

Witness Name: Lord Steel of Aikwood

Statement No.: 1

Exhibits:

Dated:

INDEPENDENT INQUIRY CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Witness Statement of Rt Hon Lord Steel of Aikwood KT KBE PC

I, Lord Steel, will say as follows:-

1. I make this statement in connection with the Inquiry's Westminster investigation.
2. I first came to know the late Sir Cyril Smith in 1972 when he was elected MP for Rochdale in a by-election. As far as I can recall, I took no part in his being elected.
3. He was quite a difficult colleague and my relationship with him was somewhat up and down. When I was elected leader of the Liberal Party, he said he would not speak in any constituency which had voted for me! On the other hand he did once visit my constituency to speak at an event.
4. In the 1970s, in order to be selected as a Prospective Parliamentary Candidate (PPC) for the Liberal Party, it was necessary to be approved. Selection panels existed to do this in England and Scotland. After approval by the selection panel, the candidate then had to be chosen by the constituency.
5. I was not involved in Smith's selection as the PPC for Rochdale and do not recall whether the existing PPC - Garth Pratt - was de-selected and replaced by him.
6. I am not aware that anybody in the Liberal Party knew of allegations of sexual assault against teenage boys by Smith in the period 1969 to 1970 at the time he was selected as PPC.

7. I have been asked whether I knew that in 1976 Cyril Smith was investigated by the Metropolitan Police in relation to allegations made by a man named Andre Thorne. I had never heard of this until the Solicitor to the Inquiry requested this statement from me.

8. When *Private Eye* published allegations about Smith in 1979, I read the report in it and of course tackled him about it. He said the story was correct – that he had been investigated by the police at the time and that no further action had been taken. I took no further action, as the report referred to events before he was even a member of the Liberal Party. It seemed to me that he had possibly exceeded his role as a local Labour councillor in the place for which he had some responsibility, but it had been fully investigated and there was nothing more for me to do.
This report was a re-hash of one which had appeared in the *Rochdale Alternative Paper* which claimed that they had spoken to the party press office who said that publishing its allegations "was not a very friendly gesture; all he seems to have done is spank a few bare bottoms". The paper said this was stated by the press office on my direction. That is extremely unlikely, but after the passing of nearly forty years I cannot be absolutely certain.

9. In the period 1972 to 1992, Mr Smith was a parliamentary colleague, and so worked in the team with me. During this time, I never heard of any allegations of child sexual abuse being made against him.

10. Most MP's were awarded knighthoods after 15 years' service, and by 1998 Smith was in poor health had announced he would not stand again as MP. I passed the recommendation that he should be knighted to the Prime Minister in the normal way, and it was vetted by the honours scrutiny committee. I know they do a thorough job because they had refused my nomination of an individual for an OBE on the grounds that he had once bounced a cheque. I did not pass on any allegations about Smith sexually abusing children to the Honours Scrutiny Committee, because I was not aware of any such allegations, other than the matters referred to above which as I say appeared to have been fully investigated and had been reported on by *Private Eye*.

11. In a televised interview with the BBC's *Newsnight* programme broadcast on 4 June 2018, I was asked questions about allegations of child sexual abuse made against Smith. I described them as *scurrilous hearsay* and *'tittle-tattle'*. Most of the allegations

