

The Telegraph

Former MP falsely accused of abuse wins libel action



Former MP John Hemming was falsely accused of abuse

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A former MP, who was falsely accused of being part of a VIP paedophile ring, has won a rare libel action over comments made about him on social media.

John Hemming, who was the Liberal Democrat MP for Birmingham Yardley between 2005 and 2014, had been accused of being part of a group that had abused children in Staffordshire in the 1980s and 1990s.

His accuser, Esther Baker, waived her anonymity in 2015, to make the claims, but the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), later concluded there was insufficient evidence to charge him.

Now Mr Hemming has won damages and apologies from two of Miss Baker's supporters, who posted comments online that implied the former politician was guilty.

Graham Wilmer, founder of the Lantern Project a charity, which helps abuse survivors, and journalist David Hencke, who worked for the now defunct website, Exaro, agreed to pay more than £10,000 after accepting their comments were defamatory.

Mr Wilmer, who was a supporter of Miss Baker, posted four comments on social media between 11 September 2017 and 14 October 2017 suggesting Mr Hemming was guilty of the abuse.



John Hemming brought a defamation action against two people for comments online

After the case went to the High Court, Mr Wilmer agreed to make a payment of £1,000 to Birmingham Children's Hospital Charity and pay more than £9,000 to Hemming for legal costs.

Mr Henke, who now runs his own blog online, agreed to make a payment of £500 to Victim Support.

He also agreed to carry a statement on his website and was instructed not to refer to Miss Baker as a "victim or survivor when the use of such terms in context presupposes the truth of her claims".

Speaking about the impact the false allegations had on him and his family, he said: "Wilmer and Hencke never thought of the effect of their activity on my children.

"I have been on the receiving end of a number of threats of violence and hundreds if not thousands of aggressive messages.

"One individual has even been convicted for making death threats to me based upon completely false allegations.

"Newspapers have checks and balances to verify facts and report in a balanced way. There are no such controls on social media or websites many websites."



John Hemming said the allegations had been extremely hurtful to his family

In a statement to the court, Mr Wilmer said: “I can confirm that I have settled the claim for defamation made against me by Mr John Hemming.

“I understand that those publications [the social media messages] have caused Mr Hemming and his family upset and distress for which I apologise.”

He told the court he would make no suggestion in the future that the defendant was guilty of any crime including rape and blackmail.

Martin Forshaw, of Weightmans solicitors, said that Mr Wilmer had “lodged a full defence” and that he had “nothing further to add”.

Mr Hencke did not respond to a request for comment.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/01/27/former-mp-falsely-accused-abuse-wins-libel-action/>