

Witness Name: David (Lord) Alton

Statement No.: 1

Exhibits:

Dated:

THE INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Witness Statement of David (Lord) Alton

I, David (Lord) Alton, will say as follows:-

1. I have been asked to provide a Witness Statement setting out my evidence on the way in which Westminster institutions and, in particular, the Liberal Party and its national leadership, responded to allegations which have been made against the late Sir Cyril Smith.
2. I was elected to the House of Commons in 1979 for Liverpool Edge Hill and Cyril Smith and I became parliamentary colleagues. Within the north-west region, he and Richard Wainwright were the two other Liberal MPs, and we occasionally campaigned together at constituency and regional events.
3. In 1979 I was the only new Liberal MP. He always encouraged me in my political work. Later, when my constituency offices were burnt out in an arson attack, he gave the local Party great support. When we disagreed – as we did on issues such as the death penalty, or my decision to leave the Liberal Democrats - it never became a matter of personal enmity.
4. I recall that there was a rigorous process for the vetting and selection of parliamentary candidates:
 - i. Anyone wishing to become a parliamentary candidate had, first, to be interviewed by the Candidates Committee: a national vetting committee.
 - ii. They asked searching questions about my background; attitudes; values; professional work; my role as a City Councillor; and what I believed the priorities of a Member of Parliament should be.
 - iii. In my case, I was interviewed by a Panel of three Party Officers, chaired by the national chair of the Party, and was approved.
 - iv. Having been placed on the approved list, I then sought the nomination for the Edge Hill constituency, where I had been elected as a City Councillor. Three approved candidates were shortlisted by the Constituency Association, and an

open Hustings took place, followed by a vote of all Association members, which I won. In 1974 I contested two General Elections.

5. Subsequently, I was elected to the House of Commons in a by-election and, one month later, re-elected in the 1979 General Election. At around that time, a newspaper in Rochdale and *Private Eye* published stories about Cyril Smith. Specifically, I recall that:
 - i. I saw neither of these publications in 1979 and was unaware of the allegations.
 - ii. In 2013, in response to a question from *Dispatches*, I said that a remark attributed to David (Lord) Steel (or his spokesman) that reference to the use of corporal punishment in public schools was a "*facetious remark*".
 - iii. His reported remark did not relate to allegations of sexual abuse against children (about which he has told me he was completely unaware) but the alleged use, by Cyril Smith, in the 1960s, of corporal punishment against a child.
 - iv. No colleague ever spoke to me about these stories or allegations and I never discussed it with Cyril Smith.
6. As a Member of Parliament I campaigned alongside all of my parliamentary colleagues, including Cyril Smith, during the time I served in the House of Commons.
7. The policy areas in which I was Party Spokesman – which included Home Affairs, Overseas Development, the Environment and Northern Ireland – rarely overlapped with Cyril Smith's responsibilities. He supported regional initiatives and Private Members' Bills where we had a shared interest.
8. From 1987, increasing health issues led him to attend Parliament less frequently and to spend more time in his constituency, working with Liz Lynne, who had been selected as candidate to succeed him in the 1992 election.
9. During my time as an MP I never heard any suggestions or rumours of child sexual abuse by Cyril Smith.
10. Similarly, during the period I served as Chief Whip, 1985-1987, I was able to confirm, in response to the internal Inquiry of the Liberal Democrats that no-one ever approached me with allegations, rumours or suggestions that Cyril Smith, or any other MP, Peer, Councillor, or party official was, or had been, involved in child sexual abuse.
11. I have now conferred with Jim (Lord) Wallace of Tankerness QC, who served as my Deputy and succeeded me as Chief Whip, and he, too, has no recollection of any such allegations, rumours or suggestions of child sexual abuse.
12. In 1988 I wasn't particularly surprised to learn that Cyril Smith has been awarded a Knighthood.

13. Leaders of all parties put forward the names of long standing colleagues for public recognition.
14. He had contested and won his Rochdale constituency six times in hard fought battles (when, presumably, these allegations would have been raised by opponents if they were known).
15. The local, regional and Party media reported the award favourably and I do not recall any adverse comments at the time.
16. I assume that, once the nomination had been submitted, the usual scrutiny had been applied by Downing Street.
17. In 2012, after Mr Daczuk's spoke in Parliament, making serious allegations against the now deceased Cyril Smith, I and other colleagues received enquiries asking whether we had been aware of these allegations.
18. I subsequently received an enquiry from Lord Newby, who had been asked by the Liberal Democrats to contact parliamentary colleagues who might have been aware of child sexual abuse allegations. I responded, stating that no such allegations had ever been drawn to my attention. I gave the same reply to media enquiries.
19. I am not aware of any allegations of child sexual abuse made against other Liberal or Liberal Democrat MPs, officials, or prominent members of the Party and, prior to 2016, had never heard any such allegation against Sir Clement Freud.
20. No allegations were never made to me during my time in the House of Commons, or while an Office Bearer of the Liberal Party (or while a member of the Liberal Democrats). Where criminal offences are alleged to have been committed they must be investigated by the Police and if such allegations had ever been put to me I would have asked for both a referral to the Police and an internal inquiry.
21. I hope that this response is helpful to the Inquiry.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed:

DPA

Dated:

12 | 11 | 2018