

**Publication Day Update – 16 July 2024**

**Statement from the Chair, Tom Crowther KC**

Almost exactly two years ago, on 12 July 2022, my Inquiry Report into Child Sexual Exploitation in Telford was published.

I found there had been very significant failings on the part of agencies dealing with children in Telford, particularly Telford & Wrekin Council and West Mercia Police, over many decades.

Those agencies, and others less significantly involved, accepted the criticisms I'd made and offered unconditional public apologies. That is perhaps what we have all come to expect when an Inquiry reveals its findings. We may also expect nothing much to change – that the agencies will reassure themselves that this was all a very long time ago and that attitudes, standards, procedures and even personnel have moved on.

But in my view, to think "it couldn't happen here again" is as dangerous today as "it couldn't happen here" was decades ago, in Telford and in many other towns. Child sexual exploitation is not a phenomenon of a particular time or place; it is a manifestation of crime, and crime will always be with us. If the agencies – and wider society – don't have child exploitation in mind, and aren't watchful for indicators, signs and trends, then perpetrators can go unchecked.

With this in mind, my Inquiry set out 47 Recommendations relating to maintaining the current strength of the specialist CSE teams in Telford, both in the Council and the Police; to CSE specific posts being set up in schools; to reviewing training across the Council, education, health and the Police; but above all to openness, with a multi-agency body, the Joint CSE Review Group, publishing an annual report so that the people who live and work in the borough can know what is happening in their community, can know the facts of prevalence of CSE and know what is being done to combat it.

The Inquiry's original Terms of Reference allowed for a two-year review to assess the progress against these Recommendations, and this year I have been invited back to Telford to conduct that review, the results of which I am publishing today. The review is the product of assessing a large volume of documents, but more importantly of two weeks in Telford before Easter speaking to the leaders of the Council, the Police, the Integrated Health Boards and to education. I have also spoken to those at the sharp end: social workers, youth workers, detectives and teachers.

What I have found has been without exception positive. Of my 47 Recommendations, 38 have been fully implemented. Four remain in progress, but with real progress. Five were, I am told, impossible to put in place without national change. The first CSE annual report was published a year ago and the next is imminent. The Joint CSE Review Group, driven by the Council and its political and administrative leadership, but with input from all key stakeholders, is firmly entrenched. There is now new support for 17 year olds approaching adulthood, a new information sharing network involving schools, social care and the Police, and new provision for families of children at risk of CSE.

What is, in my view, most impressive, is how the response to my Recommendations have been developed with a group called the Independent Lived Experience Consultees – these are three people who were themselves, over the years, victims of exploitation in Telford. They have devoted untold hours to this work and the results have been inspiring. The professionals I spoke to told me how the Consultees challenged their preconceptions and how they gave, on occasions, very blunt and unsparing views about what worked and what did not. No agency or service can respond effectively unless it understands what it is responding to, and the value of 'lived experience' is in the real interaction with those who have lived and suffered and dealt with exploitation and its aftermath. Here, the Consultees' views have informed the implementation of Recommendations, not only in respect of social care and youth work but the Police, licensing, health and schools. Indeed there is no corner of this response that they have not touched, and the positivity and enthusiasm for what has been done, from the leaders of the services to those professionals at the sharp end, has been overwhelming.

People will not forget Telford's history of child sexual exploitation – and nor should they. But in my view Telford's approach – the Council's approach – to the Recommendations, to engagement with its key partners and most of all with those three people it let down as children, now stands as a model. All involved – but particularly the Consultees, who put aside hurt and anger and years of being dismissed in order to ensure that next generations are better protected than they were – deserve our very high praise.

This Inquiry is now complete. It has been my privilege to be involved. It has ended, I consider, and I hope others will agree, on a note of positivity and with genuine hope for a better future for Telford's children.

### Support Services

The Chair is aware that the contents of his Report may have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of a number of people who have contributed to the Inquiry, and others. Those people who are currently employed by statutory safeguarding services will be able to access their employer's confidential support services. For anyone else who may be affected by the contents of the Report, Telford & Wrekin Council has funded a confidential and independent support service from Base 25. This is the organisation that has been available to provide confidential support during the Inquiry's work. To access this independent support from Base 25, please use the code 'IITCSE2022' and contact them as follows:

**Call:** 01902 572 040 or 07495 266 899

**Text** 07495 266 899

**Email** [empower@base25.hush.com](mailto:empower@base25.hush.com)



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