporaneous documents?                  4 <b>A. Yes.</b>                  5 Q. So if we have a look at tab 24, INQ003960, we have                  6 Mr Spiller's summary of the campaign from 1972, and                  7 there's a lot of administrative information on the first                  8 page, but if we go to page 2, under the heading                  9 "Summary" there is mention made of the difficulties in                  10 the organisation, there's difficulties in training of                  11 workers and activists. He goes on to talk about, again,                  12 more administrative and organisational features, but                  13 there is no mention at all of any rumours or allegations                  14 against Smith, any smears in the press, anything by the                  15 Labour Party?                  16 <b>A. Correct. Would it be helpful if I just say that it is</b>                  17 <b>not unusual in hard-fought elections and by-elections</b>                  18 <b>for allegations to be made against candidates. It</b>                  19 <b>happened to me, where I was reported to Special Branch</b>                  20 <b>by the candidate of one of the other parties for</b>                  21 <b>falsifying my nomination papers. They then did a press</b>                  22 <b>release about it, Special Branch had to get involved</b>                  23 <b>because they investigate electoral offences, and they</b>                  24 <b>told the other party to can it, to just stop it. I'm</b>                  25 <b>afraid, you know, that happens to be my personal</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 36</p>

<p>1 anecdote, but people from all parties involved in                  2 by-elections like this will see that.                  3 <b>So the right thing for John Spiller to do at this</b>                  4 <b>stage was to say, "Go to the police". That's absolutely</b>                  5 <b>the right thing to do. And without any other evidence,</b>                  6 <b>he would have regarded it as part of the dirty tricks</b>                  7 <b>that were going on.</b>                  8 Q. Thank you. Can we look at what happened then after the                  9 1972 election. You deal with this back in your                  10 statement at page 9, paragraph 5.19. You've spoken to                  11 three different individuals who have some recollection                  12 of hearing allegations about Cyril Smith following the                  13 1972 election. So the first is Philip Goldenberg, and                  14 he remembers some allegations, although he can't                  15 remember specifically what they were about, in the                  16 mid 1970s, when Cyril Smith was Chief Whip. Have you                  17 been able to find out anything else about what those                  18 might be?                  19 <b>A. No, I'm sorry, we have not. I mean, the problem is,</b>                  20 <b>this is --</b>                  21 Q. Of course.                  22 <b>A. -- memory of gossip at the time rather than anything</b>                  23 <b>more concrete.</b>                  24 Q. Did anybody mention Cyril Smith's name in connection to                  25 a man called Andre Thorne?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 37</p>	<p>1 <b>A. Not to my knowledge. The reports that have come back to</b>                  2 <b>us --</b>                  3 Q. That's never come up?                  4 <b>A. -- that's never come up.</b>                  5 Q. Secondly, you have spoken to Lord Steel?                  6 <b>A. Mmm.</b>                  7 Q. We are going to hear from him this afternoon directly.                  8 <b>A. Indeed.</b>                  9 Q. He says the only allegations he was aware of were those                  10 that emerged in 1979. Then, thirdly and finally,                  11 paragraph 5.19.3, you spoke to Gordon Lishman, and we                  12 have seen his name in some of the documents?                  13 <b>A. Yes.</b>                  14 Q. His recollection was that, in passing, in 1983, he was                  15 told that Cyril Smith had received an informal warning                  16 about his activity from the Chief Constable of                  17 Greater Manchester Police. He says his informant was                  18 responsible for liaison between the Security Service and                  19 the civil powers and, in a lunchtime conversation, he                  20 mentioned a different trial, and the surprise that the                  21 case had been brought on such evidence and was told, in                  22 such cases, it might be the only way of stopping                  23 activity even if someone was found not guilty, and then                  24 mentioned that Cyril Smith had had such a warning, and                  25 he thinks the word "spanking" was mentioned in the</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 38</p>
<p>1 background.                  2 Mr Lishman says, if he had had any reason to believe                  3 the case was more serious or continuing, he would have                  4 said something to the Chief Whip, but he appears to have                  5 thought there's nothing much to this?                  6 <b>A. No, indeed.</b>                  7 Q. That is the sum total of what you have managed to find?                  8 <b>A. Yes.</b>                  9 Q. In terms of rumours, allegations, things people being                  10 aware of in that period?                  11 <b>A. Yes.</b>                  12 Q. Can I just ask you one more general question: you and                  13 your colleagues in the party have obviously done quite                  14 a lot of digging to see if there are any allegations or                  15 rumours about child abuse?                  16 <b>A. Yes.</b>                  17 Q. Was there any knowledge or rumours that people were                  18 aware of about sexuality generally and, in particular,                  19 whether he was in any way involved in the homosexual                  20 vice scene?                  21 <b>A. Not to our knowledge.</b>                  22 Q. You then have referred in your statement to the other                  23 major thing which was going on at this period, which is                  24 the Jeremy Thorpe scandal. That dovetails neatly with                  25 the 1979 publication of the allegations about</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 39</p>	<p>1 Cyril Smith --                  2 <b>A. Indeed, yes.</b>                  3 Q. -- in the Rochdale Alternative Press. So let's look at                  4 those together. If we just go back a few paragraphs to                  5 paragraph 5.14, on page 8 of your statement, the Thorpe                  6 scandal obviously took up huge amounts of time during                  7 the 1970s, but the impression you have got from everyone                  8 you have spoken to is that there is no memory of                  9 allegations about Cyril Smith in that period prior to                  10 1979?                  11 <b>A. Not that we have managed to receive from anybody, no.</b>                  12 Q. That's despite the fact that Cyril Smith, as you have                  13 already alluded to, wasn't universally liked?                  14 <b>A. Mmm-hmm.</b>                  15 Q. There has also been several people who have said, if                  16 there were such allegations, they think it is likely                  17 they would have emerged either via the Rochdale                  18 Alternative Press or other channels --                  19 <b>A. Yes.</b>                  20 Q. -- before 1979, and they have expressed some surprise                  21 about that?                  22 <b>A. They have.</b>                  23 Q. I want to ask you about the 1979 article. There was                  24 a splash in both the Rochdale Alternative Press and then                  25 it was picked up by Private Eye, but not by any other</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 40</p>

<p>1 papers, national papers or regional papers, at the time, 2 it appears. 3 <b>A. Mmm-hmm.</b> 4 Q. From those you spoke to at the time, were they surprised 5 about that? Were they surprised that it didn't make 6 more of an impact, that it just disappeared? 7 <b>A. I think if it had been covered by national papers, or</b> 8 <b>even more mainstream papers than the Rochdale</b> 9 <b>alternative paper, then it probably would have gained</b> 10 <b>more traction. But it certainly didn't. And</b> 11 <b>Private Eye was well known for making statements, and</b> 12 <b>frequently sued by other people as well. So I think, on</b> 13 <b>its own, it was probably not enough to trigger alarm</b> 14 <b>bells.</b> 15 Q. Is it possible that the party would have taken any 16 action to try and suppress the story, to try and stop it 17 going to the national media? 18 <b>A. I doubt it, because of the Jeremy Thorpe case, where,</b> 19 <b>clearly, suppressing -- Jeremy trying to suppress things</b> 20 <b>had been part of the story. I mean, this is my</b> 21 <b>speculation. I can't confirm this. But I would have</b> 22 <b>thought the party absolutely would not have wanted to do</b> 23 <b>that, because it knew the party's reputation was also on</b> 24 <b>the line following the Jeremy Thorpe scandal.</b> 25 Q. Can I take you briefly, then, to a witness statement</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 41</p>	<p>1 that we have got from Dominic Carman. You will find 2 that at tab 18. For the Relativity operator, it is 3 INQ004013. Dominic Carman is the son of the late 4 George Carman QC, who was Jeremy Thorpe's defence 5 barrister at his trial in May/June 1979. If we could 6 look at page 3 of his statement, he describes this at 7 paragraphs 10 to 12: 8 "Cyril Smith's name did not feature in any material 9 way in the prosecution evidence ... and although 10 a Liberal parliamentary colleague of Thorpe ... he was 11 not a personal friend." 12 We have already -- that's an understatement? 13 <b>A. That is an understatement.</b> 14 Q. But then: 15 "Smith's name came up shortly before the trial as 16 a result of the Rochdale Alternative Press story. 17 "Further reproduction of the allegations in 18 Private Eye concerned [George Carman] greatly. Although 19 this was not the first time that he had become aware of 20 the alleged abuse of boys by Smith -- he had known about 21 it for some years ..." 22 Pausing there, that is interesting, isn't it, 23 because -- 24 <b>A. It is, but I have no idea where he got that from.</b> 25 Q. Then he says there was a real concern because it was</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 42</p>
<p>1 potentially prejudicial for his client, for 2 Jeremy Thorpe. It concerned another prominent Liberal 3 MP, probably the best known public figure apart from 4 Thorpe and David Steel, and so he was very concerned of 5 the impact on the trial. Then this, at paragraph 12: 6 "My father was annoyed, anxious and determined to 7 shut the story down ... professionally, he was not able 8 to take any direct action himself ... I believe that 9 solicitors -- although not Kingsley Napley, who had 10 retained my father to defend Thorpe -- were used to 11 prevent further publication. However, I do not know 12 which firm. Although Lord Goodman may have been 13 involved, I cannot be certain. From my father's 14 perspective, the outcome was successful. The Smith 15 story disappeared and was not resurrected, I believe, 16 until after his death in September 2010." 17 Do you have any comment on that? 18 <b>A. All I would say is we searched through all the archive</b> 19 <b>to see if there is any correspondence with solicitors</b> 20 <b>and there isn't. I have a suspicion that Smith might</b> 21 <b>have employed his own solicitors. We can find no</b> 22 <b>evidence to say that the party employed solicitors to do</b> 23 <b>that.</b> 24 Q. Thank you. Finally, then, the response to the 1970 25 article and the Private Eye -- sorry, RAP article and</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 43</p>	<p>1 Private Eye article does seem to have generally been 2 they weren't believed or they weren't taken any further. 3 There is only one reference we can find in any Liberal 4 Party document from the time which may refer to this. 5 I just want to bring this up to see if you can help us 6 with it: INQ003954. Chair, this isn't in your bundle. 7 This is an additional document. There is just one page 8 we want to look at. This is the minutes, again, of 9 the National Executive Committee. This is just after 10 the election in 1979. If we turn over the page to 11 page 2, this is a discussion about how the election went 12 generally. If we could just go to the bottom of 13 the page, beginning at the paragraph "Claire Brooks". 14 Could you tell us who Claire Brooks was or is? 15 <b>A. Was. She died in 2008, I think. She was an absolute</b> 16 <b>stalwart activist of the Liberal Party, extremely</b> 17 <b>influential, was not afraid to express her displeasure</b> 18 <b>with the establishment of the party, famously had</b> 19 <b>a sitdown strike when she discovered that female staff</b> 20 <b>at a conference were being paid less than male staff and</b> 21 <b>all the members refused to go to the break until that</b> 22 <b>was resolved. So she was --</b> 23 Q. A strong woman? 24 <b>A. A very strong woman and somebody who I, as a very young</b> 25 <b>and minor Liberal, admired. She was a role model for</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 44</p>

<p>1 <b>Liberals in a world that was dominated by men in</b>                  2 <b>politics. She was somebody who was not afraid to speak</b>                  3 <b>her mind.</b>                  4 Q. We see her expressing her mind here. She says she                  5 expressed her extreme disquiet at the unfair tactics                  6 used by opponents of the Liberal Party. There had been                  7 one particularly damaging article in a northern regional                  8 newspaper and any other notable instances of unethical                  9 behaviour demonstrated by the major parties. You                  10 probably can't help us with this, Baroness Brinton, but                  11 has anyone been able to find out whether that is                  12 a reference to Cyril Smith?                  13 <b>A. I'm afraid I have only seen this this morning. We</b>                  14 <b>haven't found anything to suggest that. I think the</b>                  15 <b>only other thing that I would say about Rochdale which</b>                  16 <b>does appear elsewhere is about the tactics of the far</b>                  17 <b>right in Rochdale, which I know that we, as a party, had</b>                  18 <b>been extremely concerned about. It was one of our major</b>                  19 <b>themes at the time in the '70s, was fighting racism, and</b>                  20 <b>particularly following Enoch Powell and the "rivers of</b>                  21 <b>blood" speech. It could be that. But it could be</b>                  22 <b>something else. But there is nothing more specific,</b>                  23 <b>unfortunately.</b>                  24 Q. Finally, then, under sort of allegations about                  25 Cyril Smith, can we come to any allegations there were</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 45</p>	<p>1 from the 1980s onwards. If we come back to your                  2 statement, and page 10, paragraph 5.2, you describe here                  3 two people you've spoken to in particular who recall                  4 discussions or hearing things about Cyril Smith in the                  5 1980s/early '90s. The first is Liz Lynne. As                  6 I understand it, she was the MP after Cyril Smith; is                  7 that right?                  8 <b>A. Yes.</b>                  9 Q. Was she a friend of his?                  10 <b>A. Absolutely not. Cyril --</b>                  11 Q. Tell us about that?                  12 <b>A. Cyril did everything he could to undermine her campaign</b>                  13 <b>and really only started talking to her after she was</b>                  14 <b>elected MP. Liz was one of the contestants for</b>                  15 <b>president, so I didn't talk to her at all when the</b>                  16 <b>revelations came out, because obviously we were</b>                  17 <b>competing in an election. This is obviously since</b>                  18 <b>I have become president.</b>                  19 Q. The second person is Chris Davies --                  20 <b>A. Yes.</b>                  21 Q. -- who was a colleague of Liz Lynne's at the time?                  22 <b>A. Correct.</b>                  23 Q. You have summarised what he said in your statement, but                  24 I think it might be helpful to see it in full. If we go                  25 to his recollections, they are at tab 6, chair, of your</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 46</p>
<p>1 bundle. For the Relativity operator, it is LDP000012.                  2 If we could go down to the last three paragraphs,                  3 "I think around 1985". Mr Davies says this:                  4 "I think around 1985 someone showed me a copy of                  5 the Rochdale Free Press ..."                  6 That's probably the Rochdale Alternative Press:                  7 "... article from 1979 that alleged that he had                  8 spanked boys in care, or maybe I was just told about it,                  9 but it was old news spread by political opponents and                  10 referred to a time before Cyril became an MP. Indeed,                  11 I think he was a Labour Party councillor at the time."                  12 I think that is actually right?                  13 <b>A. Correct.</b>                  14 Q. He wasn't a Labour Party councillor, he was an                  15 independent councillor in 1967, I think?                  16 <b>A. Yes. Yes, I think he'd just --</b>                  17 Q. He was a Labour party councillor and then independent?                  18 <b>A. And then independent.</b>                  19 Q. "It wasn't an issue that ever came up on the doorstep or                  20 in the Rochdale Observer.                  21 "... during my 29 years as a Lib and Lib Dem                  22 candidate ... I never received any communication of any                  23 type ... alleging inappropriate behaviour by Cyril of                  24 a sexual nature. Indeed, I don't recall anyone making                  25 any complaints about Cyril other than those of a normal</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 47</p>	<p>1 political nature.                  2 "I spoke at Cyril's memorial service. I would not                  3 have done so had I believed that he had carried out the                  4 acts that have been alleged. I remain unconvinced ...                  5 but that is maybe because I believe he was a far better                  6 representative than those who followed him."                  7 Then, if we can go over the page and zoom in on the                  8 two paragraphs beginning, "Incidentally" and                  9 "I remember". He is asked about whether there could be                  10 any coverup or collusion. You have referred to this                  11 already, Baroness Brinton, he says Labour and the                  12 Lib Dems hated each other so he doesn't think that's                  13 likely. He then says:                  14 "I remember also getting a call, I think when                  15 Nick Clegg was leader, from someone in his office or in                  16 Cowley Street ..."                  17 What's Cowley Street?                  18 <b>A. The Lib Dem headquarters at the time.</b>                  19 Q. "... who had been asked to find out if anyone had                  20 complained about Cyril to me."                  21 Do you know when that was? Would that be after                  22 2010?                  23 <b>A. No, it could have been before 2010. Nick Clegg became</b>                  24 <b>leader in 2008 and ceased to be leader in 2015. I'm</b>                  25 <b>afraid we can't date it exactly, because Chris doesn't</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 48</p>

<p>1 <b>say, but it is possible it was just before then.</b></p> <p>2 Q. "I told them as above and said that I had also discussed</p> <p>3 the claims with Liz Lynne who told me that she too had</p> <p>4 never had any allegations made to her. She pondered</p> <p>5 whether she could perhaps have forgotten. I told her,</p> <p>6 knowing her, she could not possibly have done so ... all</p> <p>7 her political antennae would have been quivering. She</p> <p>8 would certainly have covered her back by forwarding the</p> <p>9 allegations to the police and, if she had found</p> <p>10 substance in them, she would have gone for the jugular</p> <p>11 and attacked Cyril publicly."</p> <p>12 Do you think that's likely, did they hate each other</p> <p>13 that much?</p> <p>14 <b>A. Oh, they did hate each other. I mean, I think when your</b></p> <p>15 <b>predecessor does everything they can to undermine your</b></p> <p>16 <b>own election, absolutely.</b></p> <p>17 Q. So that is Mr Davies' recollection. The final piece of</p> <p>18 recollection, as I said, we come back one last time to</p> <p>19 Mr Steed, and he gives his view of what he heard in the</p> <p>20 '70s and '80s. If we go back to Mr Steed's statement,</p> <p>21 LDP000011, and page 6, it is tab 5 again,</p> <p>22 Baroness Brinton. Page 6 of this. Sorry, I beg your</p> <p>23 pardon, let's go to the next page, page 7. The last</p> <p>24 three paragraphs, beginning, "From 1980 onwards".</p> <p>25 Mr Steed describes his interactions with Cyril Smith in</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 49</p>	<p>1 the '70s and then says:</p> <p>2 "Actually, from 1980 onwards, our paths crossed much</p> <p>3 less and after I fell seriously ill in 1985 I hardly saw</p> <p>4 him again. I moved back to Kent in 1989.</p> <p>5 "I thought I knew Cyril fairly well in the 1970s.</p> <p>6 I came to like him; he was a kind man as well as</p> <p>7 politically shrewd and strongly committed to both his</p> <p>8 own town and the Liberal cause. He was somewhat</p> <p>9 oversensitive and some found him disagreeable ..."</p> <p>10 Next paragraph down:</p> <p>11 "As a middle-aged bachelor living at home with his</p> <p>12 mother, Cyril Smith was an obvious subject for gossip</p> <p>13 about his sexual orientation. I moved in gay</p> <p>14 circles ... and the topic of public figures who hid or</p> <p>15 suppressed their homosexuality was often discussed. As</p> <p>16 it became known that I knew Cyril fairly well, I was</p> <p>17 asked many times about his sexuality. I never had</p> <p>18 anything real to say in answer. The general assumption</p> <p>19 in such conversations seemed to have been that he was</p> <p>20 asexual, perhaps even impotent, as a result of</p> <p>21 the hormonal problems which caused his massive size.</p> <p>22 I cannot recall anyone in my hearing ever offering any</p> <p>23 evidence as to his erotic or sexual inclinations or</p> <p>24 behaviour."</p> <p>25 If we could turn over the page, the second paragraph</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 50</p>
<p>1 there, beginning "In 1979":</p> <p>2 "In 1979, I became aware of the story about him</p> <p>3 smacking boys that appeared in Private Eye. I cannot</p> <p>4 now recall whether it was quoted to me over the phone or</p> <p>5 I was shown a copy (perhaps each in that order); I don't</p> <p>6 think I possessed a copy or had read it carefully until</p> <p>7 Tony Greaves sent me a copy after Cyril's death. My</p> <p>8 reaction has to be seen in the context of the time. The</p> <p>9 Private Eye story was certainly not to Cyril's credit</p> <p>10 any more than the stories one heard in those days of how</p> <p>11 Tory Cabinet Ministers had caned small boys when they</p> <p>12 were school prefects ... I had myself gone through</p> <p>13 a school system where caning was routine, and</p> <p>14 experienced a headmaster who clearly enjoyed caning boys</p> <p>15 on a casual whim. The Private Eye story was politically</p> <p>16 embarrassing (just like Cyril's known view on corporal</p> <p>17 punishment) but not as potentially embarrassing as what</p> <p>18 he might do when capital punishment came before the 1979</p> <p>19 parliament."</p> <p>20 That does seem to be the general feeling from people</p> <p>21 at the time that we have?</p> <p>22 <b>A. Yes.</b></p> <p>23 Q. Can we then -- this is the second-last thing to ask you</p> <p>24 about -- look at the Liberal Democrat response to the</p> <p>25 allegations about Smith as they then came out in 2012</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 51</p>	<p>1 and 2013/14. So Cyril Smith died in -- sorry, he</p> <p>2 retired, firstly, in 1992?</p> <p>3 <b>A. Correct.</b></p> <p>4 Q. He was still seen as a positive figure for the Liberals,</p> <p>5 by and large, I think, in that period. That seems to be</p> <p>6 the case, at least, from the fact that Sir Nick Clegg,</p> <p>7 when he was leader, sent a rather generous birthday</p> <p>8 message to him, for his 80th birthday. I won't ask you</p> <p>9 to turn this up, but we have it in the bundle at tab 11.</p> <p>10 So this is on 28 June 2008:</p> <p>11 "Dear Sir Cyril,</p> <p>12 "Many congratulations on your 80th birthday. You</p> <p>13 have been a towering figure ..."</p> <p>14 <b>A. In all senses of the word.</b></p> <p>15 Q. "... not only in the political advancement of</p> <p>16 the Liberal Party but the wider cause of Liberalism.</p> <p>17 You were a beacon for our party in the '70s and '80s and</p> <p>18 continue to be an inspiration to the people of Rochdale</p> <p>19 and many others."</p> <p>20 So it seems to have been, at least publicly,</p> <p>21 celebrated?</p> <p>22 <b>A. Yes, and if I can say that the role of leader of</b></p> <p>23 <b>the party is that you write a lot of these sorts of</b></p> <p>24 <b>letters -- telegrams, in the old days -- to congratulate</b></p> <p>25 <b>long-term activists and obviously people like Cyril.</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 52</p>

1 **I mean, knowing Nick Clegg, he would never have sent**  
 2 **that if he had any inkling of what Cyril had been up to.**  
 3 **He absolutely would not.**  
 4 Q. The first point when the allegations start to come into  
 5 the public domain is almost immediately after  
 6 Cyril Smith died in 2010?  
 7 **A. Yes.**  
 8 Q. They then really started to get attention in late 2012,  
 9 as I understand it, when Simon Danczuk MP made  
 10 allegations in parliament. Is that right?  
 11 **A. I believe so.**  
 12 Q. It was at that point that an internal investigation was  
 13 carried out by the party. Can you tell us a little bit  
 14 about that? I think it was Alistair Carmichael?  
 15 **A. Who was then --**  
 16 Q. Chief Whip at that point?  
 17 **A. -- Chief Whip but he was also Deputy Chief Whip to the**  
 18 **government because it was during the coalition.**  
 19 Q. What did he do?  
 20 **A. He went to speak to everybody who had known Cyril in**  
 21 **parliament, who had been a contemporary of his, who was**  
 22 **still alive, whether they were either in the Commons or**  
 23 **the Lords or no longer in parliament but available to**  
 24 **speak to, to find out if anybody knew anything at all.**  
 25 Q. What did he find out?

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1 allegations of child abuse have been made, and in  
 2 particular those who have been convicted of child abuse  
 3 and how that's been dealt with. Then we will finally  
 4 look at your current disciplinary and safeguarding  
 5 policies.  
 6 **A. Yes.**  
 7 Q. In your statement, you deal with this at paragraph 8 on  
 8 page 12, back in tab 1, chair. It is LDP000018\_012.  
 9 Right down the bottom there, this is any other  
 10 allegations, paragraph 8. If we turn over the page, we  
 11 will see you have done a fairly thorough trawl of any  
 12 other prominent members of the party --  
 13 **A. Yes.**  
 14 Q. -- who have had convictions of any kind relating to  
 15 these kind of offences?  
 16 **A. Correct.**  
 17 Q. Can I ask you, if you just look at paragraph 8.4,  
 18 there's one name in particular there which I think you  
 19 might be able to tell us a little bit more detail about?  
 20 **A. Yes.**  
 21 Q. That's the first one: Frank Beck?  
 22 **A. Indeed I can.**  
 23 Q. Just very briefly, how was that dealt with and how do  
 24 you know about it?  
 25 **A. I don't know how it was dealt with at the time because,**

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1 **A. There was nothing. The chief of staff went through the**  
 2 **archive to see if any of the previous Chief Whips and**  
 3 **chiefs of staff had anything on record. There was**  
 4 **absolutely nothing. I mean, this included going to the**  
 5 **LSC, the National Liberal Club, I think we later say we**  
 6 **found some more archives at Bristol and we went through**  
 7 **those as well. But they have been very, very clear that**  
 8 **there was nothing.**  
 9 Q. Did Mr Carmichael produce any kind of report on this or  
 10 was it simply a piece of work that was done and then  
 11 orally reported?  
 12 **A. He was reporting back to Nick Clegg and, I presume, to**  
 13 **the president of the day, because you would**  
 14 **automatically have had the president of the day included**  
 15 **in that.**  
 16 Q. Who was that at the time?  
 17 **A. I think Tim Farron had just taken over at that point.**  
 18 Q. So that was the conclusion at that stage. In response  
 19 to the inquiry's questions to the party, I understand  
 20 further searches have been done?  
 21 **A. Indeed.**  
 22 Q. Again, nothing else found?  
 23 **A. No. No.**  
 24 Q. Then, just finally, can I come to the issue of any other  
 25 Liberal Party or Liberal Democrat members about whom

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1 **in 1991, I wasn't even a councillor, but at the time,**  
 2 **the normal procedure then would have been if a member**  
 3 **had been charged of such a serious offence, then they**  
 4 **would have been suspended and expelled as soon as the**  
 5 **court case was concluded. In other words, the party**  
 6 **waited for the court to proceed. I think earlier on**  
 7 **someone said, "You're innocent until proven guilty", so**  
 8 **the party would always follow a higher authority in**  
 9 **making a judgment about a member.**  
 10 **It particularly caught my eye because I became**  
 11 **a county councillor in 1993 at Cambridgeshire and**  
 12 **Frank Beck had had some association with some of**  
 13 **the council staff in Cambridgeshire, although most of**  
 14 **his offences were in Leicestershire and in**  
 15 **Hertfordshire, and in my role as -- I became co-chair of**  
 16 **the Education Committee and, therefore, I had member**  
 17 **responsibility for safeguarding, and I can remember**  
 18 **discussions with my Director of Education at the time**  
 19 **about what safeguarding procedures we had with our**  
 20 **schools, and then I think it is very noticeable that,**  
 21 **during the four years I had as chair of education, our**  
 22 **approach to any reports of any behaviour was completely**  
 23 **different, and I think -- so I would then say, looking**  
 24 **at the parallel with the party, as cases like this**  
 25 **started to come out, then the party also started to**

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<p>1 <b>rethink its approach, rather than just saying, "You must</b>                  2 <b>go to the police, you must deal with the police".</b>                  3 Q. Let's just look at that. Chair, I'm just noticing the                  4 time. I have only got about five minutes more, so                  5 I think I would invite you just to finish                  6 Baroness Brinton's evidence. Thank you.                  7 Can we look at an example that you refer to in your                  8 statement, and that is the more recent example at                  9 paragraph 8.6 of Jason Zadrozny. Just talk us through                  10 this. This seems to be an example of what you are                  11 describing, a very different approach to when                  12 allegations are made?                  13 <b>A. Indeed. I would go further than that and say we now</b>                  14 <b>have a completely different approach to safeguarding on</b>                  15 <b>matters like this. Although I have no formal role as</b>                  16 <b>president in the discipline process itself, because</b>                  17 <b>I line manage the pastoral care officer, she and I will</b>                  18 <b>have discussions to make sure that if there is any</b>                  19 <b>issues about safeguarding, support for complainants, the</b>                  20 <b>point at which we need to go to the police or to other</b>                  21 <b>agencies, we will do so sooner rather than later, unless</b>                  22 <b>we are absolutely confident that they have been</b>                  23 <b>involved.</b>                  24 <b>In this particular case, the initial response when</b>                  25 <b>he was arrested was that he and many of his supporters</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 57</p>	<p>1 <b>believed that a lot of this was political opponents</b>                  2 <b>trying to get at him. Nonetheless, the allegations were</b>                  3 <b>so serious that we took the view he could not continue</b>                  4 <b>as the candidate in the election, and he was pulled out</b>                  5 <b>as that election began.</b>                  6 <b>Then we had actually removed him, because it was so</b>                  7 <b>long -- this is one of the other problems we have when</b>                  8 <b>cases go to the police, that members can sit in the</b>                  9 <b>suspended limbo for years and the party has to wait</b>                  10 <b>until that process has concluded.</b>                  11 <b>But he was subsequently found not guilty. He has</b>                  12 <b>not rejoined the party, as far as I know. But that</b>                  13 <b>process was very clear and we moved extremely fast</b>                  14 <b>because it was very serious.</b>                  15 <b>Could I just point out the second example in 8.7 as</b>                  16 <b>well, because this one I think also demonstrates what</b>                  17 <b>the party does now, where we had somebody who had been</b>                  18 <b>a candidate. We were very concerned about their</b>                  19 <b>behaviour. We had reported them to the police and,</b>                  20 <b>because there was grooming involved, both of young party</b>                  21 <b>members but also non-party members, we reported it to</b>                  22 <b>Social Services immediately because we absolutely</b>                  23 <b>believe we had a duty to do so. He was expelled for</b>                  24 <b>inappropriate behaviour, which we could do, but we had</b>                  25 <b>to leave the other matter to the authorities.</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 58</p>
<p>1 Q. Can I come then, finally, to -- you have provided                  2 a second witness statement to the inquiry dealing with                  3 all this in a lot more detail. It is tab 2 of your                  4 bundle. For the Relativity operator, it is LDP000019.                  5 Chair, I invite you to adduce this in full and indeed                  6 the seven policies which were attached to it.                  7 There are really just two things I want to pick up                  8 on this in oral evidence, Baroness Brinton. The first                  9 is at paragraph 10 on page 3. You have referred to this                  10 already, but in 2013, the party created a post called                  11 pastoral care officer. Can you tell us what that is?                  12 <b>A. She is there to provide support for complainants and</b>                  13 <b>also support for staff as well. So she has an</b>                  14 <b>employment role as well for any staff who have issues</b>                  15 <b>about grievance, discipline or any incidents that may</b>                  16 <b>come up. She is the first point of contact, whether it</b>                  17 <b>is via the web or the phone if a complainant has</b>                  18 <b>particularly a serious incident that might relate to</b>                  19 <b>something that could be a crime or could be sexual</b>                  20 <b>harassment, could be bullying. She will help the</b>                  21 <b>complainant through that process.</b>                  22 <b>If they are the direct victim of that, because some</b>                  23 <b>complaints are raised by others who have witnessed</b>                  24 <b>things, then she will actually make sure that she guides</b>                  25 <b>them through, but she is not part of the discipline</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 59</p>	<p>1 <b>process. That's important. I line manage her.</b>                  2 Q. Was this system created, even in part, in response to                  3 the Cyril Smith allegations that all emerged in 2012, or                  4 was it a process happening anyway?                  5 <b>A. It was beginning to happen anyway. I would suggest that</b>                  6 <b>it was partly Cyril Smith. It was also partly because</b>                  7 <b>of the Helena Morrissey review into our discipline</b>                  8 <b>processes about sexual harassment that we needed to take</b>                  9 <b>steps.</b>                  10 Q. The final point from this, Baroness Brinton, is at                  11 paragraph 14, where you describe how there have been                  12 some further updates. Lord Ken Macdonald, the former                  13 DPP, was asked to review the disciplinary processes in                  14 2017?                  15 <b>A. Yes.</b>                  16 Q. You say at the end of that paragraph the constitutional                  17 changes were going to go to the party conference and be                  18 implemented later in 2018. We are now in 2019. Has                  19 that happened?                  20 <b>A. They actually went to the autumn conference and we are</b>                  21 <b>now recruiting the new adjudicators, investigators and</b>                  22 <b>mediators, who are being trained, and the process is</b>                  23 <b>going to be started at the beginning of July this year,</b>                  24 <b>but we are well under way with it.</b>                  25 <b>Could I add one other thing on the policies, if</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 60</p>

1 **I may?**  
 2 Q. Yes, of course.  
 3 **A. We are very aware that it's helpful for a particular**  
 4 **group of elected people to create policies. But what**  
 5 **happens after those people move on? And we are about to**  
 6 **have our next set of federal elections for the next**  
 7 **three years. As part of our policies, the incoming**  
 8 **Federal Board will have to review each of these policies**  
 9 **and also to be aware, and we now provide safeguarding**  
 10 **training for senior officers in the party at conference**  
 11 **and at regional conferences to make sure that people**  
 12 **have got the training they need to be able to be aware**  
 13 **and deliver this.**  
 14 Q. So they actually implement it, it is not just a piece of  
 15 paper?  
 16 **A. So they actually implement it, yes.**  
 17 Q. Just for completeness, I don't need to trouble you with  
 18 this, Baroness Brinton, the policies I think are all  
 19 online anyway?  
 20 **A. They are online.**  
 21 MR HENDERSON: We are going to adduce them as part of  
 22 the inquiry process. They are LDP000020 through to  
 23 LDP000026 inclusive. I invite you to adduce those as  
 24 well, chair.  
 25 Thank you, Baroness Brinton, very much. I think we

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1 questions for Baroness Brinton from the core  
 2 participants.  
 3 Baroness Brinton, as you have heard, there are two  
 4 further questions I have been invited to ask you. You  
 5 will recall we discussed the change in the way that  
 6 disciplinary procedures are carried out. If we can have  
 7 a look at your statement again at paragraph 8.3 -- for  
 8 the Relativity operator it is LDP000018\_013.  
 9 Paragraph 8.3. You say this:  
 10 "It is now standard practice to suspend members when  
 11 serious allegations are made and/or members are reported  
 12 to the police."  
 13 When you say "now" in that sentence, when has that  
 14 been standard practice from?  
 15 **A. Over the last three to four years; since the**  
 16 **Helena Morrissey report and Ken Macdonald started his**  
 17 **review. We implemented it before we implemented the new**  
 18 **discipline processes because that's something we could**  
 19 **do without changing our constitution.**  
 20 Q. Thank you. Finally, are you aware of any other  
 21 allegations of child sexual abuse that have been made  
 22 against Liberal Democrat MPs since Cyril Smith?  
 23 **A. MPs? No. I think we have listed everybody that we were**  
 24 **aware of -- oh, you mean allegations as opposed to --**  
 25 Q. Allegations as opposed to convictions?

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1 will take the break now. I'm afraid I need to ask you  
 2 not to leave the building quite yet, because there may  
 3 be some further questions. There may be some questions  
 4 from the chair and panel now, or we can take a break.  
 5 I'm in your hands, chair?  
 6 Questions by THE PANEL  
 7 THE CHAIR: Just one question, Baroness Brinton: in relation  
 8 to the latter questions there, have you considered or  
 9 had anyone carry out an independent audit of how you  
 10 have handled both the responses to allegations and your  
 11 own policies and procedures on it?  
 12 **A. Only via -- I mean, not independent, but Ken Macdonald,**  
 13 **who is a party member, did it for us, but we believed,**  
 14 **with his experience, he was independent enough and**  
 15 **didn't hold office within the party. But we have not**  
 16 **gone outside.**  
 17 THE CHAIR: At any time, was anyone commissioned to look at  
 18 the handling of the Smith allegations?  
 19 **A. No.**  
 20 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Thank you, Mr Henderson. We will  
 21 take a break now.  
 22 (11.25 am)  
 23 (A short break)  
 24 (11.42 am)  
 25 MR HENDERSON: Thank you, chair, there are just two further

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1 **A. Not to my knowledge, no.**  
 2 MR HENDERSON: Thank you very much. Chair, I invite you  
 3 just to take a very quick break.  
 4 THE CHAIR: Yes, we will take five minutes in order to  
 5 transfer the witnesses.  
 6 (11.44 am)  
 7 (A short break)  
 8 (11.46 am)  
 9 MR O'CONNOR: Chair, our next witness is Des Wilson.  
 10 MR DES WILSON (affirmed)  
 11 Examination by MR O'CONNOR  
 12 MR O'CONNOR: Could you give your full name, please?  
 13 **A. Des Wilson.**  
 14 Q. Mr Wilson, you were born and grew up in New Zealand; is  
 15 that right?  
 16 **A. Yes.**  
 17 Q. You came to this country in 1960, when you were about  
 18 19 years old?  
 19 **A. Yes.**  
 20 Q. I think it is right to say that when you arrived in this  
 21 country, and for a few years afterwards, you had no  
 22 involvement in party politics at all?  
 23 **A. None.**  
 24 Q. What did you go for those few years after you arrived in  
 25 this country?

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1 **A. Well, I left school at 15. That's the only education**  
 2 **I ever had. And I became a reporter on the local paper**  
 3 **and my whole career subsequently was in journalism. So**  
 4 **in those first few years, I was working on unimportant**  
 5 **newspapers.**  
 6 Q. Do you mean the first few years after you arrived in  
 7 this country?  
 8 **A. After I arrived in this country.**  
 9 Q. Unimportant newspapers for a time, but I think  
 10 subsequently you started writing for The Observer and  
 11 The Guardian?  
 12 **A. That came later. I had a period when I got involved in**  
 13 **fighting various causes which got me some national**  
 14 **prominence and that led to me getting my own column in**  
 15 **The Guardian and The Observer. I had a column in either**  
 16 **of those papers for a period of about seven and a half**  
 17 **years.**  
 18 Q. You mention being involved in causes. One of them was  
 19 the homelessness charity, Shelter?  
 20 **A. Yes. I was one of the founders.**  
 21 Q. That was still in the '70s, was it, or the '60s?  
 22 **A. No, it was launched on December 1, 1966, and I was the**  
 23 **first director and was with them until 1971.**  
 24 Q. That must have taken up much of your time during that  
 25 period?

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1 **A. Yes. I mean, I should explain: the reason why**  
 2 **I appeared to dip in and out was because I was**  
 3 **occasionally running fairly major, high-profile**  
 4 **campaigns that involved winning over the two major**  
 5 **parties, and I had to step back from a party political**  
 6 **profile in order to be able to be effective in doing**  
 7 **that.**  
 8 Q. In any event, this was the first of those episodes?  
 9 **A. Yes.**  
 10 Q. You have explained how you were invited by David Steel  
 11 to stand in the Hove by-election. I think it is right  
 12 to say, isn't it, that you had also been invited even  
 13 earlier than that to get involved with the Labour Party?  
 14 **A. I had been, but I chose not to.**  
 15 Q. But you did accept Mr Steel's offer in 1973?  
 16 **A. If you can call it an offer. I certainly agreed to do**  
 17 **it.**  
 18 Q. Tell us what happened at that by-election?  
 19 **A. Well, we did extremely well. I mean, there was a point**  
 20 **about a week out when it looked like we might win it.**  
 21 **I was terrified that we might actually win the thing.**  
 22 **But in fact, it swung back in the last week and the**  
 23 **Conservatives won. But we did get a 37 per cent swing**  
 24 **for the Liberals, which remains, to this day, one of**  
 25 **the biggest swings in any by-election ever.**

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1 **A. About 24 hours a day.**  
 2 Q. In any event, there came a time during the 1970s that  
 3 you did become involved in party politics?  
 4 **A. I became involved in party politics because I was**  
 5 **telephoned by David Steel, who I knew well, and told**  
 6 **that there was a by-election coming up in Hove and would**  
 7 **I fight it for the Liberal Party, and I said, "Well,**  
 8 **that's a bit difficult, because I'm not a member of**  
 9 **the Liberal Party", and he said, "Well, that could be**  
 10 **sorted". I also thought it was a bad choice because**  
 11 **I had a fairly radical image and Hove was the eighth**  
 12 **safest Conservative seat in the country.**  
 13 **My third problem was that I didn't want to be an MP,**  
 14 **and he assured me that I wouldn't be because it was**  
 15 **unwinnable. So on that basis, I joined the Liberal**  
 16 **Party and fought that by-election.**  
 17 Q. That was 1973, you have told us?  
 18 **A. November '73.**  
 19 Q. I am going to take you through your political career in  
 20 the next few minutes. One of the things you say in your  
 21 witness statement is that it wasn't a seamless career,  
 22 there were various episodes in your life when you were  
 23 heavily involved in party politics, and then other times  
 24 when you had very little involvement, and this was the  
 25 first of those times, was it?

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1 Q. You have described how you were phoned up and asked to  
 2 do this job. We have heard some other evidence about  
 3 how candidates at by-elections are selected and, for  
 4 that matter, the slightly different process for  
 5 selection of candidates at General Elections, both by  
 6 the Liberal Party. Tell us a little bit about the  
 7 formalities, such as they were, of you being selected,  
 8 appointed, to run for the Liberals in that particular  
 9 seat in that election?  
 10 **A. Well, I have read the evidence about the process and it**  
 11 **is quite foreign to me in my time way back then in the**  
 12 **1970s, but in my case it was almost bizarre, because**  
 13 **I went down to a selection committee of three people:**  
 14 **a Cambridge University student, who left for university**  
 15 **the next day and was never seen again; a woman who**  
 16 **explained to me she was about to migrate to**  
 17 **South Africa, which she duly did that week and was never**  
 18 **seen again; and one chap who remained to be my driver**  
 19 **during the by-election. And that's how I was chosen.**  
 20 **I also noted that it was said that one went through**  
 21 **an interview process nationally. This was completely**  
 22 **forgotten until halfway through the by-election when**  
 23 **someone said, maybe, as a matter of courtesy, I should**  
 24 **be interviewed so I went up and had tea with the**  
 25 **president of the party at that time, Lord Beaumont.**

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<p>1 Q. So there was an interview of sorts, even though, as you 2 say, it was after you had already been appointed as the 3 candidate? 4 <b>A. Of sorts.</b> 5 Q. What about references or anything of that nature? 6 <b>A. No.</b> 7 Q. In fact, any other formalities other than those you have 8 explained to us? 9 <b>A. No. I mean, without sounding arrogant, I think they</b> 10 <b>were so excited to have actually talked me into doing</b> 11 <b>this that no-one was going to try and rock the boat by</b> 12 <b>asking for references. I might have had difficulty</b> 13 <b>finding any.</b> 14 Q. As you have said, you fought the campaign, you didn't 15 succeed in winning the seat, despite the very large 16 swing. Did you then carry on your involvement in the 17 Liberal Party for a period after that? 18 <b>A. Yes. I'm just trying to remember the timing. I stayed</b> 19 <b>involved with the party for probably about another</b> 20 <b>couple of years or so.</b> 21 Q. You refer in your witness statement to being elected 22 a member of the party council during that period? 23 <b>A. Yes, although the party council really was an</b> 24 <b>organisation of no importance. It existed really as</b> 25 <b>a kind of safety valve between the annual party</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 69</p>	<p>1 <b>conferences just in case issues needed to be discussed,</b> 2 <b>or whatever. But it wasn't a big deal to get elected to</b> 3 <b>the council.</b> 4 Q. It was the national body that served that purpose you 5 have described? 6 <b>A. Yes.</b> 7 Q. You must have decided you wanted to be a member of it. 8 You stood for election, did you? 9 <b>A. Yes.</b> 10 Q. How long, can you remember, were you a member of 11 the party council at that time? 12 <b>A. Oh, not long. Probably only a year or so.</b> 13 Q. Now, you mention in your statement that this was, if we 14 are talking about 1973/1974, in the early stages of 15 the Thorpe affair, before the trial, obviously? 16 <b>A. Yes.</b> 17 Q. But when allegations were first starting to be made? 18 <b>A. Yes. In fact, I was on the council when the whole thing</b> 19 <b>broke, and I was at the party conference when he turned</b> 20 <b>up unexpectedly. The party was hoping he'd keep away.</b> 21 <b>So, yes, I was around at that time.</b> 22 Q. But then you explain in your statement there came a time 23 when you decided to move back away from party politics. 24 You have just said a couple of years after the election, 25 something of that nature. So in the mid 1970s. Is that</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 70</p>
<p>1 right? 2 <b>A. Let me just check my timing.</b> 3 Q. The precise dates don't matter probably, Mr Wilson? 4 <b>A. Yes, I pulled back because I had got involved -- well,</b> 5 <b>I was doing a lot of journalism at the time, some of</b> 6 <b>which would not have been helped by me being associated</b> 7 <b>with a particular party. Then I came back in 1982.</b> 8 Q. Just let me ask you a little bit more about that period 9 in the mid '70s up to 1982. Were you living in London 10 at the time? 11 <b>A. Not all of the time. But most of it.</b> 12 Q. Most of it. Did you still have very much to do with the 13 Liberal Party activists and members who you'd presumably 14 got to know in those earlier years? 15 <b>A. I had a lot of friends in the party, and I continued to</b> 16 <b>see them. I wasn't actively involved. I should explain</b> 17 <b>that I felt rather guilty after the Hove by-election</b> 18 <b>that I'd taken an opportunity that perhaps someone who</b> 19 <b>had worked for years in the party should have had the</b> 20 <b>opportunity to do, and reached a higher profile than</b> 21 <b>I deserved, and so that was one of the factors in</b> 22 <b>persuading me that I should stand back a bit for</b> 23 <b>a period of time.</b> 24 Q. Just help us: you were still living in London, you were 25 still seeing your former colleagues and friends from the</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 71</p>	<p>1 party? 2 <b>A. Occasionally, yes.</b> 3 Q. But you weren't still on the council; is that right? 4 <b>A. No.</b> 5 Q. You didn't take an active part -- 6 <b>A. No.</b> 7 Q. -- for example, going to national conferences, or 8 anything of that nature? 9 <b>A. No.</b> 10 Q. So that takes us through the mid to late '70s. I think 11 you said a moment ago that you got back involved in the 12 early 1980s, 1982? 13 <b>A. 1981, actually.</b> 14 Q. 1981. Tell us what prompted you to get back involved at 15 that time? 16 <b>A. It was beginning to look like there was going to be</b> 17 <b>a new party, the Social Democrats were being launched,</b> 18 <b>and this was suddenly opening up a whole new opportunity</b> 19 <b>in British politics of a third major force that I very</b> 20 <b>much believed we needed. So it was very attractive for</b> 21 <b>me to get involved at that time.</b> 22 Q. I see. How did you get back involved? You mention in 23 your statement that you were reappointed to the party 24 council? 25 <b>A. I literally got involved by going to the 1981 assembly</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 72</p>

<p>1 <b>which is the one where the famous four Social Democrats</b>                  2 <b>came to speak to the Liberals. From then on, I started</b>                  3 <b>going to the assembly and getting more involved in party</b>                  4 <b>activities generally, and then, in 1985, it was</b>                  5 <b>suggested that I should run for the presidency of</b>                  6 <b>the party, and I did, and I was elected unopposed.</b>                  7 Q. You were already a member again of the council, were                  8 you, by that time?                  9 <b>A. Probably. I can't actually remember, but I probably</b>                  10 <b>was.</b>                  11 Q. Is the presidency, as it were, the head of the council,                  12 or what's the relationship between the role of                  13 the president and the council?                  14 <b>A. Yes, the president chaired the council. The president</b>                  15 <b>was the head of the party in the country. He attended,</b>                  16 <b>or she attended, the weekly meeting of the parliamentary</b>                  17 <b>party on behalf of the party in the country, and,</b>                  18 <b>generally speaking, spoke to the party in the country</b>                  19 <b>and if the MPs were -- or the leader was doing something</b>                  20 <b>that the president believed was inconsistent with where</b>                  21 <b>the party was at, it would be the president's role to</b>                  22 <b>try to deal with that.</b>                  23 Q. I think I'm right in saying, Mr Wilson, that you didn't                  24 stand for election as an MP again, either during this                  25 period or at any other time?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 73</p>	<p>1 <b>A. No, I never wanted to be an MP.</b>                  2 Q. That's what I was going to ask you, whether that was, as                  3 it were, deliberate or not. You say you never sought to                  4 be an MP again?                  5 <b>A. Well, I achieved so much more not being an MP. I mean,</b>                  6 <b>I actually put, I think, five private members' Bills</b>                  7 <b>through the House of Commons using an MP to do it.</b>                  8 <b>I don't think anyone else in British political history</b>                  9 <b>has done that. With my campaigns which led to lead-free</b>                  10 <b>petrol, Freedom of Information and various other things,</b>                  11 <b>I was able to achieve so much more outside the House of</b>                  12 <b>Commons than the MPs inside, members of a very small</b>                  13 <b>parliamentary group.</b>                  14 Q. Just carrying on with the narrative, and then I am going                  15 to come back and ask you some other questions, you have                  16 mentioned then that you were the party president between                  17 1986 and 1987. It was just a one-year term, was it?                  18 <b>A. Yes. Although it became an absolutely pivotal moment</b>                  19 <b>because we had a General Election while I was president,</b>                  20 <b>and fought it as an alliance and then immediately</b>                  21 <b>afterwards went into the negotiations about merging, and</b>                  22 <b>I was a leading advocate of the merger. I wrote a book</b>                  23 <b>at the time that concluded by arguing the case for</b>                  24 <b>merger. I wrote numerous articles in The Guardian</b>                  25 <b>arguing the case for merger, made speeches. Eventually,</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 74</p>
<p>1 <b>I led the Liberal negotiating team that finally put the</b>                  2 <b>deal together.</b>                  3 Q. So that whole period, 1986 leading up to the                  4 General Election, the General Election itself, when                  5 I think you were chairman of the Election Committee for                  6 the Liberal Party --                  7 <b>A. Yes.</b>                  8 Q. -- that election, as you say, was fought as an alliance                  9 and then there was a time immediately following the '87                  10 election where the merger was discussed and, in the end,                  11 took place?                  12 <b>A. Mmm.</b>                  13 Q. You explain in your witness statement how you were                  14 prominent within the Liberal Party in being one of                  15 the people who drove that merger through?                  16 <b>A. Correct.</b>                  17 Q. The book you mention, was that called "Battle for                  18 Power"?                  19 <b>A. Yes.</b>                  20 Q. Was it essentially an account of the 1987 election,                  21 a sort of insider's account?                  22 <b>A. Yes. It was an account of my year as president, but it</b>                  23 <b>incorporated the election, and it concluded with making</b>                  24 <b>the case for the merger.</b>                  25 Q. Not well received by all of your colleagues in the</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 75</p>	<p>1 Liberal Party?                  2 <b>A. It was well received by everyone in the party except the</b>                  3 <b>parliamentary party, who, at the first meeting after the</b>                  4 <b>General Election, tried to move a vote of censure on me</b>                  5 <b>for the publication of this book. I did point out to</b>                  6 <b>them that, even Hitler read some of the books before he</b>                  7 <b>burnt them, and it might have made sense to actually</b>                  8 <b>read the book before they tried to move this vote of</b>                  9 <b>censure.</b>                  10 <b>This was led by Cyril Smith.</b>                  11 Q. Let me ask you, then, because this was -- I mentioned at                  12 the start you described these three periods of your                  13 involvement, the first being the 1973 by-election and                  14 the couple of years immediately after that. Then this                  15 is the second, isn't it, between the early 1980s up to                  16 about 1987?                  17 <b>A. Correct.</b>                  18 Q. As you have described it, you were a much more senior                  19 figure in the party by that stage, and you have                  20 explained your involvement in the merger, and so on.                  21 And Cyril Smith was a prominent member of the party,                  22 a nationally recognised figure, at that time?                  23 <b>A. Yes. I first met Cyril Smith when I fought the</b>                  24 <b>by-election and he came down to Hove to speak at that --</b>                  25 <b>and we may come back to that later -- and he was still</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 76</p>

1 around certainly at the time when I was president.  
 2 Q. Just finishing off the chronology, at around 1987, or  
 3 thereabouts, you went back to campaigning work and so  
 4 took a step back again from party politics?  
 5 A. Yes, once the parties had merged, I was elected onto the  
 6 executive of the new party, and served, I think, one  
 7 year on it, and then went back to run a series of  
 8 campaigns at that time.  
 9 Q. What were those campaigns?  
 10 A. The campaign for Freedom of Information. I became  
 11 chairman of Friends of the Earth. A campaign about  
 12 children smoking called Parents against Tobacco. I ran  
 13 an organisation called Citizen Action, which was based  
 14 on what Ralph Nader was doing in America, where he had,  
 15 like, a holding company with a number of campaigns under  
 16 it, and I ran an organisation called Citizen Action  
 17 which had a -- Citcom, which was about legal reforms in  
 18 the legal system, Freedom of Information, various  
 19 environmental issues and suchlike.  
 20 Q. You have explained that because you needed to campaign  
 21 to all the different political parties and try and win  
 22 their support for these issues, that was inconsistent,  
 23 if you like, with being particularly involved with one  
 24 of the parties?  
 25 A. It would have been really difficult because the problem

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1 the election or was it simply a short period of time?  
 2 A. No. No, that was my last throw of the dice.  
 3 Q. So you ceased your involvement with the party after that  
 4 election?  
 5 A. Yes.  
 6 Q. Let me come back and ask you a few more general  
 7 questions, Mr Wilson. You have mentioned briefly in the  
 8 context of the reception of that book you wrote, "Battle  
 9 for Power", about the 1987 election, that the book was,  
 10 I think you said, well received by members in  
 11 the country but less so by the parliamentary party. Can  
 12 you give us an idea of the parliamentary party at the  
 13 time and its relations with the party in the country?  
 14 A. It was almost like two parties. The party in the  
 15 country was very strong, winning council elections -- in  
 16 fact, at the time I was president, I believe they'd got  
 17 more votes in council elections than either of the major  
 18 parties. It was starting to take over city councils  
 19 like Liverpool and it was driven by an organisation  
 20 called the Association of Liberal Councillors, and it  
 21 was very strong, very healthy, and I was very much their  
 22 president. They saw me as a president of the party,  
 23 rather than -- I heard the Baroness earlier talking  
 24 about an "establishment figure". I was never seen as an  
 25 establishment figure.

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1 would have been that they would have been suspicious  
 2 that, really, what I was doing was promoting the Liberal  
 3 cause and using them to do it. It just wasn't  
 4 a sensible thing to do.  
 5 Q. In any event, that was why you took a step back?  
 6 A. Correct.  
 7 Q. Did you, as with the previous occasion, stop or cease  
 8 your membership of the various councils and committees  
 9 and so on?  
 10 A. Correct.  
 11 Q. But there was one last period when you were back  
 12 involved, this time with the new Liberal Democrat Party,  
 13 and that was the 1992 election?  
 14 A. Well, what had happened is that the new party got off to  
 15 a terrible start. It was virtually bankrupt. It had to  
 16 fire most of its staff. It got so low in the opinion  
 17 polls at one point it was at 3 per cent, which is the  
 18 equivalent of within a margin of error of having no  
 19 support at all. It got thrashed by the Greens in  
 20 a European election and it was in desperate straits.  
 21 With its first General Election coming up, it came to me  
 22 almost on its knees and said, could I bring my  
 23 campaigning experience in to run the General Election  
 24 campaign, and I agreed to do it.  
 25 Q. You did it, and did you stay involved in the party after

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1 The parliamentary party tended to consist of  
 2 a considerable number of by-election winners. I mean,  
 3 it's worth stressing this. I literally scribbled down  
 4 this morning, from the top of my head, some of  
 5 the by-elections we won in the time I was in the party:  
 6 Eastbourne; Ealing; Crosby; Eastleigh; Bermondsey;  
 7 Rochdale; Sutton and Cheam; Ripon; Berwick-upon-Tweed;  
 8 Glasgow; Govan; Bermondsey; Brecon and Radnor. All of  
 9 these MPs were elected in by-elections. They basically  
 10 had two functions: one was to --  
 11 Q. Mr Wilson, I'm just going to interrupt you. If you can  
 12 slow down a little bit, because these ladies in front of  
 13 you are trying to make a transcript of what you are  
 14 saying, and sometimes, if you get a bit carried away,  
 15 they can't follow what you are saying. So try and slow  
 16 down a little. Thank you?  
 17 A. Most unlikely for me to get carried away, but carry on.  
 18 Q. Possibly about by-elections. Do go on.  
 19 A. I think the point I was making was that most of them,  
 20 when they weren't in Westminster, went straight back to  
 21 their constituencies fighting to hold them at the next  
 22 General Election. So in a way they lived in a world of  
 23 their own. That was not much related to the -- what  
 24 they called the activists. They didn't use that word as  
 25 a compliment necessarily. This was my big problem with

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<p>1 <b>the parliamentary party: I believed that it was such</b>                  2 <b>a good campaigning party, the parliamentary party should</b>                  3 <b>have been the tip of the arrow and that they should have</b>                  4 <b>about six to eight issues that it fought on in the House</b>                  5 <b>of Commons instead of trying to effectively shadow over</b>                  6 <b>200 ministers and have someone at every day at every</b>                  7 <b>debate. It was ludicrous. No-one knew they were there,</b>                  8 <b>no-one knew what they said or did. Whereas if, in fact,</b>                  9 <b>they'd had a whole party organised behind them on</b>                  10 <b>a particular issue, they could have been very, very</b>                  11 <b>effective indeed.</b>                  12 <b>Now, they really, really didn't like the idea of</b>                  13 <b>being campaigning MPs and actually having to do some</b>                  14 <b>work and that was part of the problem.</b>                  15 Q. I'm going to ask you to look at a book review that you                  16 wrote, Mr Wilson. It was a review of Simon Danczuk's                  17 book "Smile for the Camera". I'm going to ask you to                  18 look at a few passages from that book review during the                  19 next hour or so. Can we call it up on screen, please.                  20 It's INQ004084. It is behind tab 3 in your bundle,                  21 I think, Mr Wilson, and for the chair and panel. If we                  22 can just zoom in on the very bottom paragraph that we                  23 see on that page, you don't mince your words in this                  24 paragraph, or indeed in other parts of this article,                  25 Mr Wilson. We see just in the last few lines of that</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 81</p>	<p>1 paragraph you describe the parliamentary party as                  2 a "weakly-led and self-serving parliamentary party that                  3 in the 1980s reached rock bottom in Liberal history                  4 (and, coming after the Thorpe murder trial years, that                  5 is saying something)". Is that what you were just                  6 describing? Expand on that, if you will?                  7 <b>A. I thought that the parliamentary party was a bit of</b>                  8 <b>a rabble, to be honest. A lot of the MPs had come down</b>                  9 <b>with great ambitions and hopes that now they were in</b>                  10 <b>national politics, they were going to really make it,</b>                  11 <b>and only to find that they were sitting on the back</b>                  12 <b>benches unnoticed, and they tended to spend most of</b>                  13 <b>their meetings arguing over who would go to what day in</b>                  14 <b>the House of Commons for a debate on white fish or</b>                  15 <b>something, when there was no need for them to be there.</b>                  16 <b>This is the point I was making earlier.</b>                  17 <b>So it was -- there was a lot of squabbling and</b>                  18 <b>arguing.</b>                  19 <b>Also, the policies they adopted were entirely</b>                  20 <b>related to the interests in each constituency. For</b>                  21 <b>instance, if an MP had a nuclear power station in his</b>                  22 <b>constituency, he would support nuclear power even though</b>                  23 <b>it was not the policy of the party. I used to sit there</b>                  24 <b>on Wednesday evenings sometimes and just think, "Oh,</b>                  25 <b>thank God I'm the only one in the party who is here".</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 82</p>
<p>1 Q. You say "Wednesday evenings". I think you mentioned                  2 earlier that you, as party president, attended weekly                  3 meetings of the parliamentary party?                  4 <b>A. Yes.</b>                  5 Q. Those were the Wednesday meetings, were they?                  6 <b>A. Yes.</b>                  7 Q. Let's have a look, if we can, at a different document.                  8 This is your witness statement. I think it is tab 1 in                  9 your bundle. Can we go to INQ003670. If we can look at                  10 page 2, please. Mr Wilson, you say you didn't think                  11 much of the parliamentary party. You suggest in this                  12 paragraph they didn't think much of you either.                  13 <b>A. Well, as I explained, there was a fundamental</b>                  14 <b>disagreement between them and me about their role, and</b>                  15 <b>they just saw me as a sort of rather, I think, nutty</b>                  16 <b>activist who wanted to make them actually do some work</b>                  17 <b>on campaigning issues. I can remember one MP scoffing</b>                  18 <b>at the word "campaigning". "We are not here to</b>                  19 <b>campaign", he said.</b>                  20 Q. Let's look at paragraph 9, please, if we can zoom in on                  21 that. You say, as your memoirs show, your relations                  22 with MPs in both the old and new parties were bad, and                  23 you describe -- we don't need to read it through, but                  24 you describe what you have said, really, that your                  25 popularity in the party had come from your campaigning</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 83</p>	<p>1 experience and your reputation and that wasn't something                  2 that went down well with the MPs?                  3 <b>A. Yes. It is worth noting that every time I stood for any</b>                  4 <b>office in the party, I either topped the poll or was</b>                  5 <b>within the top three, so I had considerable support in</b>                  6 <b>the party. The other thing, of course, which drove the</b>                  7 <b>MPs mad, particularly at that time, was that, because of</b>                  8 <b>my national profile, I tended to get invited on radio</b>                  9 <b>and television and things of that sort, where they</b>                  10 <b>didn't, and they really resented this, thinking, "The</b>                  11 <b>party president should know his place".</b>                  12 Q. Thank you. Let's move on, Mr Wilson. I want to ask you                  13 a few questions about Cyril Smith. In fact, we can                  14 stick with that document, your witness statement,                  15 INQ003670. If we can go over to page 3 of that                  16 document, please, and zoom in on paragraphs 10 to 12.                  17 You mentioned a few minutes ago, Mr Wilson, that you had                  18 met Mr Smith, Cyril Smith, during that Hove by-election.                  19 He came down to speak during the election. Is that                  20 right?                  21 <b>A. Yes.</b>                  22 Q. Summarise, if you will, your memory of that occasion and                  23 your impression of Mr Smith generally?                  24 <b>A. The first thing to say about Cyril Smith -- you will</b>                  25 <b>have seen photographs of him, you will have seen him on</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 84</p>

<p>1 television. I can't exaggerate how enormous he was. He</p> <p>2 was a huge man, and this in itself had a kind of</p> <p>3 intimidating impact, and particularly if you were</p> <p>4 arguing with him, which is one of the reasons why, when</p> <p>5 the whole thing about boys came out, I was terrified for</p> <p>6 them because I could imagine what a frightening figure</p> <p>7 he was. He was enormous.</p> <p>8 The second thing was that he never disagreed in an</p> <p>9 argument on a major policy or about his position in the</p> <p>10 party without adding a threat. There was always</p> <p>11 a threat: "I will leave the party"; "I will resign";</p> <p>12 "I will go to the press"; "I will do this, I will do the</p> <p>13 other". He had a view of himself as being indispensable</p> <p>14 to the party, but also he recognised the huge impact it</p> <p>15 would make if he did resign, or whatever. So he bullied</p> <p>16 the party, in a way. He bullied the parliamentary</p> <p>17 party, in a way, by constantly making these kinds of</p> <p>18 threats, and I think --</p> <p>19 Q. Just let's have a look at what you say about that in</p> <p>20 your witness statement. Picking it up at paragraph 10,</p> <p>21 five lines down from the top, you say:</p> <p>22 "My view of him was, on the positive side, that he</p> <p>23 was a larger-than-life figure who came across well in</p> <p>24 the media and cheered up party members, but on the</p> <p>25 negative side that this 'out front' personality only</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 85</p>	<p>1 partially hid an ego almost as big as he was physically,</p> <p>2 that he used his popularity to blackmail the party</p> <p>3 leadership by constant threats to resign if he did not</p> <p>4 get his way and was generally a bullying, selfish,</p> <p>5 manipulator of his public image, all of which --</p> <p>6 according to the book ..."</p> <p>7 Which book is that? Simon Danczuk's book that you</p> <p>8 are referring to there?</p> <p>9 A. Yes, I presume so, yes.</p> <p>10 Q. "... enabled him to get away with what he did in</p> <p>11 Rochdale ..."</p> <p>12 A. You asked about when I met him. I saw both sides of</p> <p>13 Cyril Smith the first time I met him. He was very, very</p> <p>14 much a Jekyll and Hyde character. On one hand, there</p> <p>15 was the jolly, outgoing, effervescent, brilliant</p> <p>16 speaker, a populist who could get a big smile on his</p> <p>17 face and people would instinctively like him, and that</p> <p>18 Cyril Smith could be a very likable, very charismatic</p> <p>19 character.</p> <p>20 When he came down to Hove, it was the first time</p> <p>21 I had ever met him, and we spoke together on the</p> <p>22 platform, spoke brilliantly, went down well with the</p> <p>23 audience, pleasant to me. My complete impression was:</p> <p>24 this is a good guy.</p> <p>25 Then I saw the other side. We had arranged that</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 86</p>
<p>1 a taxi would be waiting to take him to the station and</p> <p>2 that that taxi would be at the back of the hall, and he</p> <p>3 had to go from the platform down some steps and out the</p> <p>4 back door to get that taxi. So my agent took him down</p> <p>5 and I was still on the platform, and I suddenly heard</p> <p>6 this commotion, and I went to see what was happening,</p> <p>7 and my agent, who was a man called John Holmes, a lovely</p> <p>8 man, was pinned against the wall, white and shaking,</p> <p>9 with Cyril's hands on his chest, and Cyril was</p> <p>10 absolutely bellowing at him. It turned out that, while</p> <p>11 the taxi had been called, no-one had arranged for the</p> <p>12 back door to be unlocked, so Cyril couldn't get out, and</p> <p>13 he was blaming this on John Holmes.</p> <p>14 That jolly face that I'd seen on the platform had</p> <p>15 become like a slab of concrete. It was as hard as you</p> <p>16 could imagine a face to be, and it was a terrifying</p> <p>17 sight, and I called out, "Cyril, your taxi is outside",</p> <p>18 and he stopped for a moment and looked at John Holmes</p> <p>19 and I almost felt like he was thinking, "Will I punch</p> <p>20 him before I go or not?", but in the end, he grudgingly</p> <p>21 came up and disappeared. But that night, I thought to</p> <p>22 myself: that man is not just one man, there are two</p> <p>23 people there.</p> <p>24 Q. In the book review which we looked at, and we will look</p> <p>25 at some other passages from it, you say that Cyril Smith</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 87</p>	<p>1 used his grotesque physical size as a form of</p> <p>2 intimidation. Is that what you are describing here?</p> <p>3 A. Yes. It was also -- if you were having an argument with</p> <p>4 him, and particularly if he was standing, he could stand</p> <p>5 quite close to you, and it was quite intimidating.</p> <p>6 I mean, I don't think I'm a coward, but I was always</p> <p>7 quite happy to get away from him.</p> <p>8 I just wanted to make a point about the threats that</p> <p>9 he would make. Because when I was named to run the '92</p> <p>10 General Election, he sent Paddy Ashdown a note which</p> <p>11 I think sums up Cyril Smith.</p> <p>12 Q. Just let me interrupt, Mr Wilson, because I think we</p> <p>13 have still got that on screen, haven't we? Is that</p> <p>14 in --</p> <p>15 A. Yes, you have.</p> <p>16 Q. -- paragraph 11 of your statement?</p> <p>17 A. Paragraph 11.</p> <p>18 Q. You say this was in 1992, so that last period of your</p> <p>19 involvement?</p> <p>20 A. Yes, this was at the -- when I was named in 1990, I was</p> <p>21 named in 1990.</p> <p>22 Q. Named to be the election coordinator?</p> <p>23 A. Yes, and he wrote:</p> <p>24 "I wish to register my ..."</p> <p>25 And then he goes into capitals:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 88</p>

1 "... **STRONGEST POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS** [then he goes  
2 **back] to Des Wilson heading the GE team and I WILL NOT**  
3 **[in capitals] BE PREPARED TO ASSIST NATIONALLY IF HE**  
4 **DOES SO."**  
5 **Then he put:**  
6 **"PS: Count me out! I'm disgusted and will say so**  
7 **publicly."**  
8 **The point about that is it shows everything about**  
9 **it: first of all the threats, that he would say**  
10 **something publicly if he didn't get his way. Secondly,**  
11 **that he never forgot a grudge. Because I only had the**  
12 **one big row with him, and that was after the book came**  
13 **out in 1987. In 1990, he still wasn't going to have**  
14 **anything to do with me. Thirdly, the bullying, the**  
15 **belief that filing this off would somehow get the whole**  
16 **thing changed. That just summed him up, i thought.**  
17 Q. I am going to move on in a moment, Mr Wilson, to ask you  
18 some particular questions about the Private Eye article  
19 and so on. Before I do that, can I just ask you a more  
20 general question about Cyril Smith: did you ever hear  
21 any rumours about his sexuality generally and in  
22 particular whether he had had anything to do with the  
23 homosexual vice scene?  
24 **A. No.**  
25 Q. Thank you. Let's move on, then, as I say, to the

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1 up. It was, in a sense, a precis of the Rochdale  
2 article, wasn't it, Mr Wilson?  
3 **A. Yes.**  
4 Q. It picked up the core detail of it?  
5 **A. Yes.**  
6 Q. I particularly want just to look and see where it  
7 describes the particular allegations that were being  
8 made against Cyril Smith. You see there is a paragraph  
9 there which says "It publishes extracts from three men",  
10 so that's describing the Rochdale Alternative Press  
11 article. Then it briefly goes through the accounts  
12 given by the three men, doesn't it? So we see the next  
13 paragraph:  
14 "The first man says that he had missed a day off  
15 work, which was against the hostel rules."  
16 Pausing there, these three men had all given -- the  
17 accounts they gave were all of a time when they had been  
18 in the Cambridge House Boys' Hostel in Rochdale, which  
19 was a hostel run by Cyril Smith, or he had a role in  
20 managing. Do you recall that?  
21 **A. Yes, I recall this article.**  
22 Q. Let's just look through those three accounts, then. So  
23 the first man who said he had missed a day off work  
24 which was against the hostel rules:  
25 "He was reported and interviewed by Cyril Smith."

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1 Private Eye and the Rochdale Alternative Press articles  
2 which both came out in 1979, in May 1979, didn't they?  
3 **A. (Witness nods).**  
4 Q. Let's in fact look, if we can, at the Private Eye  
5 article. It's INQ000963\_004. For you, Mr Wilson, and  
6 also for the chair and panel, it is tab 2 in your  
7 bundle.  
8 Mr Wilson, this was at a time -- that time when you  
9 weren't involved in front-line politics. It was after  
10 you'd stepped down --  
11 **A. That's correct.**  
12 Q. -- following the Hove by-election and before you'd come  
13 back in 1982, wasn't it?  
14 **A. That's correct.**  
15 Q. We have established that you were living in London at  
16 the time, or most of the time. It is INQ000963\_004.  
17 This is the Private Eye article. You will probably  
18 remember, there was a larger article that appeared in  
19 the local newspaper, the Rochdale Alternative Press.  
20 Let me just ask you quickly: did you read either or both  
21 of those two articles at the time they were published?  
22 **A. I read the Private Eye one at the time.**  
23 Q. I'm going to go back to ask you some questions about  
24 what you made of that at the time. Before we do that,  
25 let's just look at the article, if we can, and blow it

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1 Then there is a quote from his statement:  
2 "He gave me the choice between accepting his  
3 punishment or leaving the hostel. I said I would accept  
4 his punishment ... he took me into the quiet room. He  
5 told me to take my trousers and pants down and he hit me  
6 four or five times with his bare hands on my bare  
7 buttocks."  
8 So that was the first allegation. The second  
9 allegation is similar: an individual who was asked if he  
10 would accept punishment, and we can see that the  
11 individual said he would, and then he, that's  
12 Cyril Smith, "told me to take off my trousers and pants  
13 and bend over his knee. He trapped my hands between his  
14 legs. He hit me many times with his bare hand and  
15 I pleaded with him to stop because he was hurting me.  
16 This took place at the hostel. Afterwards, he came to  
17 my bedroom and wiped my bare buttocks with a sponge".  
18 Then the third incident was of a slightly different  
19 nature. Immediately below we see:  
20 "Another man says:  
21 "After a few days, I was given a kind of medical  
22 examination by Cyril Smith. He told me to take my  
23 trousers and pants down. He held my testicles and told  
24 me to cough".  
25 Those were the accounts that had initially appeared

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1 in the local newspaper that Private Eye republished, as  
 2 it were, in May 1979.  
 3 Now, I am going to come to your view as to the  
 4 deficiencies, if you like, in the way that the  
 5 Liberal Party responded to those allegations. But let  
 6 me ask you, before that: what do you think the  
 7 Liberal Party should have done when those articles  
 8 appeared in 1979? Of course, with the benefit of  
 9 hindsight, but applying the standards of the time, what  
 10 do you think they should have done?  
 11 **A. First of all, I have to say, I just instinctively**  
 12 **believed them. I just think, if you knew Cyril Smith,**  
 13 **it wasn't difficult to believe. But I would have**  
 14 **thought the very first thing would have been that he**  
 15 **should have been called in by the leader of the party**  
 16 **and the Chief Whip and given a real going over, and then**  
 17 **they should have said to him, "Well, look, Cyril, we**  
 18 **have just got to have this properly looked into. We are**  
 19 **going to have to set up some kind of internal enquiry,**  
 20 **because this is obviously dynamite". As I understand**  
 21 **what happened, he met David Steel and said, "Oh, it's**  
 22 **all in the past. The police have taken no action", and**  
 23 **David Steel decided to leave it there. That's my**  
 24 **understanding. But I certainly think, given that**  
 25 **article, it's almost incredible that the party didn't**

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1 Q. Did you become aware that nothing was happening about it  
 2 and press people and say, "Why isn't this being  
 3 pursued?"  
 4 **A. I'm afraid my memory is somewhat vague of the time, but**  
 5 **I don't remember taking any particular action. I think**  
 6 **I just assumed that things would happen.**  
 7 Q. Do you remember a man called Michael Steed --  
 8 **A. Yes.**  
 9 Q. -- who was involved in the Liberal Party at the time?  
 10 **A. Yes.**  
 11 Q. I think he was president in 1978 and 1979. You may or  
 12 may not remember that.  
 13 **A. I don't, no.**  
 14 Q. But let me ask you, if you will, to have a look at the  
 15 way he described his reaction to this article. The  
 16 chair and panel have seen it once already this morning,  
 17 but it is LDP000011\_008. Do you see, Mr Wilson, this is  
 18 a page of a document that Mr Steed wrote.  
 19 **A. Yes.**  
 20 Q. You can see at the very bottom it is dated last  
 21 year, July 2018, but he's describing, amongst other  
 22 things, his reaction to seeing that Private Eye article.  
 23 If we can zoom in on the second paragraph, please, he  
 24 says this:  
 25 "In 1979, I became aware of the story about him

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1 **immediately look into it properly.**  
 2 Q. I am going to come then to the party's response, but  
 3 first let me ask you, what was your response? You said  
 4 that you read not the Rochdale, fuller account, but this  
 5 Private Eye article we have just looked at?  
 6 **A. Yes.**  
 7 Q. You weren't centrally involved in the party at the time,  
 8 but --  
 9 **A. I wasn't involved at all.**  
 10 Q. I think you have said you were still meeting your  
 11 Liberal Party friends, at the time, socially?  
 12 **A. Yes.**  
 13 Q. What was your reaction to this article and what did you  
 14 do about it?  
 15 **A. As I have said to you, I just instinctively believed it.**  
 16 **I took for granted that things would happen. It was so**  
 17 **obvious that something would happen that it never**  
 18 **crossed my mind that I had to do anything.**  
 19 Q. Did you ask the people from the Liberal Party whom you  
 20 were meeting at the time what was happening about it?  
 21 **A. No, I wasn't meeting a lot of people at the time. But,**  
 22 **no, I didn't. I just assumed, as I think most people**  
 23 **would assume, that that article would be acted upon and**  
 24 **it wouldn't -- the whole thing wouldn't have just died.**  
 25 **It seemed that that -- it seems incredible to me.**

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1 [Cyril Smith] smacking boys that appeared in  
 2 Private Eye. I cannot now recall whether it was quoted  
 3 to me over the phone, or I was shown a copy (perhaps  
 4 each in that order); I don't think I possessed a copy,  
 5 or had read it carefully, until Tony Greaves sent me  
 6 a copy after Cyril's death."  
 7 So obviously much later:  
 8 "My reaction has to be seen in the context of  
 9 the time. The Private Eye story was certainly not to  
 10 Cyril's credit, any more than the stories one heard in  
 11 those days of how Tory Cabinet Ministers had caned small  
 12 boys when they were school prefects ... I had myself  
 13 gone through a school system where caning was routine,  
 14 and experienced a headmaster who clearly enjoyed caning  
 15 boys on a casual whim. The Private Eye story was  
 16 politically embarrassing (just like Cyril's known view  
 17 on corporal punishment), but not as potentially  
 18 embarrassing as what he might do when capital punishment  
 19 came before the 1979 parliament."  
 20 What's your response to that description of this  
 21 article?  
 22 **A. Extraordinary, really. I think to write it off as,**  
 23 **"That's what it was like in those days" is ridiculous.**  
 24 **I mean, it is not as though there was just a sort of**  
 25 **wild allegation; there were three specific cases quoted**

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<p>1 in some detail. I would have thought that there was no 2 way you could brush that aside. 3 As I say, I wasn't involved in the party at the 4 time. Michael was very much involved. I just assumed 5 that this was a bombshell that would resonate. 6 Q. Just before we move away from this, what about the 7 suggestion that the allegations in that article were not 8 as potentially embarrassing as Cyril Smith's 9 controversial views about capital punishment? 10 <b>A. Well, I don't agree with that. For a start-off,</b> 11 <b>Cyril Smith wasn't really a Liberal. He was very, very</b> 12 <b>right wing and he had these views. I don't think people</b> 13 <b>really took his specific views that seriously. His</b> 14 <b>behaviour was a far more serious matter.</b> 15 Q. Can we move away from this document, please, and go back 16 to your book review, which is INQ004084. If we can go 17 to page 5 in that, that's behind tab 3, Mr Wilson, for 18 you and for the chair and panel. Page 5, please. Could 19 we zoom in on those two lines just above the photograph, 20 please? I just wanted to ask you, Mr Wilson -- so it is 21 just actually the two lines at the bottom of that quote 22 there. You refer to Cyril Smith having had more than 23 140 complaints made against him to the police. Do you 24 know where you got that figure from? What does that 25 refer to?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 97</p>	<p>1 <b>A. It must have been from the book. I would have had no</b> 2 <b>other way of knowing. It must have been from the book</b> 3 <b>I was reviewing.</b> 4 Q. So that's not independent knowledge on your part? 5 <b>A. No, it is not.</b> 6 Q. You have just referred back to something you have seen, 7 or saw, in the book. Can we go on to the next page, 8 please, so it is page 6 within this document. If we can 9 just look at the first paragraph first, please. You say 10 here: 11 "As I've said, word was reaching London of 12 the goings-on in his constituency [Cyril Smith's 13 constituency, Rochdale] (the Private Eye hints were 14 there for all to take), but who was going to raise it 15 with him?" 16 Pausing there for a moment, are you suggesting there 17 that there were rumours beyond the Private Eye article? 18 <b>A. No, I'm referring specifically to the Private Eye --</b> 19 Q. Just to the Private Eye article. So going back to this, 20 the question you ask is: 21 "... but who was going to raise it with him?" 22 Then you say this: 23 "Steel just didn't want to know. The Chief Whip, 24 a sanctimonious little creep called David Alton, whose 25 career later self-destructed, was Smith's only genuine</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 98</p>
<p>1 friend, and would never have challenged the giant thug." 2 Colourful language, Mr Wilson, but I think you may 3 be being a little bit unfair on David Alton there? 4 <b>A. Really?</b> 5 Q. He wasn't actually Chief Whip until 1985, I think it is 6 right to say. So we are talking about events 7 in May 1979? 8 <b>A. Right.</b> 9 Q. And David Alton, in fact, had only been an MP for a few 10 weeks at that stage and he wasn't Chief Whip until 1985? 11 <b>A. Inasmuch as I describe him as Chief Whip, I am being</b> 12 <b>unfair to him.</b> 13 Q. Let's have a quick look at David Alton's statement 14 because he has prepared a statement for the inquiry. It 15 is INQ001774. It is tab 11 in your bundle, Mr Wilson, 16 if you want to look at it. It is paragraph 10, page 2. 17 We see there that Mr Alton describes being Chief Whip in 18 that later time, 1985. You accept that, I'm sure, 19 Mr Wilson? 20 If we can then go back and look at paragraph 5, 21 please. You see there that Mr Alton describes that he 22 was elected in a by-election. I think he was elected in 23 a by-election only a few weeks before the 1979 24 General Election, so he was elected twice within the 25 space of a month or so. But, in any event, only very</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 99</p>	<p>1 shortly before the Private Eye article came out 2 in May 1979. 3 But while we are looking at this, we can see that at 4 subparagraphs (i) and (iv) here Mr Alton said: 5 "(i) I saw neither of these publications in 1979 and 6 was unaware of the allegations." 7 Then he says further down, at paragraph (iv): 8 "No colleague ever spoke to me about these stories 9 or allegations and I never discussed it with 10 Cyril Smith." 11 You describe in your statement, or the book review, 12 Mr Alton being a friend of Cyril Smith's? 13 <b>A. He was certainly close to him. They certainly tended to</b> 14 <b>support each other. I would find this very believable</b> 15 <b>because I, not that long ago, had dinner with a member</b> 16 <b>of parliament at the time who never saw the Private Eye</b> 17 <b>article, and it was never mentioned to him, and that in</b> 18 <b>itself I think sort of says quite a bit about the</b> 19 <b>culture in that small parliamentary party, that no-one</b> 20 <b>wanted to rock the boat or raise something that was</b> 21 <b>potentially difficult. So it was just not talked about.</b> 22 Q. Right. So it wasn't talked about and then a decision 23 reached not to pursue it; it just wasn't talked about at 24 all? 25 <b>A. Certainly the MP at the time who I had dinner with not</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 100</p>

<p>1 <b>so long ago said to me he never saw the Private Eye,</b>                  2 <b>never knew anything about it at the time. So if</b>                  3 <b>David Alton says the same, I think that is believable.</b>                  4 Q. I'm going to move away from David Alton's statement,                  5 but, chair, can I invite you to adduce his statement                  6 into evidence. He is not coming to give evidence                  7 personally, but we will adduce it.                  8 Can I ask you, then, to look back at the book                  9 review, Mr Wilson: INQ004084. If we can go to page 6,                  10 which I think is the page we were on previously. If we                  11 can zoom in on the paragraphs above the photograph and                  12 the paragraph below it as well, this is the part of                  13 the article where you address the question of why                  14 nothing was done about this article at the time, and                  15 let's see what you say. You ask rhetorically:                  16 "Was there a deliberate, cynical coverup by the                  17 leadership? I am a believer in the cock-up theory of                  18 politics rather than the conspiracy one.                  19 "There were two questions:                  20 "(1) should Smith be confronted with the rumours?                  21 I doubt anyone had the appetite for that. Personally,                  22 it was a frightening prospect.                  23 "(2) should there be a formal inquiry? Coming so                  24 soon after the Jeremy Thorpe scandal, politically it was                  25 potentially catastrophic."</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 101</p>	<p>1 Then you say, if we can just look at the single                  2 paragraph below the photograph:                  3 "I think they got the biggest spade they could find,                  4 dug the biggest hole in the sand they could manage, and                  5 buried their collective heads in it, hoping the rumours                  6 were unfounded or that it would all go away. In other                  7 words, it was cowardice rather than conspiracy."                  8 Then you add:                  9 "By now, parliamentary party meetings were dominated                  10 by Smith, who had a permanent grievance he was                  11 undervalued as a campaigner and complete confidence that                  12 he, and he alone, was the voice of the man in the                  13 street."                  14 Just looking then at those various possibilities                  15 that you raise, the first one that you suggest as                  16 a possible solution was confrontation. What do you mean                  17 by that? Who would do the confronting and how?                  18 <b>A. Well, as I said to you earlier, I would have thought</b>                  19 <b>that the leader and the Chief Whip would have together,</b>                  20 <b>at least those two -- I mean, I do recall back in the</b>                  21 <b>days of the Thorpe affair when it was coming into the</b>                  22 <b>public eye that there was a small meeting, including</b>                  23 <b>David Steel and -- Emlyn Hooson, I think was another</b>                  24 <b>one, who met with Jeremy Thorpe and confronted him.</b>                  25 <b>I think that, in this situation, I would have expected</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 102</p>
<p>1 <b>at least the leader and the Chief Whip to have sat down</b>                  2 <b>and not just accepted a throw-away that, "Oh, the police</b>                  3 <b>looked into that and there was nothing in it". I would</b>                  4 <b>have expected them to say, "Look, Cyril, this is pretty</b>                  5 <b>nasty reading. We can't just leave it there. We are</b>                  6 <b>going to have to have some sort of enquiry so that you</b>                  7 <b>can clear yourself if you are in fact innocent. We</b>                  8 <b>can't just leave it there". It was astonishing to me</b>                  9 <b>that it did kind of die nationally as a story. I would</b>                  10 <b>have thought it would have really taken off.</b>                  11 Q. What did you mean by your comment that "confrontation                  12 would have been a frightening prospect"?                  13 <b>A. Well, I wouldn't have wanted to do it. As I said to</b>                  14 <b>you, Cyril was a very intimidating man, and he would</b>                  15 <b>have been brutal in his defence, and I don't think that</b>                  16 <b>one would have been forgiven easily. If I couldn't be</b>                  17 <b>forgiven for a passing remark about him in a book,</b>                  18 <b>I would hardly be forgiven if I hauled him into a room</b>                  19 <b>and confronted him with this sort of allegation. So</b>                  20 <b>I think I would have been -- yes, if I had been asked --</b>                  21 <b>if I had been party president and been asked to sit in,</b>                  22 <b>I would not have looked forward to that at all.</b>                  23 Q. Then the second alternative you raise is some sort of                  24 formal enquiry?                  25 <b>A. Yes.</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 103</p>	<p>1 Q. As you say, there had been an inquiry back in the early                  2 days of the Thorpe scandal?                  3 <b>A. Yes.</b>                  4 Q. I think it was Lord Myers or --                  5 <b>A. Byers.</b>                  6 Q. Lord Byers, that's right, who had been commissioned by                  7 David Steel, and Lord Hooson, to conduct an internal                  8 inquiry into Jeremy Thorpe?                  9 <b>A. Yes.</b>                  10 Q. But that hadn't ended very well. Do you think that was                  11 one of the reasons why that may not have been an                  12 attractive solution in 1979?                  13 <b>A. No. I -- this sounds very critical of David Steel.</b>                  14 <b>I have to say, I admire a lot of David Steel's</b>                  15 <b>qualities. He has a lot of outstanding qualities. But</b>                  16 <b>he didn't like confrontation at any time on any thing.</b>                  17 <b>When you have him in front of you, you will see that he</b>                  18 <b>is a moderate sort of speaker and he does not like</b>                  19 <b>confrontation. He must have hated this article. And</b>                  20 <b>I think that he would have just not wanted it to go</b>                  21 <b>anywhere, really.</b>                  22 Q. That's really the point you make in that paragraph                  23 beneath the photo, isn't it, Mr Wilson? I mean, having                  24 earlier on suggested "cock-up and conspiracy", you seem                  25 to settle on a third answer, another C, "cowardice"?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 104</p>

<p>1 <b>A. I think that's part of the cock-up.</b></p> <p>2 Q. All right.</p> <p>3 <b>A. Forgive the language.</b></p> <p>4 Q. If we can go back to page 4 in the article, please,</p> <p>5 because this, I think, picks up your comments about</p> <p>6 Mr Steel, Lord Steel as he now is. There's a section</p> <p>7 where you explain about Lord Steel's relationship with</p> <p>8 the party and you suggest that he'd lost touch with the</p> <p>9 activists, but then, just picking it up four paragraphs</p> <p>10 above the bottom:</p> <p>11 "But, as Liberal leader, he hated confrontation;</p> <p>12 that's why he didn't want to hear about the nocturnal</p> <p>13 behaviour of some of those around that table ..."</p> <p>14 You mean the parliamentary party:</p> <p>15 "... because, devoid of any need to actually</p> <p>16 'campaign' for worthwhile causes (heavens, they hated</p> <p>17 the word 'campaign') they had plenty of time for</p> <p>18 extra-mural activities. And herein lies part of</p> <p>19 the answer to the question: 'Why was Smith not</p> <p>20 questioned about the rumours beginning to emerge from</p> <p>21 his political fortress of Rochdale, rumours that at the</p> <p>22 time were publicly referred to in Private Eye?."</p> <p>23 You go on:</p> <p>24 "Apart from the fact no-one would have had the</p> <p>25 courage to confront the Rochdale bully, a significant</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 105</p>	<p>1 number of the wider parliamentary party had a guilty</p> <p>2 secret of one sort or another. They had no desire for</p> <p>3 questions to be raised about what MPs did in their ample</p> <p>4 spare time.</p> <p>5 "Smith was protected as much by the culture within</p> <p>6 the parliamentary party as Savile was by the culture</p> <p>7 within the BBC."</p> <p>8 <b>A. Yes. I must stress, though, that when I talked about</b></p> <p>9 <b>a guilty secret, I wasn't referring in any way to</b></p> <p>10 <b>child abuse or any activity of that sort. I was merely</b></p> <p>11 <b>making the point that quite a few of the MPs had some</b></p> <p>12 <b>extracurricular going on in their lives and weren't</b></p> <p>13 <b>particularly interested in their activities becoming</b></p> <p>14 <b>a matter of public discussion.</b></p> <p>15 Q. You used the word "cowardice" in that earlier section we</p> <p>16 looked at. There is a suggestion of cowardice in not</p> <p>17 wanting to confront Cyril Smith?</p> <p>18 <b>A. Yes.</b></p> <p>19 Q. But here you seem to be suggesting a different sort of</p> <p>20 cowardice, perhaps a corporate cowardice, that</p> <p>21 confronting Cyril Smith or allowing issues about his</p> <p>22 private life to come into the public domain would</p> <p>23 threaten other members' private lives?</p> <p>24 <b>A. Yes. I have to say, this is the part of the book review</b></p> <p>25 <b>that I have some questions about in my own mind, but are</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 106</p>
<p>1 <b>not -- I overstated this a little bit. What I was</b></p> <p>2 <b>trying to really say was that this wasn't a group of</b></p> <p>3 <b>very serious-minded politicians sitting around a table</b></p> <p>4 <b>who, when something like this arose, would discuss it in</b></p> <p>5 <b>a serious kind of manner, they were all leading lives of</b></p> <p>6 <b>various sorts. A guilty secret could just be drinking</b></p> <p>7 <b>too much, no more or less than that. But I do emphasise</b></p> <p>8 <b>that the point that David Alton made and the point that</b></p> <p>9 <b>my friend made, that they hadn't even seen the</b></p> <p>10 <b>Private Eye article and, because it was never raised or</b></p> <p>11 <b>an inquiry set up, never really knew about it, could</b></p> <p>12 <b>possibly have applied to quite a few of them.</b></p> <p>13 Q. You give drinking too much as an example of the sort of</p> <p>14 guilty secret that you had in mind. You refer also to</p> <p>15 a particular case about a particular MP whom you were</p> <p>16 aware of who was "visited by boys", as you describe it.</p> <p>17 I am not going to ask you who that MP was, but when you</p> <p>18 referred to "boys" in that article, what sort of age of</p> <p>19 person were you talking about?</p> <p>20 <b>A. Yes, that's a very good question. I think the panel's</b></p> <p>21 <b>already had to confront this question about who are boys</b></p> <p>22 <b>and who are not boys before. I am part of</b></p> <p>23 <b>the generation where it was not at all unusual to talk</b></p> <p>24 <b>about 22-, 23-, 24-year-olds as boys, and in fact in</b></p> <p>25 <b>this case that's precisely what I was doing. I think</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 107</p>	<p>1 <b>that I was careless in using the word "boys". I think</b></p> <p>2 <b>it was a mistake. It is misleading.</b></p> <p>3 Q. But there was, nonetheless, as a different example that</p> <p>4 you gave in the book, as well as someone who had</p> <p>5 a drinking habit, someone who was promiscuous with young</p> <p>6 men?</p> <p>7 <b>A. Yes.</b></p> <p>8 Q. So I want to come back to this sentence that's still on</p> <p>9 the screen. You describe Smith as being protected by</p> <p>10 the culture within the Liberal Party, and you compare</p> <p>11 that to Jimmy Savile being protected by the culture</p> <p>12 within the BBC. Can you expand on that? What was the</p> <p>13 culture that you were referring to?</p> <p>14 <b>A. I was talking about a culture of self-interest,</b></p> <p>15 <b>self-obsession, where they weren't really interested in</b></p> <p>16 <b>what other people were doing; a kind of -- they had gone</b></p> <p>17 <b>down to Westminster thinking that they were going to</b></p> <p>18 <b>become major figures, didn't become major figures, and</b></p> <p>19 <b>kind of had their own interests and spent a lot of time</b></p> <p>20 <b>in their constituencies, which were nearly all marginal</b></p> <p>21 <b>constituencies, and it was that kind of, not really</b></p> <p>22 <b>committed to the party culture that I'm really referring</b></p> <p>23 <b>to here. I don't think I can put it any better than</b></p> <p>24 <b>that.</b></p> <p>25 <b>I just think that, in this particular case, Steel</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 108</p>

<p>1 saw Smith, nothing emerged from that; some of the other</p> <p>2 MPs didn't even read the article; no inquiry was set up.</p> <p>3 So it kind of died.</p> <p>4 I mean, I admit that it is appalling that it did,</p> <p>5 and I don't understand how it could have, but it did.</p> <p>6 Q. You describe then the MPs being busy, being very caught</p> <p>7 up with events in their own constituencies, not perhaps</p> <p>8 having much time for their colleagues in London.</p> <p>9 I think you may be suggesting in the article something</p> <p>10 that goes a bit further than that. Are you not</p> <p>11 suggesting a culture of coverup, or at least not being</p> <p>12 too inquisitive into what their colleagues may have been</p> <p>13 up to?</p> <p>14 A. I think the second.</p> <p>15 Q. Let's just look at the way you put it in the article.</p> <p>16 If we can go to the first page of the article, and look</p> <p>17 at the second paragraph, it starts, "And it contains".</p> <p>18 You say:</p> <p>19 "And it [that's Simon Danczuk's book] contains</p> <p>20 further damning evidence that those in power in this</p> <p>21 country -- whether it be in politics, the church, the</p> <p>22 police or the BBC ..."</p> <p>23 Here clearly we are focusing on politics and the</p> <p>24 Liberal Party:</p> <p>25 "... have until recently, and possibly still, been</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 109</p>	<p>1 only too willing to turn a blind eye, or even</p> <p>2 deliberately cover up, any scandal that affects one of</p> <p>3 their own."</p> <p>4 Is that the charge that you were making against the</p> <p>5 Liberal Party?</p> <p>6 A. Well, don't you think that's true? I mean, if you just</p> <p>7 for a moment think of the Savile case, it's</p> <p>8 inconceivable that there weren't scores of people in the</p> <p>9 BBC who knew about that, and, likewise, in politics.</p> <p>10 I mean, there has been one Conservative MP who has been</p> <p>11 mentioned in this inquiry already over the last few days</p> <p>12 that I had certainly heard all about. I think there was</p> <p>13 just generally, "We don't want to rock this boat. Once</p> <p>14 we start making a big issue of one person in the</p> <p>15 parliamentary party, where will it all lead?"</p> <p>16 But it wasn't people sitting around saying, "We must</p> <p>17 cover this up at all costs"; it was much more kind of,</p> <p>18 just keep out of the way.</p> <p>19 Q. You mentioned the BBC and other political parties, but,</p> <p>20 really, this book and this article is about Cyril Smith</p> <p>21 and the Liberal Party, Mr Wilson.</p> <p>22 A. Sure.</p> <p>23 Q. That's what we want your evidence about.</p> <p>24 A. Yes, sure.</p> <p>25 Q. Is that the allegation that you are making about the</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 110</p>
<p>1 Liberal Party and Cyril Smith, that either they turned</p> <p>2 a blind eye or even deliberately covered up the</p> <p>3 allegations that they knew about him?</p> <p>4 A. With respect, you did read out the whole paragraph, and</p> <p>5 that paragraph was making a whole point about other</p> <p>6 institutions, so I think it is quite right to refer to</p> <p>7 it.</p> <p>8 But having said that, I just think, yes, in the case</p> <p>9 of the Private Eye thing, it should have been addressed</p> <p>10 really definitively at the time and it wasn't, and</p> <p>11 clearly no-one felt a need to push it, either because</p> <p>12 they didn't know about it, they had missed it</p> <p>13 completely, or because they simply didn't want to start</p> <p>14 stirring things up.</p> <p>15 Q. Thank you.</p> <p>16 A. I mean, I can't explain to you -- you can't ask me to</p> <p>17 explain to you why the parliamentary party didn't act.</p> <p>18 I find it amazing, but I wasn't involved in the party at</p> <p>19 the time and I can't explain to you why they didn't.</p> <p>20 Q. You have explained it very well, Mr Wilson, and we are</p> <p>21 very grateful. There is only one other question</p> <p>22 I wanted to ask you and it is on a slightly different</p> <p>23 issue, and that is, you may or may not be aware that in</p> <p>24 fact around the time the book was published, even</p> <p>25 a little bit before that, the Liberal Party, the</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 111</p>	<p>1 Liberal Democrat Party, as it was by then, conducted an</p> <p>2 investigation of its own into what had been known about</p> <p>3 the allegations about Cyril Smith and what was done, in</p> <p>4 2012, in fact, that investigation took place. As part</p> <p>5 of that investigation, people who had been involved in</p> <p>6 the party in earlier years were approached and asked for</p> <p>7 their account. Were you approached and asked for your</p> <p>8 account?</p> <p>9 A. No. No.</p> <p>10 MR O'CONNOR: Thank you, Mr Wilson. Those are all the</p> <p>11 questions that I have for you. It may be that the chair</p> <p>12 or members of the panel have questions for you?</p> <p>13 Questions by THE PANEL</p> <p>14 THE CHAIR: Just one question, thank you, Mr Wilson.</p> <p>15 In relation to the allegations about Cyril Smith</p> <p>16 that were referred to in Private Eye and the RAP, in</p> <p>17 your opinion, would there be a distinction made between</p> <p>18 what were potentially criminal allegations and some of</p> <p>19 the other activities that have just been referred to,</p> <p>20 such as extra-marital affairs or heavy drinking?</p> <p>21 A. I think if you started looking into extra-marital</p> <p>22 affairs in the House of Commons, I think you could never</p> <p>23 stop. So I don't think that would be regarded as --</p> <p>24 I mean, the leader or Chief Whip might say to an MP,</p> <p>25 "I think you're being a bit careless here", or whatever.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 112</p>

1 **But a criminal activity of this kind would surely --**  
 2 **I would have expected to be treated with the utmost**  
 3 **seriousness.**  
 4 THE CHAIR: Was it your opinion that you could trust the  
 5 parliamentary Liberal Party to have made that  
 6 distinction?  
 7 **A. I don't know.**  
 8 THE CHAIR: Thank you. We have no further questions. Thank  
 9 you, Mr Wilson.  
 10 (The witness withdrew)  
 11 THE CHAIR: Thank you. We will now take our lunch break.  
 12 MR O'CONNOR: Thank you, chair.  
 13 (12.56 pm)  
 14 (The short adjournment)  
 15 (2.00 pm)  
 16 DAVID MARTIN SCOTT STEEL (LORD STEEL OF AIKWOOD) (sworn)  
 17 Examination by MR ALTMAN  
 18 MR ALTMAN: First of all, can you give us your full name,  
 19 please.  
 20 **A. My name is David Martin Scott Steel, known in the House**  
 21 **of Lords as Lord Steel of Aikwood.**  
 22 Q. Thank you, Lord Steel. You have made a statement to the  
 23 inquiry which I am going to adduce in full: INQ002748.  
 24 Perhaps we can put it up on screen.  
 25 Tell us something about your career in politics,

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1 **written statement I have told how, after the party**  
 2 **leadership election, when he had supported my opponent,**  
 3 **John Pardoe, he said that he wouldn't speak in any**  
 4 **constituency that had voted for me.**  
 5 Q. For you, yes.  
 6 **A. So that was -- he was a sort of prickly character.**  
 7 Q. Yes. In your third paragraph of your statement, you say  
 8 he was "a difficult colleague". Is that a reasonable  
 9 statement or an understatement?  
 10 **A. I think it was an accurate statement, yes. He was**  
 11 **a difficult colleague. He could be quite difficult on**  
 12 **a number of issues, yes.**  
 13 Q. We know he was elected in the by-election in 1972 for  
 14 Rochdale, but had first been selected as a prospective  
 15 parliamentary candidate in 1970. You tell us something  
 16 about selection panels. I don't need to ask you about  
 17 that.  
 18 Did you ever become aware, during the period when  
 19 you were in parliament and he had become one of your  
 20 parliamentary colleagues, of any historic allegations  
 21 into child sexual abuse that concerned him?  
 22 **A. Not at all, until I read the Private Eye.**  
 23 Q. We will come to that in a moment. Had you not even  
 24 heard that he had been investigated by  
 25 Lancashire Police?

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1 please?  
 2 **A. I was elected in a by-election in 1965 as an MP and**  
 3 **I have held the seat ever since, until I retired in**  
 4 **1997. John Major put me in this dissolution list during**  
 5 **the election, so I had no break at all. I served so**  
 6 **many years in the Commons and I went straight into the**  
 7 **House of Lords.**  
 8 Q. You went into the House of Lords in --  
 9 **A. '97.**  
 10 Q. '87 or '97?  
 11 **A. '97.**  
 12 Q. Leader of the Liberal Party between 1976 and 1988?  
 13 **A. Correct.**  
 14 Q. Leader of the Lib Dems, March 1988 to July 1998?  
 15 **A. Correct.**  
 16 Q. You were also a Liberal Chief Whip in 1970 to 1976?  
 17 **A. I think it was '75, but around then, yes. I started**  
 18 **after the '70 election.**  
 19 Q. The first thing I would like to ask you for your  
 20 assistance with, Lord Steel, is this: Cyril Smith,  
 21 really. What did you make of him as a colleague in the  
 22 Liberal Party?  
 23 **A. Well, I listened to the evidence this morning of**  
 24 **Des Wilson and I thought he put it very well, that he**  
 25 **was a rather Jekyll and Hyde character. I think in my**

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1 **A. No.**  
 2 Q. Between 1969 and 1970, the papers had gone up to the  
 3 DPP?  
 4 **A. I knew nothing about that.**  
 5 Q. Nothing at all?  
 6 **A. No.**  
 7 Q. So not one of your parliamentary colleagues had ever  
 8 told you that?  
 9 **A. No.**  
 10 Q. Not even heard it on the grapevine?  
 11 **A. No, nothing at all.**  
 12 Q. Not from any of the Whips; no-one?  
 13 **A. Nothing.**  
 14 Q. Let's then have a look, please, at the articles. We  
 15 have them in hard copy, Lord Steel, behind tab 2 in the  
 16 file that you have, the second tab. Once you have found  
 17 that, what I would like you to do, first of all, is to  
 18 go, please, to page 5, because that's the original  
 19 article, INQ000963\_005, from which the Private Eye  
 20 article was derivative.  
 21 **A. Sorry, page 5?**  
 22 Q. Page 5 within that document.  
 23 **A. That's not part of the Private Eye piece.**  
 24 Q. It's not because it's the RAP, the Rochdale Alternative  
 25 Paper article?

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<p>1 <b>A. Can I just make this point to you: I never saw this</b>  2 <b>Rochdale account until I got these papers. All I went</b>  3 <b>on was the Private Eye story.</b>  4 Q. All right. Let's just focus, then, on the Private Eye  5 story. So we need to go back a single page, to page 4.  6 We had part of this in evidence this morning, but if we  7 focus on, about halfway down, where the article deals  8 with the allegations --  9 <b>A. Can I just make a point before you get that far?</b>  10 <b>I think the first sentence is very important.</b>  11 Q. Yes.  12 <b>A. If I may read it out:</b>  13 <b>"There is not an important newspaper or TV station</b>  14 <b>in the land which has not received a copy of the May</b>  15 <b>issue of the Rochdale Alternative Paper ..."</b>  16 <b>The reason I say that's important is because of what</b>  17 <b>Des Wilson said this morning, when he said that he had</b>  18 <b>come across at least two MPs who had never seen</b>  19 <b>Private Eye. It is possible that I might not have seen</b>  20 <b>Private Eye, but I happen to be a subscriber to that</b>  21 <b>excellent magazine, and so I had read it. But if</b>  22 <b>I hadn't read it, I wouldn't have known anything about</b>  23 <b>this at all. The Rochdale Observer, although they</b>  24 <b>circulated it to newspapers, and so on, never sent me</b>  25 <b>a copy. I received no enquiries from any paper or any</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 117</p>	<p>1 <b>letter or telephone call or anything about it.</b>  2 Q. But it so happened that you were a subscriber?  3 <b>A. Yes.</b>  4 Q. And because you were a subscriber, Private Eye is what  5 you saw. The article from which it derived, the  6 Rochdale Alternative Paper, was something you were  7 completely unaware of?  8 <b>A. I've never seen it, yes.</b>  9 Q. Let's just look at some of the detail. There's  10 a paragraph which begins, "The first man says". We had  11 this this morning:  12 "The first man says that he had missed a day off  13 work."  14 Have you been able to find that?  15 <b>A. Yes, I follow you.</b>  16 Q. Have you got that? Good:  17 "The first man says that he had missed a day off  18 work, which was against the hostel rules."  19 He was talking about Cambridge House:  20 "He was reported and interviewed by Cyril Smith.  21 His statement goes on:  22 "He gave me the choice between accepting his  23 punishment or leaving the hostel. I said I would accept  24 his punishment ... he took me into the quiet room. He  25 told me to take my trousers and pants down and hit me</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 118</p>
<p>1 four or five times with his bare hands on my bare  2 buttocks'.  3 "The second man's statement says:  4 "Cyril Smith found that I had taken some money. He  5 asked me if I would accept his punishment or be dealt  6 with by the authorities. I said I would accept his  7 punishment. He then told me to take off my trousers and  8 pants and bend over his knee. He trapped my hands  9 between his legs. He hit me many times with his bare  10 hand and I pleaded with him to stop because he was  11 hurting me. This took place at the hostel. Afterwards,  12 he came to my bedroom and wiped my bare buttocks with  13 a sponge'.  14 "Another man says:  15 "After a few days, I was given a kind of medical  16 examination by Cyril Smith. He told me to take my  17 trousers and pants down. He held my testicles and asked  18 me to cough'.  19 And the RAP editors say they have four other sworn  20 statements from men who allege similar spankings or  21 inspections."  22 Do you accept, on the face of it, the allegations  23 weren't limited to the spanking of bottoms, but they  24 appear, if accurate, to have included allegations which  25 were far more serious?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 119</p>	<p>1 <b>A. Well, I accepted the article as presumably correct,</b>  2 <b>which is why I questioned Cyril Smith about it.</b>  3 Q. When you questioned Cyril Smith about it, can you tell  4 us the circumstances in which you did so? We know that  5 these articles were published -- well, the original  6 Rochdale Alternative Paper article was published in May.  7 There was a follow-up article in June. But the  8 Private Eye article came hot on the heels, it appears,  9 of the Rochdale Alternative Paper article. So when you  10 spoke to Cyril Smith about it, was it around that  11 time, May 1979?  12 <b>A. Yes, it would have been immediately after the '79</b>  13 <b>election, I guess.</b>  14 Q. So around the very same time -- May, presumably?  15 <b>A. Yes.</b>  16 Q. Where did you see him? In an office in parliament or in  17 Liberal headquarters?  18 <b>A. In the House of Commons.</b>  19 Q. By appointment or --  20 <b>A. No, no, it was simply a conversation.</b>  21 Q. How did the conversation go?  22 <b>A. Well, I was afraid you would ask me that, because</b>  23 <b>40 years later, it's a bit difficult to remember the</b>  24 <b>precise conversation.</b>  25 Q. Lord Steel, nobody is expecting a verbatim account.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 120</p>

1 **A. No.**  
 2 Q. What was the nature of what you said to him?  
 3 **A. What I said to him was, "What's all this about you in**  
 4 **Private Eye?", and he said, rather to my surprise, "It**  
 5 **is correct", that he had been in charge of -- or had**  
 6 **some supervisory role in a children's hostel, that he'd**  
 7 **been investigated by the police, and that they had taken**  
 8 **no further action, and that was the end of the story.**  
 9 Q. So should we take from that that it was a very, very  
 10 brief discussion?  
 11 **A. I think it was fairly brief, yes.**  
 12 Q. Confrontational?  
 13 **A. No, not -- not really. I was just trying to find out**  
 14 **whether this was correct or not, and it was.**  
 15 Q. How did he react to it? Apart from the words that he  
 16 spoke to you -- we have heard something about his  
 17 character and his size and his intimidatory nature. Did  
 18 he exhibit any of that to you during the course of this  
 19 discussion?  
 20 **A. Not at all, no.**  
 21 Q. Had he ever, in any circumstances?  
 22 **A. No. I never felt intimidated by him. I was annoyed by**  
 23 **him sometimes, but that's another matter.**  
 24 Q. Did you go into any detail with him? Did you say,  
 25 "Well, look, Cyril, we are not just talking about the

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1 **A. Because I was concerned, having read the thing in**  
 2 **Private Eye. I mean, it seemed quite natural to ask him**  
 3 **about it.**  
 4 Q. What was the concern: that it might be true?  
 5 **A. Yes.**  
 6 Q. Even despite the fact that there had been an  
 7 investigation which had come to nothing?  
 8 **A. Well, I didn't know that at the time.**  
 9 Q. So that we understand you, are you saying that it wasn't  
 10 even apparent to you, Lord Steel, that he'd been  
 11 investigated by that time and the DPP had decided not to  
 12 prosecute?  
 13 **A. I don't remember the DPP coming into the conversation at**  
 14 **all. It was simply that he had been investigated --**  
 15 **that was correct -- and no further action had been**  
 16 **taken, which I assumed to be a police matter.**  
 17 Q. My question is, if, by the time you were speaking to  
 18 Cyril Smith about this, you had understood there had  
 19 been a police investigation which, in effect, had come  
 20 to nothing, what was the need for you to speak to him at  
 21 all?  
 22 **A. Well, as I say, all I knew was what was in Private Eye,**  
 23 **and because it was in Private Eye, it was in the public**  
 24 **domain, I thought it was only right to ask him about it.**  
 25 Q. Let's imagine for a moment -- I appreciate that this is

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1 spanking of bottoms; we are talking about allegations  
 2 about you holding boys' testicles?"  
 3 **A. No, I didn't have the magazine with me, so I wasn't**  
 4 **going into the detail. I was just saying, I'd read this**  
 5 **in the paper, what had he to say. Now, what I would ask**  
 6 **you to remember is that this was 1979. We were talking**  
 7 **about an investigation two decades previously, when he**  
 8 **had been a Labour councillor --**  
 9 Q. One decade previously?  
 10 **A. Sorry?**  
 11 Q. It was 1969?  
 12 **A. Was it '69?**  
 13 Q. '69.  
 14 **A. I thought it was earlier than that.**  
 15 Q. No, the Lancashire investigation was 1969 to 1970.  
 16 **A. Right. I didn't know that. Anyway, it was quite old.**  
 17 **But it was certainly before he was an MP and before he**  
 18 **was even a member of my party. My point was that he had**  
 19 **gone on since then to be Mayor of Rochdale, to be given**  
 20 **the MBE for services to local government, then he joined**  
 21 **the Liberal Party, he'd been elected as MP with**  
 22 **increasing majorities I think four times. So I saw no**  
 23 **reason, or no locus, to go back to something that had**  
 24 **happened during his time as a councillor in Rochdale.**  
 25 Q. Why did you raise it with him at all, then?

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1 a hypothetical situation, but what if Cyril Smith,  
 2 instead of saying that, "The article is correct, but it  
 3 all came to nothing because it was investigated", had  
 4 actually said, "Well, I did do these things to those  
 5 boys", how would you have dealt with it?  
 6 **A. Well, he didn't say that to me.**  
 7 Q. That's why I'm asking you a hypothetical question. What  
 8 if he had said it?  
 9 **A. As I said in my written statement, my personal opinion**  
 10 **is that he was misusing his role as a -- whatever his**  
 11 **supervisory role was, he was misusing it.**  
 12 Q. Can I ask you what you did mean. If you have got  
 13 paragraph 8 of your statement in front of you, please,  
 14 that's behind your first tab, and perhaps we can put it  
 15 up on screen, please, INQ002748\_002.  
 16 **A. Paragraph 8?**  
 17 Q. Paragraph 8, please, yes. You say in the fourth line  
 18 down:  
 19 "I took no further action, as the report referred to  
 20 events before he was even a member of the Liberal Party.  
 21 It seemed to me that he had possibly exceeded his role  
 22 as a local Labour councillor."  
 23 What did you mean by those words?  
 24 **A. Well, he was -- he claimed that he had been -- had some**  
 25 **supervisory role in the hostel as a councillor which**

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1 **entitled him to do these things, which I disagreed with,**  
 2 **but, still, that was his view.**  
 3 Q. As you mention it, one of the excuses he was giving  
 4 you -- are you able to hear me, Lord Steel? All right.  
 5 One of the excuses he gave you was that, as a Labour  
 6 councillor, and having some supervisory or management  
 7 role within this hostel, he was permitted to, what,  
 8 perform medical inspections?  
 9 **A. That was the impression he gave, yes.**  
 10 Q. What was your response to that?  
 11 **A. Well, I don't think we went into detail on the**  
 12 **individual bits of the Private Eye story. He just**  
 13 **accepted that the story was correct, and obviously**  
 14 **I disapproved, but it was -- as far as I was**  
 15 **concerned -- past history.**  
 16 Q. Was there any policy that the Liberal Party at that time  
 17 had when accusations of this nature were made, or if  
 18 such accusations were made, or any accusations made of  
 19 serious crime against a member of parliament within the  
 20 party, how that would be dealt with?  
 21 **A. Not that I'm aware of, no.**  
 22 Q. Was there any policy or any safeguarding type of policy  
 23 at this time in relation to allegations of offences  
 24 committed towards children?  
 25 **A. Well, I don't think it had happened before, so I wasn't**

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1 **was correct. Why would he have been investigated if he**  
 2 **hadn't done something that was possibly wrong?**  
 3 Q. So you understood that he'd actually committed these  
 4 offences from what he said to you?  
 5 **A. I assumed that.**  
 6 Q. Wasn't that all the more reason to take matters further  
 7 and hold some form of inquiry?  
 8 **A. No, because it was, as I say, before he was an MP,**  
 9 **before he was even a member of my party. It had nothing**  
 10 **to do with me.**  
 11 Q. We heard this morning that there was a formal inquiry  
 12 launched by the party into Jeremy Thorpe. Was that  
 13 qualitatively different in any way to --  
 14 **A. Yes, because it was current.**  
 15 Q. It was current?  
 16 **A. It was current.**  
 17 Q. What gave you the confidence, Lord Steel, that if  
 18 Cyril Smith was confessing to you, in 1979, that  
 19 ten years or more before, he had been assaulting  
 20 children, that he wasn't continuing to do it on your  
 21 watch?  
 22 **A. Well, he was no longer involved with the children's**  
 23 **home, and indeed it had closed down.**  
 24 Q. You're right about that.  
 25 **A. Sorry?**

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1 **aware of it anyway, no.**  
 2 Q. We know that no formal inquiry was held?  
 3 **A. No.**  
 4 Q. That was the end of it?  
 5 **A. That was the end of it. As I say, I might not even have**  
 6 **read Private Eye, in which case we would never have**  
 7 **heard of it.**  
 8 Q. But you did?  
 9 **A. I did, yes.**  
 10 Q. Because you did, you had the conversation you have told  
 11 us about, albeit it was a relatively short conversation?  
 12 **A. Yes.**  
 13 Q. Were you prepared to take his word for it?  
 14 **A. Yes. Well, you know, he didn't deny it, so of course**  
 15 **I took his word for it.**  
 16 Q. He didn't deny the terms of the Private Eye article and  
 17 the fact that he'd been investigated, but as to whether  
 18 he had actually committed the offences of which these  
 19 men were accusing him, was that a topic which ever  
 20 arose?  
 21 **A. I don't think we went into the conversation that deeply,**  
 22 **no.**  
 23 Q. So you came away from that meeting, Lord Steel, not  
 24 really knowing if he'd committed these offences at all?  
 25 **A. Well, I assumed he had because he said that the account**

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1 Q. You're right about that. But did you not think, "What  
 2 if Cyril has access to other children? He could be  
 3 doing this again?"  
 4 **A. Well, I had no such suspicion or reason to think that.**  
 5 Q. Had you ever heard of Knowl View School --  
 6 **A. No.**  
 7 Q. -- where he would allow himself into the premises on  
 8 occasions and would visit the school, which was a school  
 9 for boys. Did you appreciate that?  
 10 **A. Well, I think that was in the Private Eye story, wasn't**  
 11 **it?**  
 12 Q. No, it wasn't?  
 13 **A. Was it not?**  
 14 Q. No, but my point is -- my point is, if Cyril Smith,  
 15 during this meeting, has admitted to you in effect that  
 16 he was guilty of the accusations, the question arises,  
 17 why --  
 18 **A. We have to be careful about the word "guilty", because**  
 19 **of course he was -- no further action was taken.**  
 20 Q. I'm not using it in the "guilty or not guilty" sense,  
 21 Lord Steel?  
 22 **A. Right.**  
 23 Q. But, in a sense, he is confessing to you that he has  
 24 committed these acts which have been alleged against  
 25 him. I am seeking to understand from you why that was

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<p>1 the end of the matter, you being the Liberal Party                  2 leader at this point, why you did nothing about it?                  3 <b>A. Simply because, as I repeat, he was not an MP at the</b>                  4 <b>time, he wasn't even a member of my party. So I didn't</b>                  5 <b>feel that I had any locus in the matter at all, other</b>                  6 <b>than being a reader of the magazine.</b>                  7 Q. I get that. But you understand the point I'm making?                  8 <b>A. Yes.</b>                  9 Q. He could, for all you knew, have been still offending                  10 against children?                  11 <b>A. I have to admit, that never occurred to me, and I'm not</b>                  12 <b>sure it would occur to me even today.</b>                  13 Q. You say that it was only Private Eye that you were aware                  14 of and that you hadn't seen the Rochdale Alternative                  15 Paper. Can I ask you about this, please: in the file                  16 behind tab 2 -- can we put this up on the screen?                  17 <b>A. Which tab was it?</b>                  18 Q. Tab 2, please. If you go to the sixth page, you will                  19 see "006" in the bottom right-hand corner.                  20 INQ000963_006.                  21 <b>A. Yes, I've got it. With a photograph of Cyril Smith on</b>                  22 <b>it?</b>                  23 Q. That's the one. I'm not sure we are able to bring up                  24 the -- ideally, we would have pages 2 and 3 together.                  25 But you know what I am about to ask you, Lord Steel.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 129</p>	<p>1 There is a quotation which begins just under the                  2 photograph --                  3 <b>A. Under the photograph?</b>                  4 Q. Yes, I have to read across to the third page which isn't                  5 up on screen and I don't think we can do a split screen.                  6 The way it reads is, it is a quotation, and you have                  7 been asked about this before:                  8 "It is not a very friendly gesture publishing that.                  9 All he seems to have done is spanked a few bare                  10 bottoms."                  11 The quotation is attributed to David Steel's press                  12 office, 22 April 1979.                  13 <b>A. Well, the first thing to say is, I'm afraid I didn't</b>                  14 <b>have the luxury of a press officer, so it was the party</b>                  15 <b>press officer, and he may well have said that, I don't</b>                  16 <b>know.</b>                  17 Q. Would it be something that you would have approved?                  18 <b>A. Well, that's a hypothetical question. I don't think it</b>                  19 <b>was ever discussed. In fact, I'm sure it was never</b>                  20 <b>discussed because I would remember if anyone had</b>                  21 <b>mentioned it.</b>                  22 Q. The date of it is 22 April, and if the date is accurate                  23 and the publication date for this Rochdale Alternative                  24 Paper article is also accurate --                  25 <b>A. This was coming out during the election, then?</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 130</p>
<p>1 Q. Well, it predated -- the quotation is alleged to have                  2 predated, or is said to have predated, the publication                  3 date of the RAP article.                  4 <b>A. Right.</b>                  5 Q. You will see it is in quotation marks.                  6 <b>A. Yes.</b>                  7 Q. So it suggests -- the internal logic of it is it                  8 suggests somebody gave that quotation to the RAP. It                  9 suggests also -- I understand that you say you didn't                  10 have a personal press officer, but it was a party                  11 officer. Do you think, as leader of the Liberal Party                  12 at the time, that anyone in that office would have put                  13 out a statement of that nature without your approval to                  14 it?                  15 <b>A. Oh, yes, that's perfectly possible, and in fact I'm sure</b>                  16 <b>that's what happened, because I would have heard about</b>                  17 <b>it. But if it was 12 April, that would have been</b>                  18 <b>actually during the election --</b>                  19 Q. 22 April.                  20 <b>A. Well, even more 22 April. I forget what the date of</b>                  21 <b>the election was, but it would certainly have been</b>                  22 <b>running at that time. I would have been up in Scotland.</b>                  23 <b>I was nowhere near the party headquarters.</b>                  24 Q. So we should understand that somebody was willing to put                  25 out a press statement which was --</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 131</p>	<p>1 <b>A. Well, was it a press statement or was it an answer to</b>                  2 <b>a query from the paper?</b>                  3 Q. I can't tell you.                  4 <b>A. I suspect -- from the look of it, it was the paper</b>                  5 <b>ringing up party headquarters and getting this comment</b>                  6 <b>from a press officer.</b>                  7 Q. Bit of a silly thing to have said, though; don't you                  8 agree?                  9 <b>A. Quite possibly, yes. Yes.</b>                  10 Q. A silly thing to have said, not least on its own terms,                  11 but also because anybody looking at this would think it                  12 had the leader of the Liberal Party's approval?                  13 <b>A. Yes, yes. I see what you mean, yes.</b>                  14 Q. But it rather trivialises what these young men had                  15 alleged, and not only does it trivialise it --                  16 <b>A. Of course, we don't know what he was being told.</b>                  17 <b>Presumably, this was over the telephone.</b>                  18 Q. One might assume. But at the same time, it is                  19 a trivialisation of spanking of bare bottoms when we                  20 know that the allegations were far more serious: cupping                  21 of boys' testicles and that kind of activity.                  22 <b>A. Yes.</b>                  23 Q. But what you say in your witness statement, in                  24 paragraph 8 -- you don't need to turn back to it -- you                  25 actually said:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 132</p>

1 "The paper said this was stated by the press office  
 2 on my ..."  
 3 **A. Just a minute. Which paragraph are we at?**  
 4 Q. Do you want to go back to it? Paragraph 8.  
 5 **A. Okay.**  
 6 Q. You will see the last three lines:  
 7 "The paper said this was stated by the press office  
 8 on my direction."  
 9 To be fair to you, Lord Steel, the paper doesn't  
 10 appear to say that at all.  
 11 **A. Oh, right.**  
 12 Q. But what you say is:  
 13 "That is extremely unlikely, but after the passing  
 14 of nearly 40 years, I cannot be absolutely certain."  
 15 Is the situation that you don't have, and nobody  
 16 would expect you to have, but is the situation that you  
 17 don't have a particular memory of this at all, this  
 18 quotation?  
 19 **A. As I say, you pointed out the date to me, which is**  
 20 **actually quite important. I would have been up in**  
 21 **Scotland in the election campaign, nowhere near the**  
 22 **party headquarters, and certainly not in a position to**  
 23 **make any comment to a press officer. Now reading that**  
 24 **again, I think I'm absolutely certain it was not put out**  
 25 **on my behalf or with my authority.**

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1 **have been concerned about it, but it wasn't brought to**  
 2 **my attention, so that was the end of the matter.**  
 3 Q. Can I ask you now, please, to go behind tab 5 in the  
 4 bundle. It was something Baroness Brinton was asked  
 5 about this morning. It is INQ003954.  
 6 **A. Right.**  
 7 Q. If that can go up on the screen, please. These are  
 8 minutes of a meeting of the National Executive held on  
 9 Friday, 11 May 1979 at the Midland Hotel, Manchester.  
 10 Nobody says that you were there. Did you know of  
 11 Claire Brooks?  
 12 **A. Yes, I do. I remember her, yes.**  
 13 Q. You have heard the description Baroness Brinton gave  
 14 this morning?  
 15 **A. Yes, I thought very accurate.**  
 16 Q. And you agree with it?  
 17 **A. Yes, she was a substantial figure in the party.**  
 18 Q. Turn the page, please, in the document. Have you got  
 19 the second page of it?  
 20 **A. Yes.**  
 21 Q. I think you probably have. If we go towards the bottom  
 22 where we see her name, Claire Brooks:  
 23 "Claire Brooks expressed her extreme disquiet at the  
 24 unfair tactics used by opponents of the Liberal Party.  
 25 There had been one particularly damaging article in

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1 Q. If that's right, did anybody ever bring to your  
 2 attention that that had gone out as if it had come from  
 3 you and your office?  
 4 **A. No. As I say, I knew nothing about any of this until**  
 5 **I read Private Eye.**  
 6 Q. This is all happening around the same time?  
 7 **A. Yes, but the date of publication of Private Eye must**  
 8 **have been later than that.**  
 9 Q. Of course, but I think around the same time. Maybe  
 10 a week or so afterwards?  
 11 **A. Yes.**  
 12 Q. If somebody had brought to your attention, after you had  
 13 read the Private Eye article, that this wasn't just  
 14 about spanking a few bare bottoms, but it was more  
 15 serious than that, would you have done anything to have  
 16 countermanded what had been said apparently by you or on  
 17 your behalf?  
 18 **A. That's a double hypothetical question because I didn't**  
 19 **know that had been said. So I'm not sure I can answer**  
 20 **that.**  
 21 Q. It is hypothetical. But what I'm asking, Lord Steel, is  
 22 for how you would have dealt with it had it been brought  
 23 to your attention. There is a hypothesis there, but I'm  
 24 asking what the nature of your approach would have been?  
 25 **A. If it had been brought to my attention, I would say I'd**

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1 a northern regional newspaper, and other notable  
 2 instances of unethical behaviour demonstrated by the  
 3 major parties. The Executive was firmly of the opinion  
 4 that if any candidate believed that adequate grounds  
 5 existed, the possibility of taking legal action should  
 6 be seriously considered."  
 7 Looking back now, do you think, or are you able to  
 8 help, whether what she might have been talking about by  
 9 way of "unfair tactics" in this particular instance,  
 10 "a damaging article in a northern regional newspaper",  
 11 could have applied to anything other than the article in  
 12 the Rochdale Alternative Paper?  
 13 **A. It might have been a reference to the article in the**  
 14 **Rochdale paper. I just don't know.**  
 15 Q. You simply don't know?  
 16 **A. Or it might have been, as Baroness Brinton was saying,**  
 17 **something entirely different.**  
 18 Q. So if I was to ask you the question whether, at the  
 19 time, people might have just seen that as something that  
 20 was simply scurrilous and done in order to gain  
 21 political advantage, is that perhaps how some people  
 22 might have seen things at that time?  
 23 **A. Well, it must have been, because this paper -- I don't**  
 24 **know what its circulation was, but presumably --**  
 25 Q. About 8,000, if my memory serves me.

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1 **A. Well, 8,000 circulating in Rochdale. Presumably its**  
 2 **readership was more than 8,000. As I say, Cyril Smith**  
 3 **was constantly being re-elected. And none of these**  
 4 **rumours or allegations came to us, or nobody wrote in to**  
 5 **us or phoned us or raised any questions. It's really**  
 6 **strange. So it must have been dismissed as scurrilous,**  
 7 **I suppose.**  
 8 Q. You succeeded Jeremy Thorpe in office as leader  
 9 in May 1976, I think I'm right in saying.  
 10 **A. Yes.**  
 11 Q. When he resigned over the Scott affair?  
 12 **A. Yes.**  
 13 Q. Had you ever heard of anybody called Andre Thorne. You  
 14 have been asked about him?  
 15 **A. Audrey?**  
 16 Q. Thorne?  
 17 **A. No.**  
 18 Q. Name doesn't mean anything to you?  
 19 **A. No.**  
 20 Q. I think I'm right in saying that Jeremy Thorpe was tried  
 21 at the Old Bailey three years later during a trial  
 22 lasting six weeks, beginning on 8 May 1979. Does that  
 23 ring true to you, it was around that period, the trial?  
 24 **A. Sorry?**  
 25 Q. May 1979, the Thorpe trial.

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1 the party on Smith was because the party simply couldn't  
 2 afford another scandal at the same time as Thorpe?  
 3 **A. Absolutely not. As I say, the party was unaware of all**  
 4 **this, and I could easily have been unaware of it if**  
 5 **I hadn't been a contributor to Private Eye.**  
 6 Q. Exactly. But the fact is, as I have said already, you  
 7 were.  
 8 **A. Yes.**  
 9 Q. Did you find out or know whether any of your colleagues  
 10 had read --  
 11 **A. It was never discussed, at all.**  
 12 Q. You have been able to see the statements of other  
 13 colleagues of yours?  
 14 **A. Yes.**  
 15 Q. Michael Meadowcroft, David Alton?  
 16 **A. Yes.**  
 17 Q. Who say that they didn't know about it?  
 18 **A. Exactly.**  
 19 Q. So it was pure coincidence, pure chance, that because  
 20 you were a subscriber, you did know, but to the  
 21 exclusion of anyone else?  
 22 **A. Exactly so.**  
 23 Q. As a matter of interest, did you, having spoken to  
 24 Cyril Smith about these matters, then go and speak to  
 25 some of your senior colleagues and say, "Have you heard

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1 **A. Yes.**  
 2 Q. Is that about right?  
 3 **A. I can't remember exactly, but it was around that time,**  
 4 **yes.**  
 5 Q. So all of this is going on at the same time. We have  
 6 got Cyril Smith allegations in Private Eye following on  
 7 from the Rochdale Alternative Paper allegations  
 8 in May 1979. We have got the Thorpe trial going on.  
 9 These are all huge things for you to navigate,  
 10 presumably, as the Liberal leader around that time?  
 11 **A. Yes. The Thorpe thing was a very ghastly experience.**  
 12 Q. As I say, you have, around the same time, Private Eye  
 13 building on the allegations in a local newspaper  
 14 exposing Cyril Smith, who's got away, as it were,  
 15 without being tried for allegations of child sexual  
 16 abuse. Do you think, looking back now, that your  
 17 reaction to the Smith publicity coming, as it was,  
 18 during the very time all of this was going on, may have  
 19 informed your judgment about what to do?  
 20 **A. I don't think so, no. I have obviously thought about it**  
 21 **because that's the allegations in some of the other**  
 22 **statements that have been submitted to this inquiry.**  
 23 **I really don't think so. I don't think there was**  
 24 **any connection between the two things at all.**  
 25 Q. So you don't think perhaps the reality of inaction by

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1 about these allegations? Cyril has just confessed to me  
 2 that he did it"?  
 3 **A. No. I never discussed it with anybody else.**  
 4 Q. Was there a reason for that?  
 5 **A. It wasn't a matter of public discussion at all.**  
 6 Q. Well, not public, but you're --  
 7 **A. No, I mean even within the parliamentary party.**  
 8 Q. You didn't want to take advice?  
 9 **A. No.**  
 10 Q. You didn't see the need to take advice?  
 11 **A. No.**  
 12 Q. Now, you have heard, as you have indicated, Des Wilson's  
 13 evidence this morning, and I think I remember you saying  
 14 that you agreed with his characterisation?  
 15 **A. Yes.**  
 16 Q. Do you also agree with what he said in his witness  
 17 statement that Cyril Smith was "a monstrous character"?  
 18 **A. Well, I think that's pitching it a bit high. But**  
 19 **I thought his statement this morning was reasonably**  
 20 **accurate, yes.**  
 21 Q. And why people tended not to confront him?  
 22 **A. I'm not sure that that's true. I think in politics it**  
 23 **doesn't matter what your physical size is, or anything**  
 24 **like that. If -- I think if people had been seriously**  
 25 **concerned about allegations against him, they would have**

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<p>1 <b>confronted him.</b></p> <p>2 Q. Would you kindly turn to tab 6, because we have got</p> <p>3 Des Wilson's statement there.</p> <p>4 <b>A. Yes.</b></p> <p>5 Q. It's INQ003670 at page 4. I would like you to turn to</p> <p>6 paragraph 15, please.</p> <p>7 <b>A. Paragraph?</b></p> <p>8 Q. Paragraph 15, on the fourth page.</p> <p>9 <b>A. I don't have a 15.</b></p> <p>10 Q. It will go up on the screen, do you have that?</p> <p>11 <b>A. I have it on the screen.</b></p> <p>12 Q. This is what Des Wilson had to say in a statement he</p> <p>13 made to the inquiry:</p> <p>14 "I have been asked about the party's response to the</p> <p>15 Private Eye disclosures; if you knew Smith, you would</p> <p>16 understand why no-one would raise the accusations with</p> <p>17 him. No-one would want to create that kind of enemy</p> <p>18 (note his response to my General Election involvement,</p> <p>19 referred to above). I have no idea why no action was</p> <p>20 taken after the Private Eye article, but then I was not</p> <p>21 around and perhaps Steel did discuss it with him [we</p> <p>22 know you did], though Steel's natural tendency (in my</p> <p>23 view) would be to hide his head in the sand rather than</p> <p>24 get involved in a nasty confrontation."</p> <p>25 Do you recognise that about yourself?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 141</p>	<p>1 <b>A. A pardonable exaggeration, I would say.</b></p> <p>2 Q. Which is the exaggeration?</p> <p>3 <b>A. I wouldn't have been hiding my head in the sand. As</b></p> <p>4 <b>I have explained to you, these allegations are all</b></p> <p>5 <b>related to a period some years before, and before he was</b></p> <p>6 <b>an MP and before he was even a member of the party.</b></p> <p>7 <b>Therefore, it didn't seem to me that I had any position</b></p> <p>8 <b>in the matter at all.</b></p> <p>9 Q. Which you have explained. Now, behind tab 7, there is</p> <p>10 the book review which Des Wilson wrote for The Mail on</p> <p>11 27 April 2014.</p> <p>12 <b>A. Yes.</b></p> <p>13 Q. If we can put that up, please, INQ004084.</p> <p>14 <b>A. Page 4?</b></p> <p>15 Q. Just a moment.</p> <p>16 <b>A. Yes, I marked it when I read this, because he says:</b></p> <p>17 <b>"Herein lies part of the answer to the question of</b></p> <p>18 <b>why was Smith not questioned about the rumours beginning</b></p> <p>19 <b>to emerge from his political fortress of Rochdale.</b></p> <p>20 <b>Rumours at that time were publicly referred to in</b></p> <p>21 <b>Private Eye."</b></p> <p>22 <b>Well, I have explained why nothing was done about</b></p> <p>23 <b>it, because nobody knew about it.</b></p> <p>24 Q. But if you look at page 4, it's a little before that, in</p> <p>25 fact, in that paragraph that I wanted to ask you:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 142</p>
<p>1 "But as Liberal leader, he hated confrontation.</p> <p>2 That's why he didn't want to hear about the nocturnal</p> <p>3 behaviour of some of those around that table, because,</p> <p>4 devoid of any need to actually 'campaign' for worthwhile</p> <p>5 causes ... they had plenty of time for extra-mural</p> <p>6 activities. And herein lies part of the answer to the</p> <p>7 question: 'Why was Smith got questioned about the</p> <p>8 rumours beginning to emerge from his political fortress</p> <p>9 of Rochdale ...?'"</p> <p>10 Des Wilson has in this book review, and indeed in</p> <p>11 his witness statement, claimed that you dislike</p> <p>12 confrontation, and my question is, was that true or</p> <p>13 false?</p> <p>14 <b>A. Well, I think I tended, the whole of my political life,</b></p> <p>15 <b>to be more in favour of seeking compromises rather than</b></p> <p>16 <b>confrontation, yes. It was quite interesting listening</b></p> <p>17 <b>to Des this morning. He's rowed back a bit from this</b></p> <p>18 <b>rather diatribe article to say, "Well, it was just</b></p> <p>19 <b>a book review". There was a history to it because he</b></p> <p>20 <b>actually fell out -- this didn't come up in the evidence</b></p> <p>21 <b>this morning, but after he'd been in charge of</b></p> <p>22 <b>the election in 1992, he rather fell out with my</b></p> <p>23 <b>successor, Paddy Ashdown. I don't know the reasons why,</b></p> <p>24 <b>I'm afraid. I can't enlighten you on that. But they</b></p> <p>25 <b>did have a big fall out, and Des became a bit bitter,</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 143</p>	<p>1 <b>and hence this rather anti-article that appeared in the</b></p> <p>2 <b>Mail.</b></p> <p>3 Q. So from your perspective and your understanding, we</p> <p>4 should understand the nature, perhaps, of this article</p> <p>5 against that background?</p> <p>6 <b>A. Yes.</b></p> <p>7 Q. Can you go, please, within the article to page 6,</p> <p>8 something that Des was asked about this morning. At the</p> <p>9 top:</p> <p>10 "Was there a deliberate cynical coverup by the</p> <p>11 leadership? I'm a believer in the cock-up theory of</p> <p>12 politics rather than the conspiracy one.</p> <p>13 "There were two questions:</p> <p>14 "(1) should Smith be confronted with the rumours?</p> <p>15 I doubt anyone had the appetite for that. Personally,</p> <p>16 it was a frightening prospect.</p> <p>17 "(2) should there be a formal inquiry? Coming so</p> <p>18 soon after the Jeremy Thorpe scandal, politically it was</p> <p>19 potentially catastrophic."</p> <p>20 Then beneath the photograph, as you heard quoted</p> <p>21 this morning:</p> <p>22 "I think they got the biggest spade they could find,</p> <p>23 dug the biggest hole in the sand they could manage, and</p> <p>24 buried their collective heads in it, hoping the rumours</p> <p>25 were unfounded or that it would all go away. In other</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 144</p>

1 words, it was cowardice rather than conspiracy. By now  
 2 parliamentary party meetings were dominated by Smith,  
 3 who had a permanent grievance he was undervalued as  
 4 a campaigner and complete confidence that he, and he  
 5 alone, was the voice of the man in the street."  
 6 Added to that, Lord Steel, there were allegations  
 7 that, because the Liberal Party was a small  
 8 parliamentary party, the party could ill afford to lose  
 9 Smith, and, therefore, rather than confront him, one had  
 10 to live with him in order to, as it were, protect the  
 11 party. Was there any element of that going on?  
 12 **A. I really don't think so. I think this is all -- all**  
 13 **this passage is a bit of an exaggeration on Des's part.**  
 14 **And it stems from the fact that, as I say, the**  
 15 **allegations related to the time before he was even**  
 16 **a member of the party and that nobody knew about them.**  
 17 **So how could there be a sort of determination by the**  
 18 **party to cover up something they didn't even know about?**  
 19 Q. I know. But I come back to the point I asked you to  
 20 consider earlier, which is, how could anybody be  
 21 confident, and you were uniquely in possession of his  
 22 confession. How could you in particular, and the party  
 23 more generally, be confident that Cyril Smith wasn't  
 24 continuing to offend in the way he'd confessed to you  
 25 that he had?

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1 Q. If solicitors were instructed to stop the media  
 2 reporting the allegations against Smith during the  
 3 Thorpe trial in 1979 --  
 4 **A. I don't think they were.**  
 5 Q. Well, that's what Dominic Carman tends to suggest. If  
 6 Lord Goodman or somebody else had been instructed, did  
 7 the party have anything to do with it?  
 8 **A. Certainly not. I'm totally unaware of that.**  
 9 Q. Was Lord Goodman a Liberal Party solicitor?  
 10 **A. No, but he was I think a friend of Jeremy Thorpe's.**  
 11 **That, I do remember.**  
 12 Q. Can we please go back to your witness statement, which  
 13 is behind the first tab for you, paragraph 10, if you  
 14 wouldn't mind.  
 15 **A. Sorry, which tab is it?**  
 16 Q. Tab 1, I think your witness statement is, paragraph 10  
 17 on the second page.  
 18 **A. Yes.**  
 19 Q. This is about Cyril Smith's knighthood?  
 20 **A. Yes.**  
 21 Q. Was it a matter of course in the Liberal Party that  
 22 a longstanding -- or an MP of longstanding service would  
 23 be recommended for a knighthood?  
 24 **A. It was true across all parties, yes.**  
 25 Q. You understood, after 15 years' service, and, "by 1998,

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1 **A. I don't think we -- I don't think the issue arose.**  
 2 **I mean, it wasn't a question of being confident about**  
 3 **it. It just didn't cross our minds.**  
 4 Q. You have seen Dominic Carman's witness statement --  
 5 **A. Yes.**  
 6 Q. -- which deals with the knowledge he attributes to his  
 7 father about Smith's activities over some years. If  
 8 Dominic Carman is accurate about that, and that his  
 9 father had known what Cyril Smith had been doing for  
 10 years, have you any idea how George Carman might have  
 11 known that, the father, but not you?  
 12 **A. Unless, like me, he was a reader of Private Eye, no,**  
 13 **I don't have any idea.**  
 14 Q. Over years?  
 15 **A. Sorry?**  
 16 Q. The impression that Dominic Carman gives is that George  
 17 had known about Cyril Smith's proclivities for some  
 18 years?  
 19 **A. He might have known about what you call the '69**  
 20 **inquiries, yes.**  
 21 Q. I see. In terms of shutting down the press noise about  
 22 it, specifically during the Thorpe trial, if solicitors  
 23 were instructed, did the party have anything to do with  
 24 that?  
 25 **A. I'm sorry, can you repeat that question?**

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1 Smith was in poor health and wasn't going to stand again  
 2 as an MP". I think he retired, didn't he, in the 1992  
 3 election?  
 4 **A. Sorry?**  
 5 Q. Was it the 1992 election that Smith stood down?  
 6 **A. Yes, I think so.**  
 7 Q. I think he got his knighthood in --  
 8 **A. Yes, that must be a mistake, "1998".**  
 9 Q. It should be "1988", shouldn't it?  
 10 **A. I'm sorry, yes.**  
 11 Q. Not at all. But he got his knighthood, if my memory  
 12 serves me, in 1988?  
 13 **A. I think that's right.**  
 14 Q. You say:  
 15 "I passed the recommendation that he should be  
 16 knighted to the Prime Minister in the normal way, and it  
 17 was vetted by the Honours Scrutiny Committee."  
 18 **A. Yes.**  
 19 Q. You say:  
 20 "I know they do a thorough job because they had  
 21 refused my nomination of an individual for an OBE on the  
 22 grounds that he had once bounced a cheque. I did not  
 23 pass on any allegations about Smith sexually abusing  
 24 children to the Honours Scrutiny Committee because I was  
 25 not aware of any such allegations, other than the

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1 matters referred to above [a reference to your witness  
 2 statement] which, as I say, appeared to have been fully  
 3 investigated and had been reported on by Private Eye."  
 4 The problem, may I suggest, is, Cyril Smith had  
 5 confessed to you that he had committed the acts which  
 6 the magazine had published. Did you think that that was  
 7 something that you should, even in confidence, tell the  
 8 Honours Committee about?  
 9 **A. No, it never occurred to me to tell the Honours  
 10 Committee about it. It was all, in a sense, in the  
 11 public domain through Private Eye.**  
 12 Q. You felt that sufficed?  
 13 **A. But what I can say is that, if I'd had any suspicion  
 14 that these activities had been continuing or he'd been  
 15 involved in any activity after he'd been an MP, then  
 16 I certainly would not have recommended him for  
 17 a knighthood. That would have been my natural instinct.**  
 18 Q. I was going to ask what you would have done.  
 19 **A. Yes.**  
 20 Q. How often did you ever approach Cyril Smith after the  
 21 conversation you had --  
 22 **A. Never.**  
 23 Q. -- in 1979 to say, "Is any of this still going on,  
 24 Cyril?"  
 25 **A. Never. Never. I had no reason to.**

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1 **taking a boy to the House of Commons and the boy  
 2 witnesses a conversation between Cyril Smith and  
 3 Michael Foot. That's perfectly possible. I don't know.  
 4 But that's in the book.**  
 5 **There's a newspaper account which says that he took  
 6 this boy to his room and engaged in sexual activity with  
 7 him, and it was a room where Michael Foot passed by.  
 8 That I know is completely wrong, for two reasons. One  
 9 is that Cyril Smith didn't have a room. He had a desk  
 10 in a room shared with four or five others. Anyone could  
 11 have walked in at any time. So that sounds unlikely.**  
 12 **Also, it was -- because I remember it well. I was  
 13 responsible, as Chief Whip, for allocating the desks in  
 14 the rooms. It was up a little stair above the members'  
 15 cloakroom, nowhere near where Michael Foot's office was,  
 16 so he wouldn't have been walking past.**  
 17 **For these reasons, I think I had grave doubts about  
 18 whether these allegations were correct. But these all  
 19 came out after Smith's death, so there was no way  
 20 I could ask him.**  
 21 Q. But the allegations that you knew to be true were the  
 22 ones that Cyril Smith had confessed to you?  
 23 **A. Yes.**  
 24 Q. Do you remember, Lord Steel, appearing on a Newsnight  
 25 programme on 4 June last year?

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1 Q. So you didn't know?  
 2 **A. No.**  
 3 Q. So you never found out before recommending him for  
 4 a knighthood whether this activity might have been  
 5 continuing for years as an MP?  
 6 **A. No.**  
 7 Q. Do you think you ought to have done, looking back?  
 8 **A. No, I don't think so. I have something to say about the  
 9 Danczuk book later on, if you want to come to that.**  
 10 Q. If there is something that's relevant to this, by all  
 11 means.  
 12 **A. Well, there was one thing that puzzled me about the  
 13 Danczuk book. I have said in my written statement why  
 14 I think he wrote it and the political reasons behind it,  
 15 but there was one reference in it -- and I read the book  
 16 again recently, before coming to give evidence here.**  
 17 Q. "Smile for the Camera" is the book?  
 18 **A. Yes. I read it again recently. There is an interesting  
 19 reference to Michael Foot, who was then leader of  
 20 the opposition, leader of the Labour Party. There are  
 21 two different accounts and I don't know whether they  
 22 come from the same person or not, but I rather assume  
 23 they must have done, because why else would Michael Foot  
 24 have come into it?**  
 25 **In the book, there is a reference to Cyril Smith**

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1 **A. No, but I'm sure I did.**  
 2 Q. You certainly mention it in the statement at  
 3 paragraph 11:  
 4 "In a televised interview with the BBC's Newsnight  
 5 programme ..."  
 6 **A. Sorry, let me get hold of that again.**  
 7 Q. Forgive me, the bottom of page 2 of your statement.  
 8 It's up on the screen:  
 9 "In a televised interview with the BBC's Newsnight  
 10 programme broadcast on 4 June 2018, I was asked  
 11 questions about allegations of child sexual abuse made  
 12 against Smith. I described them as scurrilous hearsay  
 13 and tittle-tattle."  
 14 Can we just play the clip to remind you. The clip  
 15 reference is INQ004085.  
 16 Before it is played, you were actually being  
 17 interviewed -- I think you were in Edinburgh, but you  
 18 were being interviewed by Evan Davis in, presumably, the  
 19 London studio about Thorpe and then he asked you some  
 20 questions about Smith. We are not going to look,  
 21 I hope, at the Thorpe part, but we are hopefully cued up  
 22 to the Cyril Smith part.  
 23 (Video played)  
 24 MR ALTMAN: Can we pause it? Is there any way of turning up  
 25 the volume?

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1 **A. If you like, just read it out.**  
 2 Q. I haven't got the transcript, I'm afraid. We will just  
 3 see if we can turn up the volume.  
 4 **A. Just to set this in context, this was an interview about**  
 5 **the film?**  
 6 Q. I think it was about the Thorpe drama that was on  
 7 television last summer?  
 8 **A. That's right, yes.**  
 9 Q. You were asked for some observations?  
 10 **A. I recognise from where I was standing, yes.**  
 11 Q. They have turned up the volume. Let's see how we go.  
 12 (Video played)  
 13 MR ALTMAN: Evan Davis, I am sure, asked you that question  
 14 without you being aware you were going to be asked it.  
 15 **A. Exactly. I think it was probably just after I had read**  
 16 **the Danczuk book.**  
 17 Q. When you referred to "scurrilous hearsay" and  
 18 "tittle-tattle", you can't, surely, have been talking  
 19 about the matters that Cyril Smith had confessed to you  
 20 all these years before?  
 21 **A. No, not at all. I was talking about the current -- he**  
 22 **was talking about 2018.**  
 23 Q. So when you used the words "scurrilous hearsay" and  
 24 "tittle-tattle", you didn't have in mind the fact that  
 25 Cyril Smith had confessed?

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1 **A. No, I haven't read it.**  
 2 Q. Because, in it, some of the allegations by the young men  
 3 who made the allegations, which were written up by the  
 4 Rochdale Alternative Paper and Private Eye, were heard  
 5 by the inquiry, and they were sitting in the very  
 6 witness box where you are now, Lord Steel. Did you know  
 7 any of that by the time you spoke to Evan Davis?  
 8 **A. No, I didn't know any of that. We are talking about,**  
 9 **again, the time of the Private Eye article.**  
 10 Q. Well, you are, yes. I was asking you about the  
 11 interview. But I'm talking about the same allegations,  
 12 the same series of allegations?  
 13 **A. There were allegations referred to in Private Eye that**  
 14 **were not the allegations in the Danczuk book.**  
 15 Q. Some of them were the same. I haven't read the book for  
 16 a long time myself so I can't bring to mind exactly the  
 17 allegations which Simon Danczuk himself made, and  
 18 I remember the one that you make about the parliamentary  
 19 incident which you have told us, and, thank you, that  
 20 can't possibly have happened because of the geography  
 21 which you have mentioned. But the point I make is, at  
 22 the time that you were being interviewed by Evan Davis,  
 23 the inquiry had actually published a report into those  
 24 matters?  
 25 **A. I don't think I had read that.**

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1 **A. Not at all. I was talking about the Danczuk book,**  
 2 **frankly.**  
 3 Q. Which particular allegations in the Danczuk book were  
 4 you saying were "scurrilous hearsay"?  
 5 **A. There were so many in the book. I actually met with**  
 6 **Danczuk after the book was published and I told him**  
 7 **I thought a lot of it was very doubtful.**  
 8 Q. As a matter of interest, by 4 June -- we can hear you  
 9 saying you were talking about this inquiry and when this  
 10 inquiry had finished its work. Is that what you were  
 11 saying when we were just hearing you talk about the  
 12 inquiry?  
 13 **A. Was it this inquiry I was talking about? I'm not sure.**  
 14 Q. I'm asking you.  
 15 **A. I can't remember.**  
 16 Q. Had you, by 4 June, appreciated that in October 2017  
 17 this inquiry had three weeks of hearings into  
 18 Cambridge House Hostel, Knowl View School and  
 19 Cyril Smith and Rochdale generally? Did you know that?  
 20 **A. I can't remember if I was aware of that at the time.**  
 21 **I know now that there was that inquiry, yes.**  
 22 Q. There was a report which the inquiry published into  
 23 those hearings in April 2018, just a couple of months  
 24 before you were interviewed by Evan Davis. Had you read  
 25 it by then?

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1 Q. But you hadn't read it?  
 2 **A. No.**  
 3 Q. Have you read it since?  
 4 **A. No, I haven't. No, I haven't seen it.**  
 5 Q. Now, just a couple of --  
 6 **A. Sorry, can you enlighten me: does that inquiry justify**  
 7 **the allegations, confirm the allegations, or what?**  
 8 Q. Well, the inquiry -- if you want me to put up on screen,  
 9 I will show you. If we look at the Rochdale report,  
 10 INQ004181 --  
 11 **A. Sorry, this is going back to the Rochdale --**  
 12 Q. Yes, is that what you want me to tell you about?  
 13 **A. No, it doesn't matter. That's okay. I thought you were**  
 14 **referring to more recent ones.**  
 15 Q. No, I'm talking about this inquiry, which heard evidence  
 16 from the very boys who were sexually assaulted by  
 17 Cyril Smith at Cambridge House Hostel?  
 18 **A. What conclusion did the inquiry come to?**  
 19 Q. That their evidence was compelling?  
 20 **A. In other words, the police investigation should have**  
 21 **been pursued?**  
 22 Q. Yes. I mean, if you read the Rochdale investigation  
 23 report, Lord Steel, you will see, amongst other things,  
 24 that the DPP's decision was turned around extremely  
 25 quickly.

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1 **A. Yes.**  
 2 Q. The police were very keen and enthusiastic that  
 3 Cyril Smith should be prosecuted?  
 4 **A. Right.**  
 5 Q. But he never was?  
 6 **A. Yes. Well, I knew nothing about that at the time.**  
 7 Q. May I suggest, when you have a moment, you should read  
 8 the report?  
 9 **A. Thank you very much. Okay.**  
 10 Q. Let me move on to something else, please. Are you aware  
 11 of the comments -- I just want to tap your recollection  
 12 as a Whip. Are you familiar with a programme that went  
 13 out in 1995 called "Westminster's Secret Service" in  
 14 which a man by the name of Tim Fortescue gave his views  
 15 about how the Whips' Office, certainly for the Tory  
 16 Party, worked?  
 17 **A. No.**  
 18 Q. Let's see if we can play it. I hope the volume is good  
 19 enough for you to hear it. If not, I can tell you on  
 20 this occasion what he actually said. It is INQ004083.  
 21 (Video played)  
 22 MR ALTMAN: Do you recognise --  
 23 **A. I'm sorry, I didn't really hear that.**  
 24 Q. I will tell you what he said.  
 25 **A. Tell me the gist of it, yes.**

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1 cover it up and he'd be yours for evermore for whatever  
 2 purpose you required him in parliament. Do you  
 3 recognise that from your own experience?  
 4 **A. I don't recognise it, but, in fairness, Fortescue would**  
 5 **have had a vast number of people to deal with. I only**  
 6 **had a handful. And I never had any experience of that**  
 7 **kind.**  
 8 Q. You're saying that because of the comparative sizes of  
 9 the parties?  
 10 **A. Yes.**  
 11 Q. Just a couple of other matters, please, Lord Steel, and  
 12 then, as far as I'm concerned, you will be finished.  
 13 First of all, in the file behind divider 4,  
 14 INQ003953, that can go up on screen, this is a diary,  
 15 a 1988 diary, for 12 April.  
 16 **A. Right.**  
 17 Q. You see at 12.30:  
 18 "Lunch Special Branch. Senior officers special  
 19 functions room, 5th floor, New Scotland Yard."  
 20 Here is a test of memory: do you have any idea why  
 21 you were invited to a lunch of that nature?  
 22 **A. I have looked at that and I cannot remember, but I can**  
 23 **assume that it would be one of several briefings that**  
 24 **other public bodies did have of MPs and I was probably**  
 25 **one among several MPs there. But I can't remember,**

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1 Q. I will tell you what he said. Did you know  
 2 Tim Fortescue?  
 3 **A. I must have done, but I didn't recognise him there.**  
 4 Q. He was MP for Liverpool Garston between 1966 and 1974,  
 5 and you started, I think you told us, in 1965 in  
 6 parliament?  
 7 **A. Right. I must have known him.**  
 8 Q. What he said -- and this I can tell you verbatim. He  
 9 said:  
 10 "Anyone with any sense who was in trouble would come  
 11 to the Whips and tell them the truth and say, 'Now, I'm  
 12 in a jam, can you help?' it might be debt, it might be  
 13 a scandal involving small boys, or any kind of scandal  
 14 in which a member seemed likely to be mixed up in.  
 15 They'd come and ask if we could help and, if we could,  
 16 we did, and we would do everything we can, because we  
 17 would store up Brownie points, and if -- I mean, that  
 18 sounds a pretty -- pretty nasty reason, but it's one of  
 19 the reasons, because, if we could get a chap out of  
 20 trouble, then he will do as we ask for evermore."  
 21 Now, he was a Tory Whip, and he was talking about  
 22 his own time, and obviously the interest, as far as this  
 23 inquiry is concerned, is his reference to, in effect,  
 24 covering up a scandal involving small boys, because, if  
 25 there was one of your flock was involved in that, you'd

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1 **honestly.**  
 2 Q. Would that be a regular occurrence?  
 3 **A. Absolutely. A frequent occurrence was branches of**  
 4 **the public service, and indeed private industry as well,**  
 5 **host events of that kind to brief MPs about what they**  
 6 **were doing.**  
 7 Q. More particularly, though, as far as this inquiry is  
 8 concerned, Special Branch, was that a regular occurrence  
 9 or not, or senior police?  
 10 **A. No, I don't think so. I think it would have been**  
 11 **a one-off.**  
 12 Q. Would it likely have been on any particular topic or --  
 13 **A. No, I think it would just have been about their general**  
 14 **activities.**  
 15 Q. Thank you. Finally, can you go, if you please, behind  
 16 tab 14. It is a document that was added today because  
 17 it's come to us very recently. Have you had time to  
 18 read this? Right at the back, it should be. We will  
 19 put it up on screen, INQ004197?  
 20 **A. Oh, Lord Jopling. I haven't read this yet.**  
 21 Q. Lord Jopling is a witness. We are going to hear from  
 22 him.  
 23 **A. Yes.**  
 24 Q. He made a statement, as you will see, yesterday,  
 25 12 March, which he sent to the inquiry, and he says in

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1 the second paragraph:  
2 "Over the weekend of 9-10 March, I read the opening  
3 statement by counsel to the inquiry, which has jogged my  
4 memory in respect of two separate issues."  
5 These are the issues I would like to see if you have  
6 any recollection about:  
7 "Firstly, approximately 50 years ago ..."  
8 And 50 years ago would be 1969 or thereabouts:  
9 "... during a private conversation with  
10 John Cobb QC, later Sir John Cobb, he told me in an  
11 informal capacity that he had been asked by police or  
12 the DPP to look at papers regarding child abuse  
13 allegations against Cyril Smith MP. He told me that  
14 after going through all the papers, he had advised the  
15 police or the DPP that he did not think there was  
16 evidence sufficiently strong to get a conviction."  
17 Lord Jopling says:  
18 "I didn't see any of the papers he was referring  
19 to."  
20 Pausing there, I can tell you, Lord Steel, what  
21 happened between police and the DPP was gone through  
22 during the very inquiry investigation I was telling you  
23 about. This didn't arise, and the inquiry had no  
24 information about this at all at that point.  
25 **A. Okay.**

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1 Q. I see.  
2 **A. I think that's what it was.**  
3 Q. But now you don't have any independent recollection of  
4 this conversation?  
5 **A. No, no. I don't know what -- how or why I referred to**  
6 **it publicly at all. I can't remember that.**  
7 MR ALTMAN: Lord Steel, those are all the questions I have.  
8 I will see if the chair or the panel have any questions  
9 for you?  
10 THE CHAIR: We have no questions. Thank you. Thank you  
11 very much, Lord Steel.  
12 **A. There are just a couple of things, may I say to the**  
13 **inquiry?**  
14 MR ALTMAN: Yes, please.  
15 **A. I don't know if you have heard of a scheme called the**  
16 **Disclosure and Barring Service?**  
17 Q. Yes.  
18 **A. It has occurred to me, talking to colleagues recently,**  
19 **that it might be a good idea if political parties were**  
20 **to apply that system to candidates or, you know, when**  
21 **they're coming forward for selection. It's a point the**  
22 **inquiry might like to consider.**  
23 **The other thing, which is less likely to be in your**  
24 **hands, is that, I must say, I am a bit concerned about**  
25 **the unqualified way in which, "you cannot libel the**

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1 Q. But paragraph 4, he says this:  
2 "A few years ago, I heard that Lord Steel of Aikwood  
3 was being criticised over a potential coverup of  
4 evidence against Cyril Smith. I told Lord Steel  
5 informally about my previous conversation with  
6 John Cobb. I believe that he subsequently referred  
7 publicly to my conversation with him, without naming me.  
8 I can't recall now how I heard or read that he had  
9 referred publicly to our conversation."  
10 Does any of that ring any bells with you?  
11 **A. It doesn't. I do remember Michael Jopling telling me**  
12 **this, yes, but I don't -- like him, I can't say that --**  
13 **I don't remember how I -- or why I would refer to that**  
14 **in any public occasion.**  
15 Q. He's talking about, on the face of it -- we will have to  
16 ask him when he comes -- you being criticised --  
17 **A. Yes.**  
18 Q. -- over a potential coverup of the Cyril Smith case, and  
19 because of it, Lord Jopling tells you, although the link  
20 between the two is difficult to see at the moment, about  
21 some advice he understood counsel had given to the  
22 police or the DPP all those years ago?  
23 **A. I think this was after all the publicity which we have**  
24 **dealt with earlier in the Daily Mail from Danczuk's**  
25 **book.**

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1 **dead". The dead have got relatives and friends, and**  
2 **I think it's rather scandalous the way some of**  
3 **the things have been said about people who are not**  
4 **around to answer.**  
5 THE CHAIR: Thank you for your comments.  
6 MR ALTMAN: Thank you, Lord Steel. Your comments are on the  
7 record.  
8 **A. Thank you very much, indeed.**  
9 Q. Thank you for coming.  
10 **A. It is a very important inquiry, and I wish you well.**  
11 MR ALTMAN: Thank you very much.  
12 (The witness withdrew)  
13 MR ALTMAN: Chair, that is all the evidence for today.  
14 10.00 am, please.  
15 THE CHAIR: Thank you.  
16 (3.07 pm)  
17 (The hearing was adjourned to  
18 Thursday, 14 March 2019 at 10.00 am)  
19  
20  
21 I N D E X  
22  
23 SARAH VIRGINIA BRINTON .....1  
24 (BARONESS BRINTON) (sworn)  
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