

*A Betrayal of Trust*, the independent report into the Church's handling of the allegations concerning the late Hubert Victor Whitsey, former Bishop of Chester, was originally published in October 2020 and concluded that Whitsey sexually abused a large number of children and young persons (both male and female) and vulnerable adults. *The review has now been republished following the resolution of a legal issue – we apologise to those who were affected by this.* The Church is committed to taking very seriously criticisms in the report about how and where it failed to respond.

The learning lessons review was carried out by His Hon David Pearl and independent safeguarding consultant Kate Wood.

The Church supported the police in an investigation into allegations of sexual offences against children and adults by Whitsey dating from 1974 onwards when he was Bishop of Chester and from 1981 while he was retired and living in Blackburn diocese. **A public apology** was issued in October 2017 following this investigation which included a commitment to a learning lessons review.

### **Joint statement from David Pearl and Kate Wood**

“The findings of our review will make deeply uncomfortable reading for the Church and we know will be very difficult for victims as they are reminded of their appalling abuse by a senior Church figure in a position of trust. Their suffering was clearly made worse by the poor response of Church officers at different times when they had the courage to come forward.

“We have reached the conclusion that Whitsey sexually abused a large number of children and young persons (both male and female) and vulnerable adults during a period from 1966 until after he had retired which was December 1981. We have identified 18 victims, but we are conscious that there may be more.

“It is our opinion that he groomed his victims, and often their families to enable this abuse. He used his position in the Church to abuse both prospective ordinands, and children and young persons, many of whom were particularly vulnerable as they were experiencing personal family difficulties, such as the death or departure of a parent.

“Applying the appropriate standard of proof of a balance of probabilities, we have concluded that some of the victims did disclose that they were abused to senior members of the Church, and opportunities were missed right up until 2012.

“We hope our recommendations are helpful in the Church learning lessons in responding to allegations of abuse as well as being a reminder that for victims the effects of Whitsey's abuse are lifelong.”

### **Statement from the Church of England's lead safeguarding bishop, Jonathan Gibbs**

“I am receiving this report on behalf of the national Church and it is a stark account of the appalling abuse by Victor Whitsey and the Church's failure both to protect these children and young adults and to respond well when the survivors and victims had the courage to come forward.

“It is also particularly poignant coming so close to the publication of the damning [IICSA report](#) on the Church of England. We apologise to all victims and survivors of Victor Whitsey, including those who may not be known to us and where he also failed to prevent abuse by others. As we said following IICSA, while apologies will never take away the effects of abuse on victims and survivors, we today want to express our shame about the events that have made those apologies necessary. Our focus must lie today with the survivors and victims of Whitsey, recognising the impact that this horrendous abuse has had on their lives, and with deep gratitude for their courage in engaging with the independent review.

“We are taking action to ensure that the Church is a safer place for all and we will be using these recommendations to help us drive change – and some of these already link up with existing work. We recognise that an urgent response to the identified failures in safeguarding practice is necessary. The IICSA recommendations have been accepted in full by the House of Bishops which has committed to moving towards an independent safeguarding structure as well as to working for a real and lasting change in the culture of the Church.

“These are important steps, but they are only first steps and we are aware there is a long way to go, as the report today emphasizes. We will be taking very seriously criticisms in the report about how and where we failed to respond, and we recognise that an urgent response to the identified failures in safeguarding practice is necessary.

“We commit ourselves above all to doing all we can to support the victims and survivors of Whitsey’s abuse in the future.”

If you or anyone you are in contact with are affected by the publication of this report and want to talk to someone independently please call the Safe Spaces helpline on **0300 303 1056** or email [safespaces@victimsupport.org.uk](mailto:safespaces@victimsupport.org.uk). There are also other **support services available**.

Alternatively, you may wish to contact the **diocesan safeguarding team** in your area

### **Statement from the Bishop of Chester, Mark Tanner**

“There are no words to express my horror and shame as I read this report; and even if there were, words alone are not enough. Our apologies, which are freely and sincerely given must be backed up by action. I am grateful to all those who have already helped us start to change, to Judge Pearl for this report, and most of all to the incredibly brave survivors who have spoken up and made us listen. It is with them and all victims of abuse that my thoughts and prayers rest today as I commit myself and the Diocese of Chester to respond in word and action to this report.”

### **Statement from the Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell**

“I am very grateful to Judge David Pearl, Kate Wood, and Hannah Sinclair for their report, entitled ‘*A Betrayal of Trust*’. This a detailed analysis and assessment of the church’s handling of allegations concerning the late Hubert Victor Whitsey, who was Bishop of Chester 1974 to 1982. Most of all I thank those survivors who have been willing come forward to speak to the reviewers. Without their help we would never be able to move forward and turn lessons learned into better practice.

“That a bishop should have been able to go on abusing young and vulnerable people over such a long period without ever being held to account for his actions is a matter of deep shame for the Church of England. In addition, there may be others for whom the publication of the report raises painful questions – we know of at least one instance where disclosures of abuse by someone else were made to Whitsey when he was bishop, and he did nothing in response.

“On behalf of the Church I apologise, and I say am deeply sorry to all who suffered as a result of his behaviour. In addition to making this apology, I also want survivors to know that if you wish it, my colleagues and I will be here to offer you real and ongoing support. Meanwhile we must ensure that these challenging lessons are learned, so as not to repeat the errors of the past.

“The thirty-three recommendations of the report are helpfully practical, specific, and detailed, and will be vital to the urgent and ongoing task of reform and improvement to the Church of England’s safeguarding policy and practice.

“They must be considered alongside the recommendations of the IICSA report.

“My prayers are with all those who are tasked with this work in the coming weeks, and with those who have contributed to the review.

“Essential to our vision as a Church today is the commitment to become a safer church for all. This report, hard as it is to receive, is a help to us in making that vision real.”

[Read an open letter from the Archbishop of York.](#)

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