

Charity Commission investigates Jehovah's Witnesses charities

Statutory inquiries opened into Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Britain and Manchester New Moston Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses

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[The Charity Commission](#)

The Charity Commission, the regulator of charities in England and Wales, has opened statutory inquiries into Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Britain ([registered charity number 1077961](#)), and one of the congregations, Manchester New Moston Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses ([registered charity number 1065201](#)).

The investigation into Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Britain is to examine:

- the charity's handling of safeguarding matters, including the creation, development, substance and implementation of its safeguarding policy
- the administration, governance and management of the charity by the trustees and whether or not the trustees of the charity have complied with and fulfilled their duties and responsibilities as trustees under charity law
- the charity's safeguarding advice provided to congregation charities

The regulator opened a case into the charity in July 2013 to examine concerns about the trustees' approach to dealing with safeguarding matters and discuss the scope of the trustees' duties and responsibilities under charity law in connection with safeguarding issues. The Commission has corresponded with the charity and met with its trustees in March 2014.

The charity has a safeguarding policy and the trustees agree that the charity, and the congregations, should have adequate safeguarding policies and procedures in place. The inquiry is about the regulator assuring itself about the policy, procedures and practices in light of recent events.

The Commission's duty to protect public trust in charity has prompted it to open a formal inquiry to investigate these concerns. The Commission's concerns have been amplified by recent criminal cases concerning historic incidents of abuse involving individuals who appear to have been connected to Jehovah's Witnesses congregations and/or the charity. In addition, there has been growing public interest in how the charity and congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses deal with safeguarding matters.

The investigation into the Manchester New Moston Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses is to examine:

- the charity's handling of safeguarding matters, including its safeguarding policy, procedures and practice
- how the charity dealt with the risks to the charity and its beneficiaries, including the application of safeguarding policy and procedures and any related policies and procedures particularly as regards the conviction and release of a former trustee
- the administration, governance and management of the charity by the trustees and whether or not the trustees of the charity have complied with and fulfilled their duties and responsibilities as trustees under charity law

The Commission has serious concerns about Manchester New Moston Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, having most recently opened a case into it in December 2013. There has also been recent press coverage in connection with the conviction and release of a former trustee of the charity.

The two investigations announced today are separate but linked.

Trustees are under a duty to act prudently and all times to act exclusively in the best interests of the charity and to discharge their duties in accordance with their duty of care. In consequence it is essential that charities engaged with children or vulnerable people (a) have adequate safeguarding policies and procedures which reflect both the law and best practice in this area, (b) ensure that trustees know what their responsibilities are and (c) ensure that these policies are fully implemented.

The Commission stresses that it is not a safeguarding authority and its inquiries will not investigate allegations of abuse or actual incidents of abuse, whether historic or recent. Its concern is with the proper regulation of charities. Anyone with concerns about specific incidents of alleged abuses, whether historic or recent, for any charity, should report their concerns to the police and the relevant safeguarding authorities.

The trustees of each of the charities have indicated to the Commission that they intend to challenge the regulator's decisions to open the statutory inquiries in the First-tier Tribunal (Charity).