

An independent review of the processes used in the George Bell case has been announced today in accordance with the House of Bishops guidance on all complex cases.

The House of Bishops practice guidance states that once all matters relating to any serious safeguarding situation have been completed, the Core Group should meet again to review the process and to consider what lessons can be learned for the handling of future serious safeguarding situations. A review has always been carried out in any case involving allegations against a bishop.

The review will be commissioned by the Church of England's National Safeguarding Team, on the recommendation of the Bishop of Chichester, to see what lessons can be learnt from how the case was handled. The case involves the settlement in 2015 of a legal civil claim regarding sexual abuse against George Bell, who was Bishop of Chichester from 1929-1958.

The Church has always recognised Bishop Bell's principled stand in the Second World War and his contribution to peace but it also has a duty to listen to survivors. The diocese of Chichester continues to be in touch and offer support to the survivor known as Carol, who brought the allegations in this case.

The review will look at the processes surrounding the allegations which were first brought in 1995 to the diocese of Chichester with the same allegations brought again, this time to Lambeth Palace, in 2013. It will also consider the processes, including the commissioning of expert independent reports and archival and other investigations, which were used to inform the decision to settle the case. The settlement was based on the balance of probabilities as criminal proceedings cannot be brought in a case where the alleged perpetrator is dead.

Details of the review including Terms of Reference and name of the independent reviewer will be announced at a later date.

The Bishop of Chichester, Dr Martin Warner said; "As in any serious safeguarding situation it is always important to learn lessons from the process and this review will ensure this is done.

"I have, however, made it absolutely clear that the survivor in the case be reassured that we will do everything we can to continue to support her as we have done throughout this process. Like her, we recognise gravity of this matter, given its impact on the national and international reputation of Bishop George Bell.

"I hope that the review will provide a constructive way forward for all concerned.

Along with my colleagues in the wider Church, I am committed to ensuring that the past is handled with honesty."

# Notes

House of Bishop's guidance: Responding to Serious Safeguarding Situations

Original statement on George Bell

Points on a complex case; blog by Gabrielle Higgins, Chichester Diocesan Secretary

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