

IN THE MATTER OF

AN INQUIRY UNDER THE INQUIRIES ACT 2005

AND IN THE MATTER OF THE INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

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WITNESS STATEMENT OF SAL BRINTON

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I, The Right Honourable the Baroness Brinton of Kenardington, c/o House of Lords, London SW1A 0PW, **WILL SAY AS FOLLOWS:**

**Preliminary**

1. I make this statement in response to a request from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse ["the Inquiry"] pursuant to a letter addressed to the solicitors for The Liberal Democrats dated 11 December 2017 ["the Request"]. A copy of that letter can be found at pages 1 to 3 of Exhibit SB1, attached to this witness statement.
2. The Request required The Liberal Democrats to produce a witness statement pursuant to Rule 9 of the Inquiries Rules 2006 and which described and produced by way of Exhibit all such policies as are currently in force in The Liberal Democrat party at local and national level that are relevant to the consideration, by the Inquiry of the adequacy of existing safeguarding and child protection policies in place within political parties.
3. I can confirm that I am a senior member of The Liberal Democrats and I am currently the President of the Party. I therefore provide this statement pursuant to the terms of the Request to which I have referred above.
4. Where the contents of this statement are within my own knowledge they are true and where the contents are not within my own knowledge I indicate the source of my belief and believe them to be true.

**Safeguarding and Child Protection Policies**

5. Exhibited to this witness statement are copies of the existing safeguarding and child protection policies currently in force in The Liberal Democrat Party at local and national level, namely:

5.1.	Members' Code of Conduct	<b>Page 4 to 10</b>
5.2.	Safeguarding Under 18's and Vulnerable Adults Policy	<b>Page 11 to 26</b>
5.3.	A Guide and Code of Conduct for Working with Under 18's and Vulnerable Adults	<b>Page 27 to 31</b>
5.4.	A Guide to Making a Complaint about an Employee or Member of the Liberal Democrats	<b>Page 32 to 37</b>
5.5.	Getting the Best Out of Social Media	<b>Page 38 to 45</b>
5.6.	Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Party Respect Policy	<b>Page 46 to 50</b>
5.7.	Liberal Democrat Lords Parliamentary Party Respect Policy	<b>Page 51 to 54</b>

6. I shall now describe some of the background, working, support and enforcement of the policies and procedures I have referred to above.
7. In 2013, following a review of our Party's response to allegations of sexual harassment, we asked Dame Helena Morrissey to review Party practices and processes and Barrister Diya Sen Gupta to review our legal responsibilities in our disciplinary structures. As a result, the Liberal Democrats Federal Executive (now the Federal Board) updated its policies on complaints, grievance and safeguarding, and agreed that these policies would be reviewed on a regular basis. These policies were reviewed and approved by the Federal Board in December 2017. A policy on whistleblowing is currently being drafted.
8. Following the review a key change to the disciplinary processes was made in that the Party would no longer use the criminal burden of proof in serious cases. Instead, the Party now follows the standard used in employment law matters; the civil burden of proof. Also in 2013 the staff handbook for Federal staff was re-written and implemented to ensure support and protection for staff.
9. The Members Code of Conduct is freely available on the Party's website, in a section on rights and responsibilities. Our approved candidates for Parliament continue to have to sign up to a higher level of conduct.

10. As a result of the 2013 reviews, the Party created the post of Pastoral Care Officer ("PCO"), who is the first point of contact for complainants, whether internal or external. Complainants can contact the PCO via the website or phone. The PCO is independent from the party's disciplinary process and is there specifically to offer advice and support to complainants and vulnerable members. The PCO reports to the President of the Party, ensuring her independence from senior staff and parliamentarians. The President has no formal role in any disciplinary process.
11. Staff employed in Westminster are also able to access the support of the PCO, even though not directly employed by the Party. Both the parliamentary party groups in the Commons and the Lords have grievance and support clauses for staff written into their Standing Orders which are key to reminding parliamentarians of their duties and responsibilities to their staff.
12. The Party has and continues to work closely with the youth wing (the Young Liberals) on safeguarding matters, resulting in a much more open dialogue about vulnerability and how support can be offered to members.
13. Between 2015 and 2017 the Party has expelled members for having been found guilty in the Courts of stalking, sexual harassment, and possession of pornography online. Members have also been expelled for serious abuse of social media, and bullying and harassment.
14. As part of our process of continuous improvement, the Federal Board commissioned Lord Ken Macdonald (former DPP) to review and update our disciplinary processes in 2017. This was somewhat delayed by the snap General Election in June 2017, but went out to members for consultation in the Autumn and the Federal Board approved new processes that will put disciplinary processes on a completely separate and independent footing from the current structures where each state (and in England, region) as well as at local party level can operate a disciplinary case. Constitutional changes will go to Conference in March and be implemented later in 2018.
15. In October 2017 following allegations of sexual assault by a member of the Young Liberals against another member, the Party has been assessing how we proceed with cases where there is an unwillingness of some complainants to give evidence either to the Party or the police, and yet they rightly want resolution on their distressing experience. We commissioned Isabelle Parasaram (Barrister and founder of Greycoat Law) in October 2017 to assess our response to allegations of sexual harassment, including where our duty lies in reporting serious crimes to the police. Her recommendations have been fully incorporated into the Macdonald Review on disciplinary processes.

16. The consequence of these changes means that there will be a faster and more streamlined process for complainants, with a clear independence from party structures. However, the party is not complacent, and has built continuous review and improvement into our systems and processes.

**STATEMENT OF TRUTH**

I confirm that the contents of this Witness Statement are true.

**DPA**

Dated this 30<sup>th</sup> day of January 2018<sup>9</sup>