

"It is a matter of deep shame and regret that a bishop in the Church of England was sentenced earlier this year for a series of offences over 15 years against 18 young men known to him. There are no excuses whatsoever for what took place, nor for 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. They have had to endure a long wait for justice over decades. 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.

Peter Ball systematically abused the trust of the victims, many of whom who were aspiring priests, whilst others were simply seeking to explore their spirituality. He also abused the trust placed in him by the Church and others, maintaining a campaign of innocence for decades until his final guilty plea earlier this year.

Operation Dunhill - which led to Peter Ball's conviction - began as a result of the safeguarding officer at Lambeth Palace working with survivors in raising concerns about Peter Ball. The approach to the police was a proactive step on the part of the national Church leading to a self-initiated referral via CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection centre) to Sussex Police in 2012. This led to active co-working between Lambeth Palace, the Diocese of Chichester and Sussex Police on a complex enquiry with full information sharing.

In October of this year the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, commissioned an independent review of the way the Church handled the Peter Ball case. The independent review will examine the Church of England's cooperation with the police and other statutory agencies and the extent to which it shared information in a timely manner. It will also assess the extent to which the Church both properly assessed the possible risk that Bishop Ball might pose to others and responded adequately to concerns and representations submitted by survivors.

Consultation with the Church's National Safeguarding Panel - which includes members of survivor's groups - has been taking place since October to identify a suitably independent chair of the review. It is hoped that the terms of reference for the reviews, its independent chair and other members of the group will be announced early in the New Year.

The Archbishop has confirmed that the report of the review will include a detailed account of how the case was handled within the church and will be published. We will also be co-operating fully with the Justice Goddard Inquiry who have announced they will also be looking into the Peter Ball case.

Over recent years the Church of England has been persistent and determined in dealing with allegations of abuse against clergy be they living or deceased. We are painfully conscious of our past failings and are committed to ensuring the highest levels of safeguarding in all our churches.

The Church of England always takes any allegations of abuse very seriously and is committed to being a safe place for all. To this end we have robust procedures and policies in place. But we can never be complacent. Any survivors or those with information about church-related abuse must always feel free to come forward with confidence that safeguarding procedures will be followed.

Should anyone have further information or need to discuss the personal impact of this news the Church has worked with the NSPCC to set up a confidential helpline no. 0800 389 5344."

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