

Review examines how a Notts foster parent could abuse so many

By Caroline Lowbridge

NOTTS County Council has pledged to carry out an in-depth review in to how one of its foster carers was able to abuse 16 boys over a 12-year period.

Patrick Gallagher was jailed for life yesterday after he admitted carrying out 55 sex offences between 1998 and 2010.

He and his wife Ann cared for children from 1982 to 2006, until he was suspended by the county council after he was caught watching pornography by a boy in his care.

He was then formally de-registered as a foster carer in 2007.

Gallagher was committing offences until November 2010, when one of his victims complained to police.

Anthony May, Corporate Director for Children, Families and Culture at Notts County Council, said a Serious Case Review into the offences had been launched but said it was too early to say whether the council was at fault.

He said: "If the Serious Case Review finds that the council was at fault I will of course apologise unreservedly on behalf of the council."

Asked if he would resign if the review finds anyone in a senior position was at fault, Mr May said: "That's a bit hypothetical. We will have to see what the Serious Case Review turns up."

All records relating to Gallagher's fostering career were independently reviewed after he was arrested in November 2010. The council and Notts Police have since spoken to all of the children he fostered.

Mr May said: "There is no information on the files which revealed any significant practice shortcomings or which indicate that the children and young people were left knowingly unsafe."

"The Serious Case Review will examine every facet of this

STATEMENT FROM GALLAGHER

A STATEMENT on behalf of Patrick Gallagher, read to Nottingham Crown Court by his barrister, Balraj Bhatia said: "How can I ever ask any of the kids to forgive me? I am so sorry for what I have done; for all of the hurt I have caused them. They did nothing to deserve what I did to them, even

though I knew it was wrong. I feel horrible about it all, knowing that nothing I can say or do can cover the pain.

"For what I have done I regret with all my heart. It is not something I can undo. This is a vile crime of mine and I alone must face up to the punishment."

case and will be published in full."

Nottingham Crown Court heard that Gallagher and his wife did not have children of their own. There is no suggestion she was aware of what happened.

Dawn Pritchard, prosecut-

My view is that you should not be released. You should die in prison

Judge Michael Stokes

ing, said the offences became more frequent as time went on. Even Balraj Bhatia, defending Gallagher, described his offending as "a campaign of abuse" which lasted well over a decade.

But in mitigation, he said Gallagher was genuinely remorseful, and had pleaded guilty so that his victims would not have to give evidence in court.

Mr Bhatia said: "He is thankful that his wife, who passed away in November of last year, has not had to bare witness to his shame and his downfall."

Judge Michael Stokes said it was an aggravating feature that Gallagher was a foster parent.

He said: "The damage you have done, as I have said already, is incalculable."

The judge said Gallagher had taken advantage of his victims' naivety, immaturity and vulnerability.

As well as being a foster carer, he worked voluntarily for a youth club and had positions with a young people's jazz band and a children's swimming club.

Statements from some of the victims were read out in court. One said: "I felt dirty." Another victim said: "It felt like I was in prison with no escape."

Judge Stokes said Gallagher must serve a minimum of 28 years before he can apply for parole, but added: "These offences are so grave that I cannot contemplate any circumstances where the parole board are likely to release you. My view is that you should not be released. You should die in prison."



Life sentence: Patrick Gallagher abused boys in his care.

VICTIMS HAD TO RELIVE EXPERIENCES TO SECURE JUSTICE

DC Rhona Keenan, who investigated the case, said: "Patrick Gallagher sexually abused many children over a significant number of years.

"In every case, Gallagher abused young, vulnerable children for his own deviant gratification.

"Today this predatory and serial offender has admitted more than 50 separate indictments against a total of 16 children over a 12-year

period, from 1998 to 2010, and he will spend the rest of his life in prison for his wicked crimes.

"These 16 victims have had the courage to come forward and relive extremely painful experiences in order to secure justice and we pay tribute to them.

"We hope that today's prison sentence will bring a sense of closure to the harrowing experiences they

suffered as children and enable them to move on with their lives."

Notts Police believe it highly probable that Gallagher's offending began well before 1998.

Anyone else who was assaulted by him is encouraged to contact police so help and support can be provided.

Call 0300 300 9999, extension 817 7999.