

During the course of a criminal investigation into Dickenson, Bishop Peter facilitated police access to Revd Dickenson's clergy file held at Bishop's House in Chester. Police recovered a letter signed and dated November 2009 titled 'Confidential Declaration'. This letter produced by Dickenson makes reference to him being accused of indecently assaulting a young member of his congregation. [Dickenson] reported the matter to the then Bishop of Birkenhead [retired Bishop Ronald Brown]. He [Dickenson] was interviewed by the Diocesan Bishop [Whitsey] who made him make a solemn promise that he would never again interfere with any youngster.

During the course of the investigation police spoke with Bishop Peter's former chaplain Christopher Burkett. It's our understanding the content of the letter was brought to the attention of the diocesan bishop [Bishop Peter] in accordance with Burkett procedural responsibilities. The Diocesan DSA appointed in 2009 has confirmed having no knowledge of Dickenson's letter sent November 2009. It is our belief the withholding of this information pertaining to Dickenson from the DSA was in breach of church safeguarding procedures.

In March 2019 retired Revd Gordon Dickenson pleaded guilty to 8 counts of indecent sexual assault against a child. These offences directly relate to events in 1974 and matters referred to within his letter sent to Bishop's House in November 2009.

As previously stated, this referral is to formally bring to the attention of the National Safeguarding Team that Cheshire Police have conducted a criminal review into the current Bishop of Chester, and this review has been concluded. We do not intend to take any further criminal action in relation to the actions/omission of the Bishop; however the Police wish to formally raise our concerns regarding the actions of Bishop Peter in terms of the following points:

1. On 26<sup>th</sup> July 2016 Cheshire Police received a referral of two victims alleging abuse against the deceased Bishop of Chester Whitsey. Bishop Peter having actively sought to conduct his own investigations prior to police contact, continued contrary to expectations policy and practice guidance to facilitate a meeting with a third victim. On 26<sup>th</sup> August 2016 Bishop Peter met with a victim inviting him to Bishop's House in Chester. The victim having consented to meet Bishop Peter expressed to police the distress this meeting caused given the Bishop's House was the same place his abuse occurred. It is police belief the Bishop Peter's actions were undertaken without the knowledge of his DSA and against previous advice given. It is suspected Bishop Peter arranged this meeting in pursuance of his own interests given his understanding of other matters regarding allegations of clergy abuse.

2. During the early stages of the Police investigation, Bishop Peter sought to speak with certain persons associated to the Chester Diocese. It is of concern that two of those approached were retired Gordon Dickenson and retired former Bishop of Birkenhead Ronald Brown who is referred to within Dickenson's letter.
  
3. Bishop Peter spoke directly with Gordon Dickenson and retired Bishop Ronald Brown. In January 2017 and April 2017 during meetings with police no reference was made of past events concerning Dickenson. Speaking of his contact [Dickenson] could offer no information regarding Bishop Whitsey. Although Bishop Peter was under no obligation to inform the Police of any prior handling with Dickenson, he chose not to disclose any information pertaining to Dickenson's letter, which in the circumstances would be considered reasonable necessary to assist the police with the investigation into allegations of abuse surrounding the diocese in the 1970's. Failing to disclose known information concerning Dickenson may be considered as failing to act with due regard to the churches safeguarding policy and practice guidance.
  
4. The Letter from Dickenson retained within his clergy file held at Bishop's House, clearly states that he was involved in the indecent assault of a child whilst Vicar of Christ Church, Latchford, this was submitted and reported at the time to senior clergy in 1974 but not acted upon. It would now appear that although raised again in 2009, no formal action was taken to report or deal with the abuse of Gordon Dickenson. Following the production of his letter Dickenson was given permission by Bishop Peter to officiate within the Chester Diocese.

Although I appreciate that Bishops have the autonomy over their diocese, requiring them to make decisions and assess risk on disclosures they receive, it is based on known information I am of the opinion Bishop Peter breached the church's policy and practice guidance on safeguarding. As such we raise these concerning issues to the Church of England National Safeguarding Team.

Cheshire Police's decision to take no formal criminal action against Bishop Peter is based upon what information we hold to date and the likelihood of a realistic criminal prosecution being successful. It is possible however that further information may become available in the future particularly through the proposed local learning review that may impact on any future evaluation of this decision. As such, we would seek your continued support and reassurance that should further information come to light, you share it appropriately.

During Police enquiries (January 2017), Bishop Peter was spoken to by non-uniformed Detectives. Police were advised of the persons Bishop Peter had spoken to and the fact he had met one of the

victims. Bishop Peter has never been formally spoken to or interviewed in relation to the Police concerns raised within this referral, nor do Cheshire police seek to interview him under caution with regard to any criminal offences.

It is the belief of the Police Investigation team that if the issues regarding Dickenson's offending behaviour would have been brought to police's attention in 2009, then he would be brought to justice before his conviction in March 2019. His victim would have been supported earlier thus avoiding additional years of mental pain and anguish. It is the failure of the Church, that Dickenson's abuse went unchallenged for 45 years.

I Detective Inspector Nigel Reid as Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) for Operation Coverage submit this referral for your attention and appropriate action. Cheshire Police are and remain committed to supporting the Church of England through appropriate disclosures and information, in any review or lessons learnt process. Cheshire Police are fully focused on supporting the Church with improving their safeguarding process with the hope that future incidents of this nature cannot be repeated.

Yours Sincerely

Nigel Reid

Detective Inspector – Major Crime Directorate

Cheshire Constabulary

Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2019.