

The Church of England's National Safeguarding Team (NST,) has today published the key findings and recommendations, along with the full report, from the independent review into the processes used in the Bishop George Bell case.

The review, commissioned by the NST on the recommendation of the Bishop of Chichester, was carried out by Lord Carlile of Berriew. As he writes in the introduction, his purpose was not to determine the truthfulness of the woman referred to as Carol in the report, nor the guilt or innocence of Bishop Bell, but to examine the procedures followed by the Church of England. The objectives of the review included "ensuring that survivors are listened to and taken seriously", and that recommendations are made to help the Church embed best practice in safeguarding in the future.

The report made 15 recommendations and concluded that the Church acted throughout in good faith while highlighting that the process was deficient in a number of respects.

**Bishop Peter Hancock, the Church of England's lead safeguarding bishop, has responded on behalf of the Church:**

"We are enormously grateful to Lord Carlile for this 'lessons learned' review which examines how the Church handled the allegations made by Carol in the 1990s, and more recently. Lord Carlile makes a number of considered points as to how to handle such cases in future and we accept the main thrust of his recommendations.

"In responding to the report, we first want to acknowledge and publicly apologise again for the Church's lamentable failure, as noted by Lord Carlile, to handle the case properly in 1995.

"At the heart of this case was a judgement, on the balance of probabilities, as to whether, in the event that her claim for compensation reached trial, a court would have concluded that Carol was abused by Bishop Bell. The Church decided to compensate Carol, to apologise and to be open about the case.

"Lord Carlile states that 'where as in this case the settlement is without admission of liability, the settlement generally should be with a confidentiality provision' but respectfully, we differ from that judgement. The Church is committed to transparency. We would look at each case on its merits but generally would seek to avoid confidentiality clauses.

"It is clear from the report, however, that our processes were deficient in a number of respects, in particular the process for seeking to establish what may have happened. For that we apologise. Lessons can and have been learnt about how we could have managed the process better.

"The Bishop Bell case is a complex one and it is clear from the report and minutes of Core Group meetings that much professional care and discussion were taken over both agreeing the settlement with Carol and the decision to make this public. As Lord Carlile's report makes clear, we acted in good faith throughout with no calculated intention to damage George Bell's reputation.

“The Church has always affirmed and treasured Bishop Bell’s principled stand in the Second World War and his contribution to peace remains extraordinary. At same time, we have a duty and commitment to listen to those reporting abuse, to guard their confidentiality, and to protect their interests.

“We recognise that Carol has suffered pain, as have surviving relatives of Bishop Bell. We are sorry that the Church has added to that pain through its handling of this case.”

**Statement from Bishop of Chichester, Martin Warner**

“Lord Carlile’s Independent Review is a demonstration of the Church of England’s commitment to equality of justice and transparency in our safeguarding practice. The diocese of Chichester requested this “lessons learned” Review.

“We welcome Lord Carlile’s assessment of our processes, and apologise for failures in the work of the Core Group of national and diocesan officers and its inadequate attention to the rights of those who are dead. We also accept the Report’s recognition that we acted in good faith, and improvements to Core Group protocols are already in place. Further work on them is in hand.

“The Report demands further consideration of the complexities of this case, such as what boundaries can be set to the principle of transparency. Lord Carlile rightly draws our attention to public perception. The emotive principle of innocent until proven guilty is a standard by which our actions are judged and we have to ensure as best we can that justice is seen to be done. Irrespective of whether she is technically a complainant, survivor, or victim, ‘Carol’ emerges from this report as a person of dignity and integrity. It is essential that her right to privacy continues to be fully respected.

“The good deeds that Bishop George Bell did were recognised internationally. They will stand the test of time. In every other respect, we have all been diminished by the case that Lord Carlile has reviewed.”

**Statement from Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby**

“Bishop George Bell is one of the great Anglican heroes of the 20th century. The decision to publish his name was taken with immense reluctance, and all involved recognised the deep tragedy involved. However we have to differ from Lord Carlile’s point that ‘where as in this case the settlement is without admission of liability, the settlement generally should be with a confidentiality provision’. The C of E is committed to transparency and therefore we would take a different approach.

“Lord Carlile does not seek to say whether George Bell was in fact responsible for the acts about which the complaint was made. He does make significant comments on our processes, and we accept that improvement is necessary, in all cases including those where the person complained about is dead. We are utterly committed to seeking to ensure just outcomes for all. We apologise for the failures of the process.

“The complaint about Bishop Bell does not diminish the importance of his great achievement. We realise that a significant cloud is left over his name. Let us therefore remember his defence of Jewish victims of persecution, his moral stand against indiscriminate bombing, his personal risks in the cause of supporting the anti Hitler resistance, and his long service in the Diocese of Chichester. No human being is entirely good or bad. Bishop Bell was in many ways a hero. He is also accused of great wickedness. Good acts do not diminish evil ones, nor do evil ones make it right to forget the good. Whatever is thought about the accusations, the whole person and whole life should be kept in mind.”

## Documents

- [Carlile Review](#)
- [Annexes to the Review](#)

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