Neutral Citation No: [2026] NICoroner 10 ***Judgment: approved by the court for handing down (subject to editorial corrections)****	***Ref:*** **ROO13024** ***ICOS No:*** ***Delivered:*** **17/04/2026**

IN THE CORONER'S COURT IN NORTHERN IRELAND

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IN THE MATTER OF AN INQUEST TOUCHING UPON THE DEATH OF NOAH DONOHOE

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ROONEY J (Sitting as Presiding Coroner)

Introduction

[1] This ruling will deal with the various applications listed below, which in several respects, have interconnecting themes.

[2] The matters for determination include the following:

(a) Next of Kin's ("NOK") application dated 23 March 2026 for disclosure of Daryl Paul's ("DP") and C4's criminal records.

(b) C4's application dated 23 September 2025 and 24 March 2026 that C4's evidence should be given pursuant to rule 17 of the Coroners (Practice and Procedure) (Northern Ireland) Rules 1963 and that he should not be called to give evidence in person.

(c) C4's and DP's applications relating to whether the purported statements of Maria Nolan, C55 and C55A reach the threshold established in *Re Hemsworth* [2009] NIQB 33.

[3] I remain grateful for the comprehensive written and oral submissions made by senior counsel on behalf of the NOK, C4, DP and Coroners Service. I have benefited greatly from said submissions which will be considered below.

Relevant factual background

[4] On 21 June 2020, at approximately 17:40hrs, Noah Donohoe ("Noah") left his home at Fitzroy Avenue, Belfast. He was riding his black Apollo bicycle and was wearing black trainers, grey shorts, a hoodie and a green North Face coat. Noah was also wearing a black helmet and carrying a green backpack which contained at least his laptop and some school notebooks.

[5] On his route into Belfast, Noah was identified on CCTV cycling past Queen's Quarter Housing (QQH) at 17:42hrs. He was seen on CCTV at the top of the Ormeau Road near the junction with Cromac Street at 17:44. CCTV cameras identified Noah in Royal Avenue at 17:50 and in York Street between approximately 17:52-17:55hrs, at which stage it appears that Noah discarded his backpack. CCTV footage shows Noah falling off his bike at the lower end of North Queen Street at approximately 18:00hrs. Witnesses said that Noah's coat came off when he fell off his bike and he cycled away without picking it up. CCTV footage from 85 Northwood Road shows Noah cycling naked past a house at approximately 18:03-18:05hrs. At this point, Noah gets off his bike and moves quickly into the driveway of a house at the end of Northwood Road.

[6] In relation to DP, various CCTV cameras reveal DP's movements during the relevant period in which Noah was cycling his bike, namely from 17:40hrs-18:05hrs approximately. From 17:37-17:57hrs, CCTV footage reveals that DP was in close proximity to QQH. DP then walks in the direction of Botanic Avenue. At 18:06hrs, a CCTV camera shows DP on Botanic Avenue. Therefore, at or about the time when Noah was last seen in Northwood Road in North Belfast, DP was in south Belfast, a considerable distance away. At approximately 18:11hrs, CCTV footage identifies DP on Dublin Road and thereafter on Royal Avenue at 18:22hrs.

[7] Mr Ian Skelt KC, senior counsel on behalf of DP, submits that the above CCTV footage provides DP with incontrovertible alibi evidence that at no stage during Noah's journey from his home at Fitzroy Avenue to Northwood Road did DP have any contact with Noah.

[8] In respect of C4, CCTV evidence in or around QQH on 21 June 2020, reveals that from 16:30 to 21:hrs C4 remained in or around said premises.

[9] Ms Fiona Doherty KC, senior counsel on behalf of C4, submits that the said CCTV evidence from QQH also provides incontrovertible alibi evidence that at no stage did C4 have any contact with Noah during his journey from his apartment at Fitzroy Avenue to Northwood Road from 17:40-18:06hrs approximately.

[10] Ms Campbell KC, senior counsel on behalf of the NOK, accepts in her submission dated 23 March 2026 that "on the unchallenged CCTV evidence, neither Daryl Paul nor C4 had any direct contact with Noah from the time at which he left his home on 21 June 2020 (circa 17:40hrs) to the point of his disappearance (circa 18:05hrs). The NOK also accepts that, within the limits of the investigation, there is no evidence of any contact between them outside that timeframe."

[11] However, in the said submission, Ms Campbell, further states as follows:

> "That acceptance, however, does not preclude the next of kin from fully exploring the evidence available to the

> inquest, for example, Maria Nolan and C55, in relation to what they know or have been told about Noah having been spiked with drugs and about Daryl Paul and C4's *knowledge of or involvement* in the same and about Daryl Paul being in possession of Noah's coat. Nor does the acceptance prevent the NOK from exploring the veracity of what we know of Daryl Paul's account, namely that he stole Noah's rucksack containing his laptop and other items, from alongside the University of Ulster on York Street, that he did not have Noah's green North Face coat, and that he has no knowledge of Noah or what happened to Noah." (emphasis added).

[12] The NOK further submit that the characters of both C4 and DP remain very much an issue and that their criminal records ought properly to be disclosed *in full*. It is submitted that without full access to their criminal records, the NOK is precluded from a full assessment of what might be relevant and from making an appropriately grounded application to admit relevant antecedents. The NOK submit that the proper approach would be for the coroner to obtain a full complement of C4's and DP's criminal records and, thereafter, the NOK could advance a "bad character" application akin to the approach in criminal courts. The NOK submit that the bad character application might reasonably include, convictions that demonstrate a propensity to be involved in the supply and possession of drugs (including heroin, spice and other stimulant drugs), and convictions that demonstrate a propensity to engage in dishonesty, deceit or acquisitive offending and convictions that demonstrate a propensity to engage in joint enterprise offending and the propensity to target vulnerable individuals.

[13] In submissions dated 25 March 2026, Ms Doherty on behalf of C4, strenuously opposes any application for disclosure of C4's criminal record and any attempt by the NOK to introduce and question C4 in relation to evidence relating to rumour and suspicion which does not reach the evidential threshold for examination by the inquest. In essence, Ms Doherty submits that the inquest should not investigate (and no PIP is entitled to ask questions about) an issue for which there is no credible basis in evidence.

[14] Ms Doherty submits that firstly, C4 has alibi evidence, not only for the relevant period in which Noah cycled from his house to Northwood Road, but also from between 16:43 and 21:39hrs on 21 June 2020. Secondly, there is no evidence that C4 had any contact with Noah at any other time. Thirdly, any attempt to question C4 about his involvement in spiking Noah with drugs, should not be asked because such questions are based on hearsay, rumour and suspicion and categorically do not reach the evidential threshold as set out in the decision of Weatherup J in *Re Hemsworth* [2009] NIQB 33. Ms Doherty argues that the evidential threshold for examination by the inquest of any matter relating to rumour and suspicion is clear, namely that "there must be grounds for a reasonable suspicion or

a reasonable basis for the rumours, not amounting to mere speculation, to warrant further inquiry at the Inquest" (see *Re Hemsworth,* para [35]). Furthermore, the full and public investigation conducted by the inquest must be relevant to the direct cause of the death.

[15] Mr Skelt, on behalf of DP, endorses the submissions advanced on behalf of C4 insofar as the same arguments apply to DP. As considered in more detail below, Mr Skelt emphasises, what he describes as, incontrovertible alibi evidence that at no stage during Noah's journey to Northwood Road did DP have any involvement or contact with Noah. Consequently, any purported evidence that DP was involved in Noah's death is categorically without foundation, based on rumour and speculation, neither accurate nor reliable and falling short of the *Hemsworth* threshold.

[16] Specifically, Mr Skelt submits that, in relation to the allegations made by C55, they are based on hearsay and, accordingly, unreliable and not accurate. Furthermore, the allegations have been disproven by irrefutable CCTV evidence. It is submitted that if the coroner permits C55's evidence of the allegations, despite their unreliability, the evidence will be grossly prejudicial to DP, particularly before a jury.

Analysis of the evidence of Maria Nolan and disclosure of C4's criminal record

[17] Following oral legal arguments, Ms Doherty and Ms Campbell indicated that they would attempt to agree whether it is necessary for C4 to give evidence and, if so, the basis in evidence for any questioning. Counsel would also discuss and attempt to agree whether C4's criminal record ought properly to be disclosed for my consideration, and any editing of Maria Nolan's evidence. Accordingly, I will postpone my ruling in relation to these matters until I am advised by counsel that my determination is required.

Analysis of the purported evidence of C55 and C55A in relation to Daryl Paul

[18] The purported evidence emanating from and relating to C55 and C55A is contained within the following documents:

(a) The incident report form from C55's support worker dated 21 June 2021;

(b) Attendance note from Owen Winters, KRW Law, dated 6 July 2021;

(c) Statement from DC Karen Curran dated 15 December 2021;

(d) DC Curran's notebook entry dated 20 October 2021;

(e) Emails provided by KRW in relation to contact with C55 dated 19 June 2023 at 09:23hrs and 7 July 2023 at 15:47hrs;

(f) C55's witness statement dated 12 January 2026;

(g) Witness statement from D/Inspector Sam McCallum dated 6 October 2023 and DI McCallum's notebook; and

(h) Interview with C55A on 9 April 2026.

[19] I will deal with the documentation in chronological order.

[20] Firstly, the incident report form dated 21 June 2021 provides that C55's support worker made a home visit on the same date to check on C55's well-being. The report form records that "C55 then went on to state that C59 had told her and her partner [C55A] 'they had only given herbal to that wee lad Noah so that they could steal his laptop but they didn't do anything else.' C55 stated that C59 had attempted to change the story but both C55 and her partner [C55A] confirmed that they both understood what he was saying. C55 stated that she believed that "C59, C56, DP and the wee girl who had Noah's laptop know more than what they are letting on as they had his school books, backpack (sic) and laptop."

[21] The second document is entitled, "Statement of C55 re Noah Donohoe." In fact, it is not a statement but rather an attendance note prepared by Owen Winters, KRW on 6 July 2021 between 11:00 to 11:20hrs. The attendance note states that Owen Winters and C55 were present. However, in her coroner's statement dated 12 January 2026, it is noted that C55 suggests that C55A was also present at KRW Law on the date in question. It has since been confirmed by KRW that C55A and C55 attended the KRW office together in respect of an entirely separate matter on a different date but they did not attend together on 6 July 2021.

[22] The attendance note records the following:

> "[C55] had a relapse on crack cocaine and was in a house on Tates Avenue on the Village side of the bridge. [C59] had gone there as he was going to live with [C56]. [C55] was there three weeks ago.
>
> He would be there frequently and would inject cocaine. It was actually while he was high, he seemed to loosen up a bit and began to speak about Noah Donohoe. He was talking about Daryl Paul's robbery of Noah. I asked him what happened and he said that Daryl and one other person gave Noah a hit of spice and that allowed them to rob him because he was 'out of it' after that.
>
> [C59] is under 18 and I feel like he is quite intimidated by Daryl and [C56]. In the morning, I went back to him and wanted to ask him more about what was going on, and

what he knew about Daryl Paul giving Noah spice. I told him that he should come to Noah's mummy's solicitor to tell them about what he knew. He became closed off and told me that he didn't have a clue what I was talking about. I could see in his eyes that he was scared and wanted me to be quiet, as he was worried about [C56] hearing what he said to me.

Spice is really bad for you, even worse if you are only 14 and haven't taken drugs before. When I heard that Noah had taken off without his clothes, I was not surprised. A person's behaviour is very unpredictable when they are on spice. He was probably scared after being robbed and got completely spooked. It is very hard to say.

I think [C56] and Daryl Paul were involved in a small way with the Mount Vernon UVF. It would not surprise me if some of them were made aware of the robbery and made sure that Daryl Paul took sole responsibility for it.

I think it might be dangerous for [C59] if he is approached by the PSNI. He is quite vulnerable and it would not surprise me if he had been threatened into silence. What it might mean is that some other people may know about the robbery and about what happened to Noah in the aftermath.

The only other person I have spoken to about this is my support worker from the Welcome Centre. I feel like [C59] has a lot more to say about what he knows that would need to be kept safe as he is vulnerable."

[23] The next relevant document is the statement from D/Constable Karen Curran dated 15 December 2021. On Thursday 28 October 2021, DC Curran and DC Wilson spoke with C55 in relation to an allegation that Noah Donohoe had been "spiked" with Spice. The interview was recorded on body worn video ("BWV") by D/Constable Wilson. DC Curran's statement provides as follows:

"C55 informed me that during the summer of 2021 she had been associating with C59 to take drugs. C59 stated that Daryl Paul had told him (that) Noah Donohoe had been "spiked with herbal." C55 claimed that C59 was under the influence of crack cocaine when he told her this. "Herbal" is Belfast slang for Spice. C55 explained (that) Spice can only be taken by inhaling it, either by smoking it, or by having someone blowing it in your face, although

> this method requires a lot of smoke to be blown at the person. The effects are immediate and include losing control of your body and losing consciousness. C55 informed me that shortly after C59 had told her this information, she had contacted KRW Law and made a statement to them outlining what C59 had told her."

[24] I make the following observations from DC Curran's statement. Firstly, C55 admits that she was taking drugs with C59. Secondly, C55 admits that when C59 provided his account to her, C59 was under the influence of crack cocaine. Thirdly, there is a significant difference from C55's account as recorded in the memorandum and her account to the police. In the memorandum, C55 alleges that Daryl Paul had robbed Noah and that "Daryl and one other person gave Noah a hit of Spice and that allowed them to rob him because he was 'out of it' after that." On the other hand, in DC Curran's statement, it is recorded that "C59 stated that Daryl Paul had told him (that) Noah Donohoe had been "spiked with herbal"."

[25] I now turn to C55's coroner's statement dated 12 January 2026. To assist C55 in making her statement, she was provided with a copy of the said KRW attendance note and DC Curran's statement.

[26] The following observations must be made. Firstly, although C55 confirms that C59 had injected cocaine at the time, his conversation was with C55A and that C55 was listening in on the conversation. Secondly, as far as C55 can now remember, C59 had stated that "Daryl Paul had blown(sic) smoke into the kid's face" and that the conversation was definitely about Noah Donohoe. Thirdly, C55 did not state that her account to KRW was incorrect, albeit she did claim that both herself and C55A had injected cocaine at the time of the conversation. Fourthly, C55 confirmed that C59 had stated that "Daryl Paul and one other person gave Noah a hit of spice and that allowed them to rob him as he was out of it after that," but she did not know the identity of the other person referred to by C59.

[27] In her statement, C55 claimed that she had attended KRW Law with her partner, C55A. C55 further stated that the information in the KRW memorandum in relation to Daryl Paul and C56's involvement with Mount Vernon UVF was provided by C55A. In June 2020, when Noah went missing, C55 stated that she would only have known C56 and did not know Daryl Paul and would not have been in his company, nor the company of Maria Nolan or C4. To some extent C55 contradicts this account by also stating that, for a couple of years, she would have associated with C56 and Daryl Paul through her partner C55A "because we all had drug issues."

[28] In relation to C55A, he was interviewed by a coroner's investigator on 9 April 2026. He was mostly non cooperative. C55A admits to being on cocaine in June 2020. C55A had little recollection of the conversation that is alleged to have taken place in Tates Avenue and recorded in the KRW memorandum. He was unable to

recall who C59 alleged had given Noah 'herbal' in order to steal his laptop. However, C55A did state that C59 attempted to change his story and "started freaking out and started back tracking."

[29] In his written and oral submissions in response to the above statements and accounts provided by C55 and C55A, Mr Skelt on behalf of Daryl Paul, makes the following submissions.

[30] Firstly, the allegations C55 (and C55A) attribute as arising from C59 are neither accurate nor reliable. The CCTV evidence irrefutably demonstrates that Noah cycled past Daryl Paul at Queen's Quarter Housing (QQH) at 17.42 and thereafter, Daryl Paul did not have any direct physical contact with Noah at any stage during Noah's journey to Northwood Road. Accordingly, any allegation that Daryl Paul "blew smoke" into Noah's face or that "Daryl Paul and one other person gave Noah a hit of Spice that allowed them to rob him" cannot be correct.

[31] Secondly, C55's statement and her accounts are plainly hearsay. Mr Skelt acknowledges that, in inquest proceedings, hearsay evidence can in certain circumstances be admissible. However, in the context of the CCTV evidence which provides Daryl Paul with an alibi, the purported hearsay evidence from C55 is clearly not accurate.

[32] Thirdly, adding fuel to the unreliability of C55's hearsay evidence, Mr Skelt submits that not only had C59, C55 and C55A injected cocaine at the time of the alleged conversation, C59 denied to the police that he had made the said allegations.

[33] Fourthly, in relation to C55A's interview, there is no statement of truth or an undertaking that the content of the interview is truthful. Furthermore, C55A can give no direct evidence about the issues in this inquest. C55A is reporting "only what I have heard." His evidence is therefore just hearsay rumour. The interview records that C55A was present when C59 made the comments reported by C55. C55A does not say what was said. The limit of his evidence is that he recalls "bits and pieces of it, I'm not sure, I can't actually remember it all." In summary, C55A's evidence, which is inherently defective for the reasons given, merely repeats some of the rumours alleged by C55, which are neither true nor accurate.

Decision

[34] It is my decision that C55's allegations arising from what she says she was told by C59, contained within the incident report form dated 21 June 2021, the KRW attendance note, the statement from DC Curran, and the witness statement to the coroner dated 12 January 2026 do not reach the threshold required by *Re Hemsworth* to warrant further inquiry at the inquest.

[35] C55's allegations are tantamount to rumour and suspicion. As stated by Weatherup J in *Re Hemsworth,* the evidential threshold for examination of a matter of rumour and suspicion by a coroner is clear, namely:

> "[35] … the coroner cannot be expected to carry out an inquisition into every stated rumour and every stated suspicion, however apparently unfounded and unreasonable. There must be a plausible complaint relating to the issues touching the means by which the deceased came by his death. There must be a reasonable basis in evidence before the coroner can be expected to conduct such an inquisition. There must be grounds for reasonable suspicion or a reasonable basis for the rumours, not amounting to mere speculation, to warrant further inquiry at the inquest."

[36] In my judgement, the purported evidence of C55 that Daryl Paul had directly administered drugs to Noah does not reach the level of reasonable suspicion. The said CCTV evidence which reveals that Daryl Paul did not have any direct contact with Noah as the latter cycled from Fitzroy Avenue to Northwood Road is unchallenged alibi evidence. The CCTV footage unequivocally condemns the reliability and accuracy of the hearsay allegations made by C55. My conclusions apply in equal force to the content of the interview notes in relation to C55A.

[37] In summary, in light of the unchallenged CCTV evidence in relation to the physical location of DP covering the period from Noah leaving his apartment complex at Fitzroy Avenue until Noah's arrival in Northwood Road, the inquest will not consider evidence arising from C59 (whether via C55 or any other avenue) which alleges or implies that Daryl Paul physically interacted with Noah during his journey on the evening of the 21 June 2020. This includes any suggestion that, during the said journey, Noah was robbed or administered any drug by DP. There are no reasonable bases for these allegations. For the period captured by the CCTV footage, it is clear that the allegations cannot reasonably be said to be true.

[38] I do not rule out other aspects of C55's purported evidence which arguably may reach the evidential threshold. I will hear submissions by counsel on these issues as a matter of urgency. I will also hear further arguments in relation to disclosure of Daryl Paul's criminal record following this ruling.