



**DIOCESE OF
CHICHESTER**



**Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser
Colin Perkins**

Direct Dial:
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**The Most Reverend and Right Honourable
the Archbishop of Canterbury
Lambeth Palace
London
SE1 7JU**

6th December 2011

cc: Elizabeth Hall

Dear Archbishop,

I am writing in my capacity as Safeguarding Adviser to the Diocese of Chichester and member of the Safeguarding Advisory Group (SAG) of that Diocese. As you will of course be aware the SAG has recently lodged a complaint under the Clergy Discipline Measure against Bishop Wallace Benn. Having spoken recently with Keith Akerman, chair of the SAG, I have learned that he has received a reply from the Provincial Registrar regarding that complaint. The reply suggests a number of errors in the format of the complaint, essentially that it is too detailed and lengthy, and states that it should be re-submitted in 'summary' form.

I fully appreciate that, by virtue of making a complaint under the Clergy Discipline Measure, the SAG has entered into a disciplinary process with clearly defined structure. I am aware that this structure must be adhered to. I would argue, however, that there are not one but two issues involved in this matter; the first being the disciplinary issue, about which the Provincial Registrar's letter is concerned, and the second being a safeguarding issue, about which that letter makes no mention.

I am writing to express my concern that, with regards to the complaint against Bishop Benn, those involved in receiving that complaint have focused on the legal issues arising from it, but have yet to respond to the safeguarding concerns detailed within it.

Please let me state those concerns as clearly as possible: as Safeguarding Adviser to this Diocese, I cannot guarantee that good safeguarding practice is in effect throughout the Diocese whilst the risks presented by Bishop Benn's practice remain. Those risks are outlined in the complaint but have also been reported by both Roger Meekings and Baroness Butler-Sloss. Despite these two reports, the latter of which has been in the public domain since May, no formal, recorded action has been taken to address the concerns regarding Bishop Benn's practice.

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I believe that the concerns addressed in those two reports could and should be addressed by a formal plan of action. I also believe that the concerns raised in the complaint, which build on those contained in the two reports in light of further analysis and information, make even more pressing this need for decisive and forthright action. Given the fact that this complaint is being made against a serving Bishop, I believe it is proper to make this request to you, although I have informed Bishop Hind of my intention to write this letter.

In summary I ask that attention is given at a national level to managing the ongoing safeguarding risks presented by Bishop Benn. I will not pre-judge what actions should be taken, but I do believe that at the very least a formal discussion should occur between those involved at Diocesan and national level, producing a clear and coherent plan to manage these risks. The concerns regarding Bishop Benn's practice have already been established in the reports by Roger Meekings and Baroness Butler-Sloss, the latter having been publicly accepted, in full, by Bishop John Hind on behalf of the Diocese of Chichester. The establishment of these concerns does not, therefore, depend upon the progress of the current complaint. Given this, I believe that my proposal would not prejudice the progress of that complaint; the matters of legal process and risk-management should be able to run concurrently without the one interfering with the other. I am deeply concerned that failure to respond to these concerns in a sufficiently weighty manner, should a new safeguarding matter arise in which the Diocese of Chichester is at fault, and in which mistakes similar to those outlined in the EBS report are repeated, would leave this Diocese exposed to considerable liability. I am also concerned that such liability could extend to the national Church, given that the complaint has now been received at that level (on this issue, I am quite convinced that the substance, rather than the form, of the complaint would be the crucial issue).

Far more importantly, I am also concerned that the message being sent out to the public and even more so to victims is that a Bishop can be found to have failed in his responsibility to follow good safeguarding practice, but no formal action will be taken to ensure that does not recur. I am in contact with victims of Roy Cotton on a regular basis, and some remain deeply concerned that the lessons of Cotton and Pritchard have yet to be fully learned. Commissioning and publishing a report, for them, is not enough; they are interested in what has genuinely changed. I know for certain that the inaction regarding the safeguarding risks presented by Bishop Benn does not give them confidence that the required change has been implemented. I believe they are justified in this concern.

I have not been asked to write to you by anyone in the Diocese of Chichester or the SAG, nor indeed by anyone else, and am writing essentially in my own capacity as Safeguarding Adviser to this Diocese rather than on behalf of the SAG.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Yours sincerely,

Colin Perkins