

Background and Introduction

In 2013 the General Synod had voted to acknowledge and apologise for past safeguarding wrongs in the Church of England and to ensure that steps would be taken to ensure that victims of abuse would always be actively listened to and offered appropriate support.

In July 2013 the Archbishop of York, Dr. John Sentamu, announced the launch of an Independent Inquiry lead by HH Judge Sally Cahill into the Church's handling of reports of alleged child abuse by the late Robert Waddington, a former Dean of Manchester.

In August 2013 the Archbishop further announced that there was to be an independent review of all files relating to deceased clergy who served in the Diocese of York from before 1950 to the present.

Files were recalled from the archive and examined. Files which contained any information relating to potential or actual safeguarding issues have been scrutinised and the lessons learned from this analysis are outlined in brief below:

1. That any future procedures and actions taken ensure the needs of the victim of an offence are paramount, and the support needs of the person making the allegation are also considered.
2. That a clear protocol for the recording and handling of allegations of abuse made against a member of the Clergy or any member of staff of the York Diocese or Bishopthorpe Palace, should be further developed, properly disseminated, and rigidly adhered to.
3. That the Diocese of York safeguarding children protocols and procedures are reviewed to ensure that they are able to be fully understood by relevant members of the church community. They must be appropriately disseminated and commended to all parishes.
4. That the renewal and removal of Permission to Officiate is appropriately undertaken in accordance with the Archbishop's Council document, Remuneration & Conditions of Service Committee Guidance (2007).
5. That an Episcopal Reference and Clergy Current Status Letter is always received from a potential incumbent's previous Bishop, and supplemented with appropriate checks and references.

Lessons Learned in Detail

It is useful to highlight specific cases which have informed the development of the five lessons learned, and some relevant examples are included below.

1. That any future procedures and actions taken ensure the needs of the victim of an offence are paramount, and the support needs of the person making the allegation are also considered.

Case 2 demonstrates that the then Archbishop of York drew conclusions (on the basis of no apparent consultation with any other agency or child protection professional) that the alleged incident was an isolated one; he advised that the incumbent should be supported to seek therapy and provided with an alternative Parish. There is nothing noted to illustrate any support provided to or offered to the victim.

Case 24 is similar, where the vicar about whom there were concerns was simply moved to another Parish to pursue Youth Work. The Diocese were aware of this move, but no action was taken.

2. That a clear protocol for the recording and handling of allegations of abuse made against a member of the Clergy or any member of staff of the York Diocese or Bishopthorpe Palace, should be further developed, properly disseminated, and rigidly adhered to.

Case 11 demonstrates that any evidence regarding outcome and any processes followed were not clearly recorded.

The file relating to Case 21 is incomplete in terms of any actions taken or consequences, despite the fact that the incumbent was fined & received a suspended sentence for 3 counts of indecent assault on children.

Case 24, regarding incidents in the late 1960s and early 1970s, indicates that no protocol was followed. However, it is acknowledged that at this time specific protocols relating to allegations of abuse would not have been in existence. The individual resigned from his ministerial role to pursue youth work in another location. The Diocese of York took no action to inform the new employer of allegations made.

3. That the Diocese of York safeguarding children protocols and procedures are reviewed to ensure that they are able to be fully understood by relevant members of the church community. They must be appropriately disseminated and commended to all parishes.

Every case reviewed showed that appropriate safeguarding procedures were not followed. It is acknowledged that, as the cases go back as far as the 1940s, safeguarding procedures would not have been in place at that time.