

Read the opening statement on behalf of the Archbishops' Council as part of the IICSA hearing into Peter Ball.

Chair, members of the Panel,

The Archbishops' Council is grateful for this opportunity to make some brief opening remarks.

The Inquiry heard longer submissions from us at the start and finish of the Chichester case study, and we also filed detailed written submissions at the close of the Chichester hearings. All of those submissions are publicly available, and I need not repeat the detail of them now.

Rather, I shall confine myself to three matters.

The first and foremost is to say clearly that the Church is sorry and ashamed.

At the Chichester hearings, the Archbishops' Council offered an unqualified apology to those vulnerable people, children and others, whose lives have been damaged by abuse, and who were not cared for and protected by the Church as they should have been.

We repeat that apology now, specifically to those who suffered abuse at the hands of Peter Ball, and to families and others who have been affected by that abuse.

In 2015, after Ball pleaded guilty to offences and was sentenced for them, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, wrote to individuals known to have been abused by Ball to offer his apologies, and the Church made a public statement including these words:

"It is a matter of deep shame and regret that a Bishop in the Church of England has today been sentenced for a series of offences over 15 years against 18 young men known to him. There are no excuses whatsoever for what took place and the systematic abuse of trust perpetrated by Peter Ball...We apologise unreservedly to those survivors of Peter Ball's abuse and pay tribute to their bravery in coming forward and also acknowledge the long wait for justice that they have endured. ...We also remember Neil Todd, whose bravery in 1992 enabled others to come forward but who took his own life before Peter Ball's conviction or sentencing."

The Archbishop of Canterbury also commissioned an independent review of the Church's response to Ball's abusive conduct. He appointed Dame Moira Gibb to chair that review. The review team reported in June 2017, a year ago, and their report was published in full by the Church.

In her foreword to the report, Dame Moira Gibb said this:

"Peter Ball, a bishop of the Church of England...abused many boys and men over a period of twenty years or more. That is shocking in itself but is compounded by the failure of the Church to respond appropriately to his misconduct, again over a period of many years."

In the body of the report, the review team expands upon that conclusion, setting out with painful clarity the ways in which the Church failed.

They include: the prioritising of concern for the well-being and rehabilitation of Ball, as well as the reputation of the Church, over concern and

compassion for his victims, and indeed the future protection of others; inadequate internal investigation and the absence of formal action; a failure, for whatever reason, to pass full information to the police; and downplaying of the seriousness of what had occurred. As the report put it: “Peter Ball betrayed his Church and abused individual followers of that Church. The Church, at its most senior levels and over many years, supported him unwisely and displayed little care for his victims.”

The lead safeguarding bishop, Bishop Peter Hancock, said when the report was published, that he was “appalled and disturbed” by its contents, and that there were “no excuses”. The present Archbishop of Canterbury said that the report revealed “inexcusable and shocking behaviour”.

The Archbishops’ Council agrees that the Gibb report discloses fundamental failings, and once again, in this public forum, apologises for them on behalf of the Church.

The second of the three matters that I wish to address also concerns the Gibb Review. In the foreword to the report, the review team recognised that both attitudes and safeguarding practices had changed since the events with which it was concerned, and expressed the view that the Church now would not conduct itself in the ways described in the report. It said that the Church had made significant progress in recent years in its understanding of abuse, and that the review team had no doubt that the Church had a genuine commitment to meeting its responsibilities towards the victims of abuse. Nonetheless, it went on to say this:

“...we can see how difficult it is to make change across the complex structures of the Church. Progress has been slow and continuing, faster improvement is still required. It is the leadership of the Archbishops and Bishops which will determine whether change is effective.”

The Gibb Report made 11 recommendations to address what it considered to be key challenges.

As Mr Tilby, the National Safeguarding Advisor, explained in his first witness statement for the Chichester hearings, all of those recommendations were accepted by the National Safeguarding Steering Group, the NSSG. The Archbishops of Canterbury and York endorsed them fully when the report was published, and Bishop Peter Hancock stated that the Church was “absolutely committed to implementing them”. Mr Tilby’s second witness statement made in March summarised what had by then been done, and was being done, to implement the Gibb recommendations.

Within the last fortnight or so, the General Synod has endorsed key priorities for action set out in a further report from the NSSG, based in part upon the evidence that was heard by this Inquiry in March. These thematic priorities are: support for and engagement with victims and survivors of abuse; clergy selection, suitability and discipline; and finally, structure, independence, oversight and enforcement. They reflect some of the most important issues that emerged at the Chichester hearings, and they also cover some of the Gibb recommendations. Mr Tilby has now produced for this Inquiry a further updating statement which deals with this report amongst other matters, and which sets out where matters

currently stand in relation to the various Gibb recommendations.

So it will be seen that the Church has begun the work of learning and acting upon at least some of the specific lessons of the events around the abuse committed by Peter Ball, as well as the work that had already been done, especially after the Chichester Visitation. But the Church knows that it must not be complacent. The work is challenging and far from complete.

That leads me to the third and final matter. Consistently with the approach which the Archbishops' Council took at the Chichester hearings, we shall not be seeking at this hearing to make submissions about disputed facts in relation to past events. Nor will it be our role to blame, nor defend, particular individuals. As Archbishop Justin indicated when he gave evidence in March, the Church needs to acknowledge its collective past failures, and everyone within the Church needs to understand, both from the Gibb Report and from this hearing, what happened in the case of Peter Ball, and to use that understanding to take responsibility for doing better in the future.

It may well be that some of the themes and lessons that emerge in the coming week of oral evidence are ones which have already been identified by Gibb, and also that they overlap significantly with the themes that emerged from the Chichester case study. These may include, for example: the risks which flow from a culture of deference to powerful and charismatic figures; the role and regulation of religious communities; and issues around the grant of permission to officiate. All of these were addressed in our previous evidence and submissions. But there may be other lessons to learn as well. We shall be listening very carefully to all the evidence given this week, because the Church wishes to go on learning all it can from this Inquiry.

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