

The independent lessons learnt review of the recruitment and appointment of William Scott Farrell, who pleaded guilty and was jailed for sexual offences, some of which had children as the victim, has been published today. It can be viewed in full below. These offences occurred while he was working at two cathedrals, and the review also looks at the handling of concerns raised at a third cathedral.

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.

Alternatively, you may wish to contact the diocesan safeguarding team in your area or the National Safeguarding Team – email safeguarding@churchofengland.org

There are also other support services available.

Farrell was Director of Music at Rochester Cathedral at the time of his arrest and admitted a previous offence while working as assistant director of music at Ely Cathedral. In between these two posts he also worked at Newcastle Cathedral. Following his conviction all three cathedrals commissioned reviews into the safeguarding handling and safe recruitment; these informed the independent review.

The main objective of the review, commissioned by the National Safeguarding Team, and carried out by independent safeguarding chair Chris Robson, was to allow the Church of England to take steps to enhance and improve its response to allegations of abuse and, thereby, to ensure a safer environment for all. The review considered both good practice and failings in the Church's safe recruitment practices in respect of Farrell, and the appropriateness of responses by different Church bodies to allegations and anonymous concerns raised across each diocese and cathedral in which he held any post.

A total of eleven recommendations are made to improve culture, support and develop existing good practice, remove barriers and improve safeguarding outcomes. Key areas for improvement are identified including safeguarding culture, governance and leadership, recognition of risk and impact of cumulative risk, status of individuals and music departments, information exchange, safer recruitment and review processes. Where relevant these will be factored into existing recommendations from previous reviews.

Statement from independent reviewer, Chris Robson

"This Learning Lessons Review examines a period of time when William Scott Farrell was employed by the Church of England as an organist and musical director in three different Cathedrals.

"During this employment in two of the cathedrals he committed a series of sexual offences for which he received a substantial prison sentence, with concerns being raised in the third.

"I would like to acknowledge the pain and suffering his offending caused many people, he was a manipulative man who abused his position of trust. First and foremost, my thoughts are with those who he abused, offended against and manipulated so he could carry out these terrible crimes.

"The review does not seek to apportion blame or hold individuals to account. It seeks to afford the Church of England an opportunity to learn from missed opportunities, mistakes made, and good practice observed during the process.

"I am heartened by the progress already made, including significant investment in safeguarding. Whilst I have been reassured by many people, I have met during this review the Church still needs to examine its culture and the priority it gives to safeguarding. If positive change is to be made and maintained, then policy must be lived by Church leaders and the wider community.

"The review makes eleven recommendations and a number of comments all of which are aimed at improving future safeguarding. Above all there needs to be a recognition that safeguarding is everybody's responsibility. We all should take responsibility for doing everything we can to safeguard children and vulnerable adults."

Response from the Church's lead safeguarding bishop, Jonathan Gibbs

"I agree whole-heartedly with the Review's conclusion that the pace of change in the Church has been too slow, and that we still have a way to go until everyone truly sees safeguarding as their responsibility.

"This report should be compulsory – and uncomfortable – reading for church leaders at every level.

"This review is about learning lessons to improve the Church's safeguarding practice for the future, but we must never forget the victims and survivors who have been abused and others affected by the impact of this case.

"We are truly sorry. There were clearly missed opportunities to challenge Farrell's behaviour and it is vital that we learn from this and act on the recommendations.

"The report does acknowledge that there have been improvements in practice throughout the review period, and highlights examples of this, particularly around safer recruitment but we must continue to learn and develop, building on our existing work. There is criticism of the time taken to start the review process and this is something the Church must take on board in any future work.

"I would like to thank Chris Robson for carrying out this important review and commend the cooperation of the three dioceses and cathedrals involved."

More information

- [William Scott Farrell - independent overview report](#)
- [Terms of Reference](#)
- [Independent Reviewer - biography](#)

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