

## **Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry**

Witness Statement of

ESK

Support person present: Yes

1. My name is ESK My date of birth is 1962. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

### **Qualifications and work history**

2. I have a BA (hons) in Applied Social Sciences with a Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW) from North London Polytechnic, which became North London University. It was a four year course, but I did it over five years as I took a year out in the middle. The CQSW was required for practice as a social worker at that time. I'm not sure what qualifications are required now, but the CQSW still covers me to do social work.
3. My training started in September 1985 when I started at North London Polytechnic. I had two different placements during my training. One was at Camden Social Services and this lasted for nine or ten months and my second placement was with the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO) for six months. When I was on placement with Camden I worked with generic social workers in a time before social workers started to specialise. We trained in all areas covered by social work, such as child protection, disabilities, older people and mental health. This meant that I became a well-rounded Social Worker, able to work with all clients. Specialising created issues whereby some social workers and managers were confident in their own specialism but not others. I recall a case being bounced several times between a

mental health and physical disabilities team because neither manager wanted to take the complex case.

4. After my placements I had one more year of academic work at the Polytechnic as well as writing my dissertation. Then I qualified in 1991. I was very involved in the Student Union and between 1991 and 1992 I became an elected Women's Officer in the Student Union before starting work as a social worker. After that I stayed in London and at first did agency work in social work-type roles in care homes and children's homes while applying for a permanent post.
5. I started work with [REDACTED] Council Social Services in January 1993 and stayed with them up to May 2006. I had a few different posts. I was initially a Community Support Worker in mental health, then I became a social worker/care manager for adults with disabilities for several years. Then I got a post as a Children and Families Social Worker in both [REDACTED] Social Services and later at the other side of the borough in [REDACTED] Social Services. I was involved in the Trade Union and was elected as Social Services Convenor for Unison in [REDACTED] Council from 2001 to 2005.
6. In 1993 my union position of Shop Steward took up just a few hours each week. In the light of the [REDACTED] case it became apparent to me that I understood the complexities of the case due to being a children and families social worker but other people in the trade union didn't really understand so well its complex nature. I stood for election as the Social Services Convenor for Unison, with the Council. I was the one who understood the very complicated nature of what was happening, I spoke on [REDACTED] about cuts in social services, the pressures we were under and the impact on us; which were all factors in the terrible death of [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I gave evidence to the government enquiry into this, which was chaired by [REDACTED]
7. I worked as a Children and Families Social Worker in London (among other roles) which was challenging. I went into it feeling I needed a challenge and a stimulating role; I certainly got that. They were very tough years. When [REDACTED] died, I was working in a different office in [REDACTED] The [REDACTED] case was in the

██████████ office, although I had previously worked in ██████████ I knew that office was chaotic and I could see to a degree why it happened.

8. As Social Services Convenor for ██████████ Unison, I represented the interests of social services staff working in ██████████ Council. It was a very busy office with a big caseload. I moved to Scotland in light of the ██████████ death. I had spent five years as a Social Services Convenor in Unison which had been very tough. There had been a lot of disciplinaries and an awful lot of staff who were driven out. There was a view among the new management that the staff in place before ██████████ death were considered 'incompetent'. That word had been said in court by one of the killers; he said that the social worker was "incompetent" and this was all over the newspapers the following day. It was my job to defend social workers to the best of my ability, which meant five years of battling.
9. A new team of management came to ██████████ Council after ██████████ death. A lot of the previous management had left and new people came in from ██████████ Borough with corporate qualifications and experience, but not social work qualifications. The Director of Social Services, ██████████ had a lot of qualifications in management and in the corporate world, but not in social work. Getting rid of so many workers and starting all over again with a new management team might work in the corporate world, but in social services I don't think that's right. It meant the council lost vital links with and knowledge of the local community.
10. There was a shortage of Social Workers, a turnover of staff and social services were losing staff across all the London Boroughs. There was a general problem of social workers leaving and not being replaced. There was burn out, low pay and poor working terms and conditions.
11. In ██████████, before the news hit the press, it was known that there had been a serious child death and senior management started to leave and were getting jobs elsewhere. The elected councillors were looking for new team managers for social services. They found ██████████ from ██████████ who came in and managed social services. She agreed to come along provided she could bring her whole team with her.

12. When I was in my full time union role I was not doing social work casework, but after five years I wanted to go back to doing social work; however I didn't want to do that in [REDACTED] any longer. The "new" management in [REDACTED] were kidding themselves that they'd solved the problems and became blasé about things. They changed the Council logos but it was just a corporate masking thing that didn't deal with the fundamental issues which were that it was a deprived borough and there were issues with poverty, deprivation, lack of social workers, difficulty with race relations and the police. There was a lack of trust amongst certain communities in dealing with people in authority and issues with finding suitable interpreters. I had met social workers from Scotland in my union role, they had an understanding of the issues in [REDACTED] and Unison had a better organisation in Scotland for social workers. I learned how the system was different in Scotland. There had been the Kilbrandon Report that led to the setup of the Children's Reporters system and I thought that it was a really good system. At the time this inspired me.

### **Employment with 'Council in west of Scotland'**

#### *Work structure and responsibilities*

13. In May 2006 I became a Children and Families Social Worker at 'Council in west of Scotland' in their 'Office 1'. When I arrived at the 'Office 1' I had one week to settle in before I started work. This period of one week wasn't sufficient for me. I felt there was an expectation I couldn't meet. They weren't willing to recognise that I might need more time to settle in. for example I had never written a report for the Scottish Children's Reporter's Administration (SCRA). The legal system for children is different in Scotland. I had one week to read policies and procedures for child protection and read past reports that had been put together for the Children's Panel. I made a visit to the Children's Reporter's Office and met one of the Children's Reporters.
14. The social services office was a square shape. Within that square there were small offices and about four people in each small office. All the social workers were doing the same kind of work. There was one larger space for the welfare rights workers and

another large space for the admin team. It had a corridor going all the way around the square and an open air section in the middle. Within the office bit, it was sectioned off into smaller segments. I was working with the same colleagues on a daily basis. In the segment where I worked there were three more in my section as well as me. We had similar types of cases and we all had our own specific caseload.

15. The 'Office 1' was small. It had around thirty staff members in it. They were mostly social workers and a team of welfare rights workers and an admin team. There were about five or six managers in the social work team. The social work team was headed up by a team leader and then four or five senior practitioners and below them around twenty social workers. I had worked in 'Office 1' for about one month with a female team leader whose name I cannot recall before the next team leader for the office, 'Team Leader, Office 1', started. He was there as team leader for the rest of my time working in that office.
16. There were two senior practitioners that I worked with and they were called 'Senior 2, Office 1' and 'Senior 1, Office 1'. There were a couple of other senior practitioners but I can't remember their names. Under them were around twenty social workers and about ten welfare rights workers.
17. Whilst in office 1 I had a change of seniors from being 'Senior 1, Office 1' to being 'Senior 2, Office 1'. In general, your senior was the person you have your supervision meetings with. Those meetings are when you take your concerns about complex cases, report on the progress of the cases and ask for advice. Decisions that involve money or resources have to go through a senior, but given I was an experienced social worker I didn't need to ask for advice on day to day things such as what to do next on a case. When someone is new to the job they usually do need to do that.
18. I had casework responsibilities working with children and their families. I attended child protection case conferences and there were duty days to do. I had a duty day each week. Being on duty means picking up the phone when a new call comes in. This could be anything from issues such as a parent who is annoyed with their child to a report from someone hearing their neighbour's child screaming. It could involve you

going out of the office in an emergency situation and conducting an assessment. In emergencies, I would be checking in with managers frequently and working with them to make decisions. I think I did this one day per week in rotation with colleagues. It could mean staying late in the office until seven o'clock or eight o'clock if something was ongoing. Once I left the office I was no longer on duty. There was a Glasgow based out of hours duty team to deal with new referrals.

19. My responsibilities were also to carry a caseload. Some cases were children in foster care and I would visit them to regularly review the foster placement. I had two child protection cases in my caseload, I was used to having more child protection cases. One case was taken off me by management to relieve my workload. I would regularly visit children in foster care placements and carry out review meetings in the office of those placements. In terms of frequency this would be dictated by the legal requirements and the complexity of the matter. I would try to speak to the child or children alone. Sometimes that wouldn't be easy depending on the attitude of the parents. In London, the necessity of speaking to a child alone was more readily recognised than in the Council in the west of Scotland. Foster carers were more open to a social worker speaking to the child alone, but some of the natural parents were more likely to put up barriers to that happening. From memory I think I carried a *caseload of twelve* in that office.
20. Quite a big part of my job was writing reports for the Scottish Children's Reporters Administration (SCRA). Reports could come about from a request from SCRA for an investigation and report because of one or more incidents. Writing those reports could take up a lot of time, I had to meet particular deadlines. The report would then be used in Children's Hearings, if a hearing was called, along with reports from other agencies. I would sometimes refer to previous reports from other agencies in order to compile my report.
21. I would usually be present at the Children's Panel Hearing to give evidence and answer questions. I could also give evidence at the Sheriff Court; I think I did it just once. In London I attended court a lot more often, including the High Court, Old Bailey.



22. In the "Council in west of Scotland" I was also the elected Equalities Officer with the trade union Unison. I raised equalities with more senior management in terms of talking about the culture in the office and the Council. This was a role I took on quite early on in my employment. Before I moved to Scotland, I knew people through the Trade Union in Scotland and they helped me find a job by sending me a copy of The Herald, so I could see the jobs that were advertised.

### **Child protection policy**

23. There was a procedure for dealing with child protection matters. Cases often came via duty. The concerns were relayed to us and there would be an investigation. We would make phone calls, find out who the doctor was, were the kids in school, do other bodies have concerns etc. A priority would be to see the child and the parents. If we still had concerns for the child's safety, we would take action. The case could go to a Child Protection Case Conference though that was not always the case.
24. At the Child Protection Case Conference there would be me, my senior, the team leader would chair the meeting, the family if possible, the child if possible and a minute taker. There could be other professionals, such as teachers or police depending on the nature of the case. The Child Protection Case Conference was an opportunity to explore all the concerns we had, decide if a child needed to go on the Child Protection Register and determine the level of our intervention.
25. Child Protection Case Conferences happen when the concerns are quite high. Social Services don't really want to remove the child but really want the family to engage with you to ensure the child continues to go to nursery or to school and the health visitor is allowed to visit etc. The Child Protection Case Conference would explore concerning issues with a view to getting the family to engage, which would help to keep the child safe and prevent removal of the child from the family. The Child Protection Case Conference decided whether the child/children's names went on the Child Protection Register. If so, there followed quite a high level of intervention. The overall principle is

that the welfare of the child is paramount and Social Services would facilitate whatever level of intervention was necessary to achieve that.

26. If I try to compare procedures in 'Council in west of Scotland' with those in London, I think in [REDACTED] the procedures fell apart and we spent our time responding to crisis situations due to many factors like lack of staff and chronic underfunding of services, In Scotland I'm not sure that procedures were being adhered to much at all. Seemingly "Office 1" had its own culture which fell outside normal laws, procedures, was unprofessional and undignified to put it mildly. There was a "Dignity at Work Procedure" but the general culture and what happened to me was anything but dignified.

### **Record keeping at 'Council in west of Scotland'**

27. Digital records were kept in something called the Care First System. I think it was quite a good system on the computer. We went on training for two days to learn how to use this system. Each client had a record and you would write up each conversation into their record on Care First. All the social workers in the office could use that system. It was a case management system that was council-wide. I would record conversations on the database that I made up from my own notes taken during the day. Standards of practice varied amongst my colleagues. Some people made comprehensive notes and some did not. I am not aware of any guidance on how notes should have been made up.

### **Individual children's cases**

28. In one case I was working with a girl called [REDACTED] who was fostered locally by a family. I visited regularly. [REDACTED] was aged around eleven or twelve. I arranged for her to visit her brother who was in foster care elsewhere in Scotland. I did speak to her alone and I think that would have been every two or three weeks. She wanted to see her brother and through the review meetings it was decided she would see him about



three times a year. There was a history to this and he was less willing to see her and found contact quite distressing, although [REDACTED] was very keen to have contact with him. I organised and attended days out for the two of them, they were nice days; I took her on the train to see her brother. I remember that one time we went to a safari park together. Her brothers foster mother also came along.

29. One of the child protection cases I had was a mother who was from the Traveller community. She was settled in a flat, had three children and was pregnant with a fourth child. There was a lot of domestic violence. The father of the children would disappear from the family home. There were concerns about neglect, poverty and the house was very dirty and messy. The mother was reluctant to allow visits from officials.
30. Concerns were initially raised by the school as the children were having too much time off school. There was a case conference that agreed that child protection procedures should be put in place and this meant I would need to visit once a week and introduce more services into the children's lives. I would try to get the children into school regularly, try to get them to attend hospital appointments and get them plugged into the system more. There wasn't any involvement with the police because of the domestic violence. The mum didn't want that.
31. Another child protection case I had involved parents with a volatile relationship. There was history of a fire in the house, they'd had to move house because of the house fire. The mum also tried to set the dad alight. There were three children in the family. The mum had mental health problems as did the dad, there were also drug addiction issues. There had been a Child Protection Case Conference. After this my role was to monitor the family closely to try ensure they kept appointments, they allowed a health visitor to visit to see their baby, to make sure the children were safe and to try to stop the violence. There were a lot of issues and I had to try to tease out how the violence erupted. To these ends I visited the family once a week in the family home.

## Office culture in 'Office 1'

### *Team Leader*

32. The team leader 'Team Leader, Office 1', was considered to be a funny, jokey man. I found some of his humour offensive, this was the culture in the office. There was a lot of banter in the office and some of it was sexualised banter. I often found it to be homophobic and sexist. I let him know I found it offensive. I also knew that it breached equalities and employment law. The workplace began to feel unsafe for me. I told him to his face if his comments were sexist, I had a quite combative relationship with him. Certain managers and some of the workers began to see me as being "the English person who was miserable, who wouldn't banter with them and was no fun". I have since had feedback which said that. It was said in 'Senior 2, Office 1's statement as part of the disciplinary procedure I was put through later on.
33. At the office there was a back door to outside where smokers used to gather on their breaks. One day there were three women from the welfare rights team having a laugh with each other about the first time they'd worn a bra as a child. Then 'Team Leader, Office 1' came out for a smoke. One woman said when she was about eleven, she wore her bra on top of her vest and the other women were laughing. This is what was conveyed to me, 'Team Leader, Office 1' said something like, 'that's no good, when you put your hand up her bra and all you get is a handful of vest'. The three women were fuming. I stumbled on the story because I went into their room in the office and the story was explained to me. I can't remember what I did immediately. I did take it somewhere and it became part of a general grievance that I did later.
34. I'd often heard him say offensive things in the office. That was the culture, but there wasn't just one person leading it, it was bigger than just one person. I found it offensive. In London there were policies and ongoing training on equalities eg anti-racism, anti-sexism and no one would get away with what he came out with. There should have been similar policies in the Council in the west of Scotland, as they are UK wide law but they were not adhered to. There was a reluctance and resistance in "Office 1" to face up to equalities. A very old fashioned misogyny prevailed. For me there was a

clear difference between the office cultures I had experienced. I also knew that this culture in Scotland, was breaking anti-discrimination and employment law.

35. I believe other people felt there was inappropriate behaviour, but were less inclined to speak up about it. I was new and found it shocking, but other people had got used to it because it had gone on for so long.
36. Later on, I was put on a disciplinary investigation for two and a half years, with no charges at the end of it. I had several changes of union rep during this investigation, due to sickness, one of them was Karen Dunlop who was very good. She was also a social worker like me and told me that 'Team Leader, Office 1' had been in the Council for quite a long time and was well liked. It was well known that he had a foul mouth but people accepted it as that was how it had always been. I was new and it wasn't appropriate for any office, but particularly not in a child protection office. This culture meant it was impossible to have grown up conversations about the clients. It was not a progressive office. Another issue was there was no equalities training in the whole borough. The culture needed addressing through equalities training.
37. I thought 'Team Leader, Office 1' was out of his depth. I remember one occasion when I was upset about something he'd done I can't remember what it was now. I went into a meeting room with 'Team Leader, Office 1' and 'Senior 2, Office 1' and I was just saying to him that his behaviour was inappropriate and he needed to set an example to everybody else in the office. I don't think he'd been spoken to like that before. I heard him after that, going into the next room where the women were a bit flirty with him and he was telling them "I need therapy for my head" after what I'd said to him.

*Working relationships in the 'Office 1'*

38. My working relationship with my first senior practitioner, Senior 1, Office 1' was not good. She worked part-time in the office. Some people didn't like me in that office, particularly managers. I was an elected union representative, a shop steward and had some union duties. There was a typical worker/management tension that might happen in any workplace. I had been used to good employee/management

relationships but this was not the case in 'Office 1'. 'Senior 1, Office 1' was not sympathetic to my position at all.

39. Coming from England, I was very experienced at social work, but not in a Scottish context with a different legal system. She sent me to the Training Section several times. The memos she sent to the Training Section about me and the training she felt I required; they didn't understand. I didn't understand what she was saying to them either. To me they were a lot of waffle. I couldn't really understand what her issues were. Partly she wasn't giving me time to adjust to the new context and legal system. She would get frustrated that I hadn't grasped it. I always tried to get on with people, but our relationship deteriorated.
40. In supervision I would normally meet with my senior practitioner for one hour or one and half hours. We would go through cases, discuss progress, how I felt about my caseload and professional development issues. It would take place every two or three weeks. Other social workers in the office would have similar supervision meetings. If someone was new to social work, supervision could take place once a week.
41. I went into a supervision meeting one time, I think it was sometime in 2007, and she told me that, 'Team Leader, Office 1' the team leader, was coming to my supervision. I hadn't been told that beforehand or pre-warned. Suddenly he came in the room, he is quite a tall man. He started to read out a memo that 'Senior 1, Office 1' had sent me and he was reading it out like I was accused of doing something wrong. This memo that the senior sent to me contained some criticisms of me. I can't recall the specifics now. Some comments were general and some were about particular cases. In fact, I'd responded already to 'Senior 1, Office 1's memo but he wouldn't let me go and get my response memo so I could discuss the whole matter with him. In my view he stood there, raised his voice, pointed his finger and lectured me; his face was red and it felt like bullying. I was trying to defend myself.
42. He left the room and I burst into tears. 'Senior 1, Office 1' commented that I looked frazzled and decided to call off the meeting and carry on the next day. I was fuming, but also in tears. I remembered storming round the little office and I opened a door

into a room and discovered 'Senior 1, Office 1' and 'Team Leader, Office 1' were in there talking to each other in the dark.

43. I'd not expected 'Team Leader, Office 1' would be coming to my supervision. At that time, I was feeling frightened of him because of his misogyny, conduct as well as other things. It wasn't good news to have him at the supervision. I was fearful of him due to his inappropriate, sexist manner around the office. His conduct often felt like a violation of my safety and boundaries. I argued this in a legal way (unsuccessfully) as employers should provide a safe working environment.

*Attitude to child sexual abuse*

44. I had several concerns about the culture in the office, in the 'Office 1'. I tried to address this procedurally but whatever I did or whatever official procedure I invoked; nothing would work. I'm a survivor myself of childhood sexual abuse which is why I feel so strongly about these things. I told my later senior 'Senior 2, Office 1' that I'm a survivor. I told her I found the office culture not conducive to doing good work. At times it meant I couldn't even think straight. It ended up with me being seen as "a nuisance" or "annoying". 'Senior 2, Office 1' told me I was "obsessed" with sexual abuse. When I initially confided in her during supervision, she was sympathetic and I felt I was understood. Within two to three weeks she got fed up. I found her knowledge was very limited. She started asking me about how I felt about 'Team Leader, Office 1' and others in the office. I found those questions to be irrelevant and a bit invasive. They had no bearing on my performance as a social worker.
45. I think they didn't see sexual abuse happening but I can only speculate. One thing I learned it was a very religious office and the religious ideology trumped the social work ideology, policies and procedures. I think they felt they had their own ways of dealing with things and it wasn't what I was coming out with. There was an underlying religious culture that I didn't really understand as I wasn't brought up that way and that's one reason why we clashed. People reacted and responded in ways that they understood because of how they'd been brought up and the religious culture that they'd been brought up in, which I didn't understand.

46. I think they were responding to me in a way that said 'we don't talk about these things here, that's not what we do'. When I was telling them that sexual abuse can happen here, they were telling me I was the problem because they didn't see it and didn't want to see it. They'd been there twenty or thirty years and I'd just arrived in the area. Some of the people in my office had been working together in the council for a very long time. The 'Council in the west of Scotland' is quite a small community in itself. Most people in the office lived in the area that they worked in and some travelled in from Glasgow for work. Very few had travelled as much as I had or had a wide breadth of experience of different cultures like I had.
47. I'm wary of naming the raising religious aspect, but for clarity it was a predominantly Catholic council. The two seniors 'Senior 1, Office 1' and 'Senior 2, Office 1' were what some colleagues called the 'Catholic mafia' meaning that if you didn't agree with them, you were out. With the benefit of hindsight, I did get given some warnings that I didn't understand at the time, informal bits of information from people who had worked there a long time. I came to the office not familiar with the west of Scotland, there was history that I wasn't aware of. I think there was denial there, in dealing with the possibility of sexual abuse.
48. I did have a chat with 'Head Officer, Children and Families', who was 'Team Leader, Office 1's' senior. She was the senior for the two Children's and Families offices. I told her that childhood sexual abuse wasn't being dealt with in the Council. She told me 'we do things a bit differently here'. I didn't know what she meant. There was no explanation for her comment. I put details of all of these conversations in the grievance that I did as part of the disciplinary process. I've since burned all of the copies of these papers that I had because it was pressing in on me too much and stopping me from moving on. The SSSC should have copies of these documents, as well as the Council. I had a suitcase full of these documents. The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) should have these documents on their records. The office culture in 'Council in west of Scotland' was part of the grievance that has been sent to the SSSC on their request. 'Council in west of Scotland' should also have these documents in their records. During the disciplinary procedure against me they gave me an option of doing a



grievance as during the disciplinary investigation meetings I was raising issues I had with the office. I was told I could raise a grievance to get a more thorough investigation into the office issues.

### **Concerns about care of children or abuse**

49. Our client called [REDACTED] was in a foster placement. I read in her previous notes that there had been concern about sexual abuse when she was a very young child. In a previous report it said she had said something to her previous social worker that indicated she had been sexually abused. She had said this to 'Senior 1, Office 1' who was previously her social worker. I asked 'Senior 1, Office 1' what exactly [REDACTED] had said, when we were next in supervision together. 'Senior 1, Office 1' said she "Didn't know" as she "Couldn't remember, it was ages ago." She didn't even care but to me that was sloppy, bad practice. She didn't think it was an issue now. I was trained to do a "Process Recording" for something serious like a disclosure of sexual abuse, so the child's words or the conversation would be recorded word for word.
50. With regard to the case involving [REDACTED] I spoke to 'Senior 1, Office 1' and she rebuffed me. I then spoke informally with colleagues about the practice, but generally I never got the clarity that I was seeking. From memory, my conversation with 'Senior 1, Office 1' about [REDACTED] didn't go any further. It's possible I raised it with 'Team Leader, Office 1' as team leader, but I can't recall it. I was shocked at the dismissive attitude of "Senior 1 Office 1"
51. [REDACTED] has profound learning disabilities and suffers from epilepsy. She was known to 'Council in west of Scotland' from being a baby. From her records the health visitor had alerted social services to concerns. She had had quite a few different foster placements as life with her mum didn't work out. Some of the foster placements broke down. She'd had quite a disrupted life. The fact that it had been known for a long time that there had been sexual abuse disclosed and not dealt with, gave me a lot of concerns. I suggested play therapy or some intervention so she could explore her feelings in relation to these issues. 'Senior 1, Office 1' dismissed me and said "We

don't want to rake all that up." I was disgusted. I had expected at [REDACTED] first early disclosure her exact words should have been written down and explored in more detail. It is best to intervene early and for therapeutic work to be done with children who disclose sexual abuse so they don't carry the pain of it with them throughout all their life. It is known that sexual abuse can lead to learning disabilities if its not dealt with.

52. After I left the Council, much later on, I moved to [REDACTED] and started to bump into [REDACTED] on the bus. She was living nearby. This was probably less than ten years after I'd left social work. She's hard to miss as she has distinctive red hair. She recognised me on the bus. She'd grown up and was living in a unit for adults with learning disabilities. She invited me to come around to visit her. I checked it out with the home she was staying in at [REDACTED] to be sure it was ok and I took up the offer.
53. Her room was in a group home with staff who took care of the residents. [REDACTED] asked me to phone her social worker and previous foster carers, whom I knew from when I was her social worker. It transpired her foster placement had broken down. [REDACTED] said there had been a sexual incident. [REDACTED] told me she was in the bathroom in the foster carers house and the man, the foster father, was in the room. She said, 'I touched his willy and white stuff came out'. This is a disclosure. I phoned social services and told them I was her previous social worker, she'd made a disclosure and I was very concerned.
54. I was invited to the next case conference involving [REDACTED] Then suddenly I got a call from [REDACTED]'s social worker to say I was no longer invited; I don't know why although she mentioned "confidentiality". [REDACTED] wanted me there and she wanted me to communicate with her social worker. When I was her social worker, there were several children in the same foster placement, I dread to think what may have been happening, or how much her memories from the past (which were unprocessed) impinged on her present consciousness. [REDACTED]'s disclosure to me happened sometime in 2017 or 2018. I don't know how long before that she had left the foster placement, but I think maybe within the previous year. I didn't go to any other case conferences about [REDACTED]

as I was no longer invited. It was her current social worker at that time, who told me that I wasn't invited; I can't recall her name.

55. [REDACTED]'s foster placement was with a husband and wife. I can't remember their names, but I think he might have been called [REDACTED] ESL [REDACTED]. He also worked at a children's home [REDACTED]. This was the foster placement she was in when I was her social worker. When I was her social worker I didn't have concerns about the foster placement, the council seniors spoke very highly of these foster carers. It was later on that the alleged incident happened, when she had a different social worker and I had left the council.
56. I didn't find out the outcome of this case conference as I was excluded from attending. This had become a familiar pattern, it echoed of what had happened before whereby I'd raised issues of sexual abuse at a previous time and I was thrown out. In the past I think they got rid of me because they couldn't cope with me picking up these things on the cases. The [REDACTED] case was a clear example, but there were others. In general, they got fed up with me talking about sexual abuse and about them missing sexual abuse. I would also talk about equalities issues and the office culture being sexualised, which was inappropriate in a workplace, especially a child protection office. Whilst at 'Council in west of Scotland', I was elected Equalities Officer for Unison so it was my job to raise equalities issues. However, I think they had enough of me and shoved me to another office. My main concern was they were not dealing with sexual abuse, instead they were defending themselves to not hear it, not see it and not deal with it appropriately, when sexual abuse was staring them in the face sometimes. The "jokey" sexualised culture meant that these issues could not be discussed in a grown up, professional way.
57. The earlier disclosure made by [REDACTED] when she was a small child, from memory this involved events in her family home, should have been dealt with early so a pattern didn't develop. Sexual abuse can lead to learning disability and [REDACTED] did have a profound learning disabilities and epilepsy. We know that children can develop patterns of vulnerability that lead them into abusive relationships. My initial social work training (as detailed in the opening paragraphs of this statement) told me that a

disclosure of sexual abuse should be dealt with as early as possible so the pattern does not establish itself. We should allow the child to speak about it and deal with their feelings so they can move on. Otherwise a learning disability and cycles of abuse can develop. It is the job of social services to intervene and break the cycle of abuse.

58. In another case, there was a family who moved from England to Scotland. They had a child, a girl, who displayed sexualised behaviour. I'm not sure how old she was but think she was under the age of six, I can't recall her name. She was displaying sexualised behaviour and her grandmother in Scotland had concerns. We knew from the documents we had obtained from England that her mother had had a boyfriend who may have sexually abused the girl.
59. I visited the grandmother with a colleague. My colleague, 'Social Worker, Office 1', who trained in Scotland said to the grandmother 'Don't worry, she'll grow out of it'. She was a social worker at the same grade as me. It was a shock to me to hear her say that and I thought it was just wishful thinking on her part. It went with the culture of not dealing appropriately with sexual abuse. The girl was living in the family home with her mum and not at immediate risk. They'd moved away from the place in England where the abuse might have happened. There were ongoing concerns about the mum and her relationships with men. The mum was herself a rape survivor.
60. As best practice I expected an intervention regarding the sexualised behaviour. In London I would have reported it to my senior. I would have expected to make a referral to a therapeutic service, perhaps a psychologist to do an assessment and for a service such as play therapy to occur. I didn't expect that there would be nothing done. Sexualised behaviour like that could lead to a cycle of abuse and a pattern of behaviour that attracts predators when she gets older. The child did get referred to a nursery and the nurseries in 'Council in west of Scotland' are quite good. If they noticed the sexualised behaviour, I expect they picked up on it, but I don't know because I was removed from that office. I think I did speak to a senior, but I don't recall there being any further action.

61. I had a good working relationship with the mother in this case who was also a rape survivor. I bumped into her on a night out, a few weeks after I was removed from the case. She was working as a waitress in a pub/restaurant. She told me no one had explained to her why I was no longer there and no longer the child's social worker, that in one call someone was very rude, angrily saying "She's not here" and slammed the phone down. I explained as best as I could that I'd been removed and at the very least I'd have liked to have done a professional ending with her and the family. After hearing the truth from me, she went and hid herself behind some shelves and cried; in her workplace. On so many levels this was appalling treatment of a family.

### **Training on sexual abuse in 'Council in west of Scotland'**

62. In [REDACTED] Council they would have been open to play therapy and to explore what had happened to the child. I am not aware of any 'Council in west of Scotland' policy on dealing with disclosures of sexual abuse. Towards the end of my time there, we did a little bit of training on dealing with sexual abuse, not much. It was one training course that lasted two or three days. Part of the training was about clients making a disclosure and we had discussions in small groups about a child making a disclosure. I found that my colleagues were very resistant to listening to disclosures. I felt that if somebody made a disclosure, they would be met with a brick wall. My colleagues didn't want to engage with it. I understand that it makes people feel uncomfortable, but its more uncomfortable for a survivor of sexual abuse who has to live with the abuse. It is the job of a social worker to listen, hear it, have empathy and process their own feelings.

### **Reporting concerns about children**

63. If abuse was reported to me, I would write down what I was told and speak to my senior. If I was concerned that a child/children were in danger and they were still in the situation; I would report to my senior straight away. That way of dealing with concerns was ingrained in me from previous experience in London.

64. In one case I was on duty in the 'Office 2'. This was where I moved onto when I was removed from the 'Office 1'. A call came though about a boy/teenager who was not going to school and I knew from his notes that his behaviour was very bad in the school and concerns had been raised. I got the boy on the phone. I wanted him to go to school and was trying to persuade him to speak to his teacher. His teacher had already conveyed concerns to me and I felt she was acting very professionally.
65. I suspected he was abused somewhere in his background. I could tell his home was chaotic. He was telling me how much he hated school and teachers. I wanted him to talk to his teacher and tell her what's going on because she cares. I recorded it meticulously. It would be called a process recording in London. 'He said, she said' and it captures everything. Not everyone did that in 'Office 1'. My concerns were that 'Office 1' didn't respond to revelations of sexual abuse in time, appropriately or sometimes at all.

### **Whistleblowing procedure**

66. I don't think there was a process or whistleblowing procedure for social workers in the council to raise concerns. There was a grievance procedure but that wouldn't always have been appropriate. It was one of my many complaints that there was no such procedure in place. There was a whistleblowing procedure in London but not in 'Council in west of Scotland'.

### **End of employment and disciplinary procedure**

#### *'Office 1'*

67. In answer to why I ended up on a disciplinary investigation, I sent a text message to 'Team Leader, Office 1' saying 'I love you' and this was deemed inappropriate. It was a challenge and said in banter but it was taken very badly. It was in keeping with the office banter. This was after I'd raised many concerns via the correct procedures and



got nowhere. A "Trusted Professional" commented later "It was the only thing left for you to do to make a change, but you hit a raw nerve." Sometime after the text message, I returned to the office from a visit and was greeted by two seniors, 'Senior 2, Office 1' and 'Head Officer, Children and Families', and we went into a meeting. They told me I was then under a disciplinary procedure. I was told I had behaved inappropriately. This happened in July 2008. I had to leave that office immediately and go to work in 'Office 2'. I recall I carried a box with my stuff in it and that was me leaving the office and the next day I was to turn up for work in the 'Office 2'. I was not allowed to say "Goodbye" to any of my colleagues, despite being their elected rep.

68. I do recall a previous meeting with 'Senior 2, Office 1' and 'Senior 3, Office 1' where they raised the text message with me and the rights and wrongs of it. I told them "Team Leader Office 1" had a banter and I'm having a banter as well. They did not allow me to have a union rep in the meeting which is against the law procedurally. I remember feeling bullied and harangued. In hindsight I should have refused to meet them but I was always trying (unsuccessfully) to be nice. We didn't come to a meeting of minds. They felt I had to be separated from 'Team Leader, Office 1'. I was telling them (again) about how inappropriate things were in the office. They decided I had to leave that office. It seems "Team Leader Office 1" could be lewd, sexual, salacious, sexist and misogynist but I was not allowed to banter affectionately in a text message.

*'Office 2'*

69. The next day after the meeting with "Senior 2, Office 1' and 'Head Officer, Children and Families', I went to 'Office 2' to work. I'd had a terrible night, I hadn't slept; had cried a lot, felt distraught and was pretty frazzled by then. I saw the manager who seemingly had no prior knowledge of me coming, I burst into tears as soon as I sat down. I threw the piece of paper at him about the allegation of me behaving inappropriately. He read it and told me to get a cup of tea and come back in one hour. It appeared that he he clearly wasn't expecting me and was surprised to hear the story. His name was Robert Warner. He was friendly and kind to me, which was pleasant after everything I'd been through. In hindsight he probably knew at some point that I would be leaving "Office 2" but he didn't let on.

70. When I came back in an hour, he was with one of the seniors, 'Senior 1, Office 2', so we all had a meeting about what I was going to do in that office. I'd been put on restricted duties so not allowed to work on child protection cases. I was given basic work. I could do report writing and duty days. 'Senior 1, Office 2' and Robert Warner decided this. I liked being in that office as I felt safe there in general, I feel I could have stayed. My work was fine and I got on with my colleagues. I got on fine with the manager, but less so with 'Senior 1, Office 2', who could also be a bully.
71. I had a few meetings with Robert Warner and Lesley Cameron who was another senior. They were informal meetings, seemingly not in any procedure. They were helpful meetings whereby these managers were trying to understand the issues in the 'Office 1' which had made me very distressed. There were four or five of these meetings. I worked in the 'Office 2' from July to December 2008.
72. As part of the formal disciplinary procedure I sometimes I had to go to formal disciplinary meetings. 'Investigating Officer 1', was conducting the formal disciplinary process and meetings were in her office. She was a manager of a mental health team  
[REDACTED]
73. The formal disciplinary procedure came about from the meeting in the 'Office 1', referred to in paragraph 67, when they put me on restricted duties. They told me then I was under a disciplinary procedure. There was a lot of correspondence. There was a date for a disciplinary hearing set for two or three weeks away. I was so confused and upset by everything that had happened, I couldn't even think about my defence.
74. As I had so many issues about 'Office 1', I was told to invoke a grievance procedure so the two procedures would run in parallel. 'Personnel Officer' who was a personnel officer in 'Council in west of Scotland', advised me to do this. I had a union rep with me at disciplinary investigation meetings. I had a good rep called Karen Dunlop. After a while she was finding it too difficult and she thought I needed someone higher up in the trade union. I then got a Regional Officer called 'Unison, Regional Officer' who was not so good. She was about to retire and was off sick a lot. Management took

advantage by pushing things forward when she was off sick and I wasn't in a position to respond adequately. I would say she wasn't as interested in my case as I would have liked, she had little energy for the case. For about six weeks when she was off sick, I had another rep who was high up in the union and she was much better. I can't remember her full name unfortunately. She was from Unison Head Office, she was kind and good.

### **Grievance procedure**

75. I invoked the grievance procedure as advised by 'Personnel Officer'. I spoke to Karen Dunlop and she looked over what I had written which was largely about the inappropriate culture in the 'Office 1'. I included the joke and the discussion about the bra (see paragraph 33) and other incidences. I felt I was a whistle blower and I was being got at for it. I felt they were ruining my career, which I put in the grievance and it was never answered. I wasn't liked in that office, particularly by seniors; for my English accent, talking about equalities and raising practice issues they didn't want to hear.
76. The grievance was given by "Head of Social Services, Head Office" to a senior person in the council to investigate. Unfortunately, I can't recall her name. She interviewed people named in the grievance. She called me in to speak with me and my union representative a few times. Some of my grievance was upheld and some not even dealt with. I had said that 'Council in west of Scotland' were trying to ruin my career, this was skipped over and not addressed. I was not satisfied as the investigation never really concluded.

### **Final suspension**

77. I was moved from the 'Office 1' to work in the 'Office 2' for the last six months of working as a social worker. I moved to the 'Office 2' for six months on disciplinary procedures and restricted duties. At the end of those six months I was called to a

meeting at the head office to meet with 'Head of Social Services' who had a senior role as Head of Social Services. I think I was with my union representative at the time. I was told to go home and not return to work. I was on suspension from then onwards. In my mind nothing bad had happened between me leaving the 'Office 1' and being asked to leave 'Council in west of Scotland', however I was asked to leave the Council. I was still under investigation under disciplinary procedures.

78. I was suspended from the 'Council in west of Scotland' on 30 December 2008 after I had worked in the 'Office 2' since July of that year.

### **Compromise Agreement**

79. In my final days at the council I was sent a thick book of all the paperwork they had on the disciplinary and the grievance. A covering letter offered me a compromise agreement. At this time it had been two and a half years of me battling with the council. I knew from having studied employment law that a financial settlement was the best I was going to get. I also wasn't mentally or emotionally able to deal with this any more so I took the compromise agreement. In this agreement there is about a page and a half of different bits of legislation I'm not allowed to take to them to court over. This was the first time the council had recognised they'd broken the law. This included breaking health and safety law and equalities legislation, as I had been saying. The Compromise Agreement names seventeen laws which were broken, which I had to sign that I would not take them to court over.
80. When I got the compromise agreement it was the first sign they had broken areas of the law. I felt justified in my stance. It was an acknowledgement there was something wrong and it wasn't just me. I accepted it as I was emotionally drained and I couldn't go any further. It also contained what union people call "a gagging clause," which means I'm not supposed to speak about anything that happened at 'Council in west of Scotland' or have anything to do with them. This is why names and offices are written in code here. The union advice I got about the compromise agreement wasn't much. I

just got an email between me and a trainee solicitor. Ultimately, I left my employment with the Council in December 2010.

### **Impact**

81. The process of speaking out or whistleblowing has caused me a lot of pain for many years. It hurt me emotionally. My senior 'Senior 2, Office 1' accused me in her statement to 'Investigating Officer 1', of "masturbating at the desk". This in particular was devastating to read and showed a huge amount of arrogance, incompetence and sheer hatred of me. She was in a position of power and trust which she abused. She was unable and unwilling to deal with child sexual abuse in the case work but was able and willing to make up a serious, sexual allegation against me. How messed up is that? It has taken me many years of healing to get over these events, particularly that vicious, untrue accusation.
82. I have since befriended GGA [REDACTED] who was a child abused in care and *who* has given evidence to this inquiry. She has given me validation for my stance which these so called professionals didn't. She also is angry with them for their actions toward me.
83. Since leaving I've got more and more into my own healing. I went to [REDACTED], a mental health organisation in [REDACTED]. They were very good and I saw them for several years. I was under mental health services for a short while. I'm a practising Buddhist so visit the Buddhist temple and practise there a lot. Buddhism is very much about inner healing. I'm much stronger, clearer and in a better emotional place now.

### **Lessons to be learned**

84. One organisation that helped me a lot was Safe2say who support survivors of childhood sexual abuse. I saw the founder by accident as I went to a lecture on research into sexual abuse and I spoke to her in the break. She was very helpful. In the 'Office 1' I didn't get that. They couldn't cope. The person who reports sexual abuse needs to feel safe.

85. If you're at the stage with a child when they are ready to make a disclosure, a safe setting could be a room that is set up as a family living room with soft furnishings. I have come across such a place in London, it was called "The Childrens Interview suite". I have been present, when a child was interviewed by a specially trained plain-clothes police officer. Thought should be given to the gender of the interviewer and the number of adults in the room. The "Children's Interview Suite" was in London, it was decorated in neutral, pastel colours and felt like an informal room. However, it was set up with a hidden camera and microphone that the child would be told about.
86. If a child in foster care did make a disclosure, whether they would be immediately removed from the foster setting would depend on the nature of the disclosure. The guiding principle is that the welfare of the child is paramount.
87. [REDACTED] disclosed abuse to me some time after my employment ended. Time for reflection and processing of the experience is important. When she made a disclosure when she was very young it should have been acted on then. When acted on and processed early, it avoids trauma later on. It's my view that a lot of suffering and heartache could have been avoided if "Office 1" had done their job properly when [REDACTED] was a baby.
88. I needed professional support as an employee in 'Council in west of Scotland' when I revealed my own experience to my supervisor as a way of saying "I know what I'm talking about." I touched on buttons that were raw for them. I got all of their projections from them that I was "evil", "obsessed" with child sexual abuse and saw it everywhere.

#### **Other information**

89. I have no objection to my witness statement being published as part of the evidence to the Inquiry. I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed.....

ESK [REDACTED]



Dated..... 07 March 2022 .....