



MAY 2023

LESSONS LEARNED REVIEW

PETER STUART MCCONNELL

David Gardiner
Independent Reviewer



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Confidential: Lessons Learned Review (For Publication)

Concerning: Peter Stuart McCONNELL

Report prepared for: The Right Reverend Mark Wroe, Bishop of Berwick and Acting Bishop of Newcastle.

Independent reviewer: David Gardiner

Date: Report submitted 31st March 2022. An updated section 4.3 (below) was added in May 2023 to give the latest position on the recommendations in the report prior to publication.

1. Terms of Reference (extract)

Scope of the Review

1.1 The Review will focus on two related, but distinct, questions:

- What did the Newcastle Diocese, or those with accountability, know about abuse perpetrated by Peter McConnell; and
- What was the Newcastle Diocese, or those with accountabilities', response to those allegations?

1.2 In connection with the first question, the Review will consider:

- What information was available to the Newcastle Diocese relating to Peter McConnell's abuse of young people and individuals.
- What did Newcastle Diocese or those with accountability do with this information?

1.3 In connection with the second question, the Review will consider:

- Whether, when the abuse was reported, Church officers and Church bodies responded in a timely and appropriate manner in line with policies, practice and procedures in place in the Church of England at the time, as well as appropriate statutory policy and legislation.
- Whether such abuse, and any further abuse, could have been prevented.
- Whether, taking account of the Gibb Review, what additional lessons can be learnt which are relevant and which might improve safeguarding practice in the Newcastle Diocese.

2. Overview of the Case & Executive Summary

- 2.1 Peter McConnell (PM) was convicted, following a trial at Newcastle upon Tyne Crown Court, on 26th June 2019 for a sexual assault on a young adult male (Mr C: see table at section 3). The offence was committed on an overnight flight to the UK in March 2017 and reported very soon after, initially to the Diocese, by the victim. The 2019 court hearing was a retrial, a previous jury having failed to reach a verdict the year before. At conviction, the case was adjourned for sentencing, with the benefit of pre-sentence probation service reports.
- 2.2 On 16th August 2019, PM was sentenced to nine months' imprisonment, suspended for two years. A custodial sentence was, according to the Judge's remarks on the day, inevitable, though he felt able to suspend it. The Judge also informed PM he would be subject to Notification Requirements (generally referred to as being "placed on the sex offenders register") for ten years and added a requirement on him to attend the "Horizon" sex offender treatment programme delivered by the National Probation Service. A Restraining Order, prohibiting PM from contacting the victim, Mr C, was also made, plus a substantial order for costs against PM, in the sum of £11504.
- 2.3 Mr C's "victim personal statement" had been read out in court, in which he described the severe impact on him of the assault by PM. He was also very critical of how he had been dealt with by the Diocese (other than the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser herself) and of the Church's procedures. His comments were reported at some length in the press, with potential reputational damage to the Church.
- 2.4 In 2020, under the Clergy Discipline Measure of 2003, PM was prohibited from ministry for life as a result of his conviction.

Previous allegations

- 2.5 At the time of his 2019 sentencing, PM had not been at work for five years. He had been allowed to retire on health grounds in February 2019, but had otherwise been on sick leave, formally suspended or on unspecified leave of absence since August 2014. This was the date of PM's arrest, after an adult male (Mr A) who, as a teenager, had previously made an allegation of sexual assault against him, reported the same allegation to Northumbria Police. At the time of his arrest, PM was working as a half-time parish priest and a half-time Chaplain with Northumbria Police.
- 2.6 As a teenager, Mr A had been referred by his school for "counselling" from PM and alleged a sexual assault in the course of that contact in June 1998. The allegation was investigated under the child protection procedures which applied at the time.

- 2.7 There was no criminal investigation, at the request of the family, though there was Police representation in the local multi-agency child protection meetings. The child protection investigation did not reach a formal conclusion about the alleged incident, though PM was seen to have acted inappropriately. He denied the allegation of sexual assault and continues to do so.
- 2.8 At Christmas 2014, after consideration of the evidence, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) decided not to proceed with a criminal case against PM, given the length of time since the alleged events of 1998 and evidential difficulties in securing a conviction. Mr A unsuccessfully appealed against the CPS decision.

After the criminal case was discontinued, Newcastle Diocese commenced a lengthy, but ultimately unsuccessful, disciplinary action against PM, under the Clergy Discipline Measure of 2003.

- 2.9 As well as the two allegations of sexual abuse noted above, there was a complaint in 2004 about PM “counselling” a young man (Mr B) in his bedroom, over a long period. The boy’s grandmother had been concerned, though there was no suggestion of sexual impropriety. It seemed clear to those involved, in both 1998 and 2004, that PM had no relevant qualifications to provide counselling, nor any access to regular clinical support and supervision, which would be considered essential to any such role.
- 2.10 The complaint of 2004, which came from PM’s parish, also raised other concerns about his behaviour apart from the “counselling” of Mr B. As a result of this complaint, there was a recommendation to the Chief Constable of Northumbria Police from the head of Northumbria Police Human Resources (a Chief Superintendent), that PM’s role as Police Chaplain should be brought to an end, though this was not followed and he remained in post.
- 2.11 In addition to the allegations investigated by the Diocese in 1998, 2004, 2014 (which, as noted, was a formal complaint about the 1998 incident, not a new allegation) and 2017, other concerns were raised against PM over the years (by Mr D, Mr E, Mr and Mrs G and on behalf of Mr F) but did not proceed to prosecution or other formal action (see Section 3).
- 2.12 After PM’s conviction in 2019, a former work colleague, Mr H, expressed concerns and made some specific allegations, none explicitly sexual, about PM’s treatment of him, suggesting that others in the Diocesan hierarchy were aware of at least some of those concerns at the time. These matters cannot be dealt with in this published report. This is because any description of the working relationship between the two would make the indirect identification (“jigsaw identification”) of H likely, contrary to a key principle of published safeguarding reviews. The matters concerning PM and Mr H will therefore be dealt with only in the full report provided for Newcastle Diocese.

3. Anonymisation of individuals who made, or were affected by, allegations against Peter McConnell (PM)

Name Description and dates

- Mr A Made a complaint of sexual abuse by PM to his school in 1998, which was dealt with under child protection arrangements at the request of the family. Later (2014), a formal complaint was made by Mr A, then an adult, to Northumbria Police about the same incident. In 1998, PM had been “counselling” Mr A, both at his school and at the vicarage. PM was arrested in 2014 and a full Police investigation was undertaken, but the case did not proceed to prosecution.
- Mr B The subject of a third-party complaint against PM from his former parish in 2004, which also included a range of other concerns. Though there was no allegation of sexual impropriety with Mr B, who was a teenager at the time, PM had been “counselling” him in his bedroom over a long period. Mr B also went on a parish holiday to the Northumberland coast (also in 2004), which was the focus of some of the other concerns raised. As an adult, Mr B was interviewed by Police in 2014 in relation to the investigation into PM noted in the previous section of this list.
- Mr C Made an allegation of a sexual offence against him by PM in March 2017, which took place on an international flight. PM was prosecuted and eventually convicted of this offence in June 2019.
- Mr D Contacted the Diocese in late 2017 and a safeguarding referral was completed. After some discussion, and a meeting, with the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser, Mr D decided not to proceed with his complaint. The details were never made clear, but Mr D said he had been abused by PM when he was a teenager. The Diocese found, and paid for, counselling for Mr D.
- Mr E Northumbria Police were contacted, in December 2017, by a man who made a very similar complaint to that of Mr A. Mr E said he was being “counselled” by PM, alone in his bedroom, having been referred by his school (the same school as Mr A’s) because of bullying. At some point, PM allegedly discussed sexuality and touched Mr E sexually. Mr E said he was 14 at the time, which puts the alleged incident close to the date of Mr A’s allegation. The Police interviewed PM under caution, but were not able to proceed with a prosecution, due to evidential difficulties and concerns about Mr E’s mental health.

Mr F A complaint was made to the Police in June 2019 by a third party, who was concerned about PM's interaction with Mr F in a shop. Mr F was a vulnerable young adult with special needs. The Police officers interviewed as part of this review confirmed that there was a full criminal investigation, which also revealed that the young man had been struggling with his sexuality. Whilst there was some witness testimony and CCTV evidence, it was not sufficient to proceed to prosecution. PM was interviewed by Police, under caution, as part of the investigation.

Mr & Mrs G This couple were former parishioners of PM. They approached another priest in the Diocese in December 2014 and made various allegations about PM, which they described as verbal, physical and sexual abuse of Mrs G. The sexual allegations consisted of repeated, unwanted kissing and hugging by PM. The couple were torn between wanting to share information to protect others and compromising their anonymity. They expressed a fear that PM could make life difficult for them in their community, even though they were no longer attending his church. They decided not to proceed and the Diocese took the view that no further action could follow as long as this remained an anonymous complaint.

Mr H Following PM's conviction in 2019, concerns were raised about his behaviour by a former colleague, Mr H. The allegations were not specifically sexual.

NOTE: whilst they are all now adult men, Mr A, Mr B, Mr D and Mr E were young teenagers at the time the alleged misconduct or abuse by PM took place. Mr C and Mr F were in their 20s (23 and 24). The ages of Mr and Mrs G are not recorded.

4. About the published version of the review

- 4.1 This is a shortened version of the lessons learned review of Peter McConnell. A decision has been taken not to publish the full report, in order to protect and avoid further harm to individuals who could be identified by others, or see themselves included, in a public document.
- 4.2 The conclusions and recommendations in this published report are the same as those contained in the full version, other than a specific section on Mr H is not included here, for the reason given at 2.12 above. Otherwise, all of the required actions for improvement are described below, in section 6.
- 4.3 (Updated May 2023) The full report was considered by the Acting Bishop of Newcastle and his senior staff. An action plan was produced and progress against the plan is being monitored by the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP).

Appendix A to this report summarises the sources of information which were used for the review. Names of the people interviewed have been removed in this version.

5. Chronology

The chronology from the full version of the report is included here, to assist readers with their understanding of the conclusions and recommendations. However, in this version, entries which refer to Mr H have been removed, for the reason explained at 2.12 above.

The Chronology

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| 1996 | PM resigned as a school governor at a local High School, but retained an informal role as a “counsellor” and “school chaplain”. |
| 30/06/97 | Retirement of the 10th Bishop of Newcastle, the Rt Revd A A K Graham. |
| 14/11/97 | Commencement of the 11th Bishop of Newcastle, the Rt Revd J M Wharton. |
| June 1998 | Mr A reported an alleged incident of sexual assault by PM to his school. PM had been “counselling” him, at the request of the school. The allegation was investigated under child protection procedures, as Mr A’s family did not want Police involvement. |

- 20/09/98 The Diocese's Child Protection Adviser wrote to the Archdeacon of Northumberland about the outcome of the child protection investigation into Mr A's allegation. While the allegation was unproven, PM was not exonerated.
- August/September 1998: PM was "warned about his future conduct" by the Archdeacon of Northumberland.
- 31/12/98 Retirement of the Assistant Bishop of Newcastle, the Rt Revd K E Gill.
- 01/01/99 Commencement, the Assistant Bishop of Newcastle, the Rt Revd P Richardson.
- 06/12/01 PM was granted Permission to Officiate (PTO) in Durham Diocese.
- 13/09/04 Meeting between PM and the head of Northumbria Police Human Resources (HR), at PM's request. PM disclosed elements of a pending complaint about him from his former parish.
- 18/10/04 The Diocesan Child Protection Adviser reported to the Bishop of Newcastle on the outcome of an investigation into the complaint from PM's former parish, including his "counselling" of a teenage boy in his bedroom over a long period.
- 21/10/04 Recommendation from the Police Human Resources Chief Superintendent to the Chief Constable that PM be asked to stand down as Police Chaplain and from his national work within the Police Chaplains' network. This was not followed. The Chief Constable sent the Police report to the Bishop of Newcastle and asked to discuss it.
- 27/11/06 The Co-ordinator of the National Association of Police Chaplains wrote to the Bishop of Newcastle, praising PM highly for his work within the association and commented that his female co-chaplain was making PM's life "so difficult".
- 14/04/07 PM completed a confidential declaration, apparently alongside his Criminal Records Bureau check, giving his explanation of the allegation of 1998.
- 30/08/07 Note of a discussion between the Bishop of Newcastle and Chief Constable (there had been a change of Chief since the events of 2004). PM had offered to be Chaplain to a youth group supported by the Police. The Bishop was asked to tell PM not to get involved, "for his own sake".
- 20/09/07 PM completed an application for a new position as Priest-in-Charge. He listed significant responsibilities in the community involving children and young people and gave a Head Teacher as a referee.

- 29/10/07 The reference (see previous entry) mentioned, “(PM) having provided counselling to a child struggling with bereavement”.
- 21/02/08 The Diocesan Child Protection Adviser (CPA) produced a “protocol” to “support PM in his ministry, especially with children and young people”. This set out the conditions and monitoring arrangements of a “safeguarding agreement” supposedly set up following the complaint of 2004, but this is the first appearance of the conditions in any written document.
- 18/03/08 CPA’s notes of a meeting with PM to discuss the safeguarding protocol and PM’s supervision by two of his Churchwardens.
- NOTE: these meetings with the CPA are recorded as having taken place annually, as intended, from then until 2013, when the CPA, about to leave the Diocese, recommended that her successor need not continue them.
- 17/08/08 As part of the Diocese’s contribution to the first national “Past Cases Review” exercise in the Church of England (PCR1), the reviewer who inspected PM’s file noted the concerns raised about him in both 1998 and 2004 and the recommendation that he should be asked to stand down as a Police Chaplain.
- The reviewer discussed this with the Child Protection Adviser (CPA) but no further action seems to have resulted.
- 16/01/09 Resignation of the Assistant Bishop of Newcastle, the Rt Revd P Richardson.
- 15/06/09 Letter from the Bishop of Newcastle to the CPA: (PM) “has asked me to arrange for you to review (PM’s) supervision arrangements”.
- 29/06/09 File note, unsigned but confirmed by PM to have been by the Bishop of Newcastle, following a meeting they had shortly before PM went on sabbatical (noted elsewhere as being for three months), including a trip to the USA. PM took the opportunity to say he had managed to “get rid” of one of the Churchwardens supervising him.
- Letter (undated) from the CPA to the Bishop of Newcastle, following the review of PM’s supervision arrangements (as requested in the letter of 15/06/09). The CPA was inclined to relax the arrangements, but suggested asking an independent assessor to take a view.

- 23/11/09 The proposed independent review was completed. It is in the form of a letter and the author, one of the Diocese's independent advisers, only looked at written records. The key sections included: "I have never met PM" but the written material "gave me the impression of a man who wants to exercise control and who will try to manipulate situations to get his way". The author went on to advise against any "major relaxation" of the current arrangements.
- 13/08/10 Letter (unsigned) referencing PM's latest Ministerial Development Review. It referred, without comment, to his "teaching in local schools, with some involvement in schools beyond the parish".
- July 2011 PM featured in BBC news reports on the first anniversary of the Raoul Moat case. PM was praised for his support for Police officers at that time. Mr A, who made allegations about PM in 1998 and the same allegations in 2014 to the Police, remembered seeing this coverage and later described its adverse impact on him.
- 30/11/13 Letter to the Bishop of Newcastle from the CPA on her leaving the Diocese, suggesting her successor need not supervise PM. "I am not sure anything could be gained by continuing". The CPA went on to state that no concerns had been raised about PM's ministry with children and young people in the last seven years. "We have to be aware that someone may groom a situation for years before abusing a child/young person, but there has never been any hint of a suggestion of grooming behaviour with (PM)". These words would later have a significant impact on the outcome of a Clergy Discipline Measure submission in 2016.
- July 2014 Mr A, who made the allegation in 1998, made a formal complaint about it to the Police.
- 08/08/14 PM was arrested as a result of Mr A's complaint. PM went on sick leave soon after and never returned to work, either as a priest or Police Chaplain, prior to his retirement in early 2019.
- 13/08/14 A key in-house meeting was held to discuss PM's arrest. The meeting made some immediate, timely and sensible decisions on practicalities and communications issues, but the crucial note of the session as it relates to this review is as follows:
- "As far as the Diocese is concerned, PM has done everything asked of him in keeping to the arrangements that were put in place in 2004 (as a result of concerns he was counselling a young man in his bedroom)".

- 30/11/14 Retirement of the 11th Bishop of Newcastle, the Rt Revd J M Wharton.
- 01/12/14 Acting Bishop of Newcastle, the Rt Revd F White.
- December 2014 “Mr and Mrs G” alleged, to a priest, “verbal, physical and sexual” abuse of Mrs G by PM. However, they decided, after reflection, not to give up their anonymity, expressing the belief that PM could make life very difficult for them. On that basis, the Diocese decided that the matter could not be taken further.
- 24/12/14 The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) decided not to proceed with the prosecution of PM, given the time period since the events of 1998 and evidential difficulties which made conviction unlikely. Mr A asked for a review of the CPS decision, but this was unsuccessful.
- January to March 2015 Following the CPS decision not to proceed with prosecution, the focus of the Diocese shifted to disciplinary action against PM under the Clergy Discipline Measure (CDM 2003). As a first step, an independent risk assessment was commissioned and completed on 30th March. A key conclusion of the risk assessment was that, " it is the view of the assessor that (PM) remains a risk to children and young people".
- 05/06/15 A QC's legal opinion on disciplinary action was provided to the Diocese. Those involved were aware that, under CDM 2003, an initial application would need to be made to proceed outside of the usual time limit of 12 months.
- 22/06/15 PM was called to a meeting to receive “formal advice” on his position from the Acting Bishop of Newcastle. The lack of a serving Diocesan Bishop, who would normally deal with CDM cases, was an added complication at this time. PM was informed of the intention to take action under CDM 2003 and his various options. He was supported at the meeting by a retired senior Police officer, who later complained that the meeting had failed to adhere to the Church's published procedures.
- 26/06/15 Letter from the Diocese to the President of Tribunals, which asked for permission to bring a disciplinary action outside the usual time limit.
- 14/07/15 Letter (from PM, though he has indicated all correspondence was handled by his solicitor) to the President, opposing the bringing of a complaint out of time.
- 30/07/15 Letter from the Diocese, responding to PM's objections to the disciplinary action proceeding out of time.
- 03/11/15 Permission to proceed was given by the President of Tribunals, though the original three elements of the complaint were reduced to two.

- 28/11/15 Cessation of the Acting Bishop of Newcastle, the Rt Revd F White.
- 29/11/15 Commencement of the 12th Bishop of Newcastle, the Rt Revd C E Hardman.
- 09/12/15 Letters were sent out from the Diocese to potential witnesses. The intention was primarily to re-use, with permission, Police interview notes from the discontinued prosecution of PM, taken in the period from August to December 2014.
- 20/01/16 Letter received from PM's GP, concerned for his mental health.
- 29/02/16 Letter (the first in a series) to the Bishop of Newcastle from the retired senior Police officer who had supported PM at his meeting of 22/06/15. He seemed to have knowledge of PM's current physical, mental and spiritual health and knew that the Bishop had heard from PM's GP. The letter is worded very strongly and suggests the meeting of 22/06/15 "bypassed several stages of your procedures to initiate formal disciplinary procedures against (PM)". The letter also said PM "had no prior warning of this".
- 18/03/16 PM requested an extension to the time limit for him to respond to the disciplinary complaint.
- 21/03/16 The Bishop of Newcastle granted an extension.
- 10/05/16 Letter from the Bishop of Newcastle to PM. Despite an extension of time, he had not responded to the CDM complaint and "I must therefore proceed on the assumption that all allegations are denied". The Bishop indicated her intention to refer the matter to the Designated Officer in the Church's Legal Office, who would make enquiries on behalf of the President of Tribunals. NOTE: in 2022, PM indicated, in an interview for this review, that he had not known he was required to respond to the complaint and that his solicitor had accepted responsibility for that omission.
- 22/09/16 Mr A was interviewed by the Designated Officer, on behalf of the President of Tribunals, in Newcastle, as part of his inquiries, to determine if the disciplinary case might proceed. The interview was stopped by the Police officer supporting Mr A, concerned at the intrusive questioning and the impact on him.
- 27/02/17 Letter to the Bishop of Newcastle from the President of Tribunals, to record a decision not to proceed with the disciplinary case against PM.

- 28/02/17 Letter to the Archdeacon of Lindisfarne (in whose name the CDM submission had been made) from the Secretary to the President of Tribunals. This confirmed that, “there is no case to answer so the complaint will not be referred to the...disciplinary tribunal. Under CDM there is no right of appeal from this decision. No further steps will therefore now be taken with regard to the complaint.”
- 17/03/17 Notes of a meeting with PM. Given that the disciplinary action had ended, the discussion was about his possible return to work. PM referred to what he saw as his “unlawful arrest” in 2014 and said he could not return until it was removed from his record.
- However, any Diocesan response to PM’s refusal to return to work was soon overtaken by a new development:
- 29/03/17 The Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser (DSA) received a phone call from Mr C, a student, who alleged a sexual assault against him by PM on an overnight flight a few days before. The Police were informed, with Mr C’s agreement, and appropriate safeguarding actions followed.
- 25/05/17 The Core Group, set up to manage the new investigation, was advised by the Diocesan Director of Education of options for the removal of PM from his role as a school governor. The Local Authority Designated Officer later provided a letter in support of this action and, in July 2017, PM was invited to a meeting to discuss a proposal that he should stand down. He resigned his position as school governor following that meeting.
- 23/06/17 The Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser from Durham Diocese contacted Newcastle Diocese about her list of clergy with Permission to Officiate (PTO) in Durham. This seemed to be an administrative exercise to update the Durham list. As the entry below suggests, Newcastle Diocese had not been aware PM held PTO in Durham, so had not shared any information about the current Police investigation, his arrest in 2014 or the subsequent efforts to bring a disciplinary action.
- 06/07/17 Core Group Meeting. “It has come to the Diocese’s attention that PM holds a PTO from Durham Diocese. (The Newcastle Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor – DSA) has briefed (the Durham DSA), and she in turn will be advising (the Bishop)”. The Bishop of Durham subsequently suspended PM’s PTO in Durham Diocese and later rescinded it.

- 30/10/17 Following a criminal investigation, PM was charged with sexual assault on a male. He was never arrested in connection with this case, attending on a voluntary basis for Police interviews.
- 20/11/17 A meeting was held at Middle Engine Lane Police Station. This was about safeguarding for PM's family.
- 06/12/17 A new Safeguarding Incident Report was completed by the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser, who had been contacted by Mr D. He had become aware of the first media reports of PM's court appearances and telephoned (later met) the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser. He spoke about being abused by PM when he was young, but never gave details. He later decided not to proceed with a complaint, but to wait for the outcome of PM's prosecution.
- December 2017 This was reported to the Diocese slightly later, but another man (Mr E) came forward to Northumbria Police with an allegation of abuse by PM when he was at school. His story was very similar to that of Mr A: he had been at the same school and also had a "counselling" relationship with PM. The Police questioned PM under caution, but later decided the case could not proceed to prosecution.
- December 2017 A trial date of August 2018 was set for PM at Newcastle upon Tyne Crown Court. All relevant safeguarding meetings continued and PM remained absent from work throughout.
- August 2018 Formal termination of PM's Police Chaplaincy role.
- August 2018 At PM's trial at the Crown Court, he pleaded Not Guilty and the jury failed to reach a verdict.
- The focus of the Diocese was, from this point, on three issues: a re-trial (for which permission had been granted), the need for new disciplinary action should there be no conviction and the potential for PM to take early retirement.
- 14/12/18 E-mail from the Diocesan Secretary to the Bishop of Newcastle. The Church of England Pensions Board had granted PM's request for retirement on health grounds, provisionally from 19/02/19.

- 19/02/19 PM's retirement took effect. By then he had also accepted an offer of retirement housing from the Church of England Pensions Board. His Permission to Officiate in Durham Diocese was revoked by the Bishop of Durham, having previously been suspended in 2017.
- 11/03/19 Letter to PM from the Durham Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser, setting out expectations on him, and the need for a safeguarding agreement, should he wish to worship there (PM's retirement housing was within Durham Diocese).
- 26/06/19 At his re-trial, PM was found guilty of sexual assault against Mr C. The case was adjourned for Probation reports and sentencing.
- 27/06/19 E-mail from Northumbria Police to the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser headed "new complaint". The complaint was from a third party on behalf of the vulnerable adult referred to as Mr F in this review. It was alleged that PM had behaved and spoken inappropriately with him in a shop. There was a full Police investigation, including questioning of PM under caution, but insufficient evidence to proceed to prosecution.
- 16/08/19 PM was sentenced at Newcastle upon Tyne Crown Court. He was given a suspended prison sentence (nine months, suspended for two years), ordered to attend a sex offender treatment programme and told he would be placed on the sex offenders register for ten years. The Judge also made an order for costs against PM in the sum of £11,504 and a restraining order preventing any contact with Mr C.
- 23/12/19 Mr C's victim personal statement, as well as describing the impact of PM's assault on him, was very critical of how he had been dealt with by the Diocese (other than the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser herself) and of the Church's procedures.
- 23/12/19 Letter from the Bishop of Newcastle to Mr C re the steps being taken to exclude PM from ministry permanently. The Bishop apologised for the aspects of the Diocese's handling of the case that Mr C had found "cold and unsupportive", whilst noting his positive experience of the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser.
- 09/01/20 The Deputy President of Tribunals considered PM's prohibition from ministry for life.

- 3/3/20 Letter from the Bishop of Newcastle to PM. This indicated he had made no response to her letter of 30/01/20 within a 28-day period referred to. Therefore, her intention was to impose prohibition from ministry for life. The letter also noted that PM had the option to ask the Archbishop of York to review this decision, within 21 days.
- 13/07/20 PM's prohibition for life took effect.
- 10/09/20 Letter to the Bishop of Newcastle from the Archbishop of York. This indicated that, under the guidelines, the Diocese should appoint a pastor for PM and anyone else who may need pastoral care.
- 30/11/21 Retirement of the 12th Bishop of Newcastle, the Rt Revd C E Hardman.
- 01/12/21 Acting Bishop of Newcastle, the Rt Revd M Wroe.

6. Conclusions & Recommendations

6.1 The story of PM's involvement with Newcastle Diocese is a long and complex one. With hindsight, there were situations which could have been dealt with more effectively but, that said, it is not easy to allocate responsibility to individuals. The Diocese's response to PM was arguably more to do with the culture of the organisation at the time, locally and nationally, rather than individual failures. It was by no means unusual in the wider, national safeguarding context.

6.2 The "Gibb Review" ("An Abuse of Faith: The Independent Peter Ball Review" by Dame Moira Gibb, 2017) covers a similar time frame to this report and noted what has changed in the wider Church since many of the events described in both:

"The Church has already taken steps to understand better the theological implications of abuse. We have considered the Faith and Order Commission's two reports, "Gospel, Sexual Abuse and the Church" and "Forgiveness and Reconciliation in the Aftermath of Abuse". These works represent a determined effort by the Church to provide a firm theological basis to its responsibility for preventing abuse and responding well when abuse does take place. They seek to mitigate any risks that distorted Christian teaching, or teaching which over-simplifies issues of forgiveness, might create conditions in which abuse goes unchecked or where the harm of abuse can be compounded."

- 6.3 This “over-simplification” of forgiveness, and a traditional culture of deference to the clergy, may be seen to feature in the earlier history of PM within the Newcastle Diocese. As the years went by, there were improvements in safeguarding practice, as was also noted in the Diocese’s contribution, in 2021, to the national Past Cases Review (PCR2) of safeguarding cases across the Church of England.
- 6.4 This improving picture is largely due to the increasing professionalisation of the Diocesan Safeguarding function, its greater levels of resourcing (though these are still very limited) and its ever-closer engagement in statutory, multi-agency safeguarding networks. There were changes at national level too, not least the development of the National Safeguarding Team and also some important policy changes. The latter include some updating of the Clergy Discipline Measure (2003) in 2016, which, for example, amended the general 12-month time limitation on bringing complaints (without the need for a specific exemption, as in the case of PM in 2015) where these relate to the sexual abuse of children or vulnerable adults.

In that context, these are the main conclusions and recommendations from this review:

- 6.5 Issue: There was a lack of clarity about, and insufficient recording of, both a warning given to PM in 1998 and an agreement for his future conduct in 2004.**

Neither of these seems to have existed in a written form, at least until 2008. It is clear, however, that PM’s work with children and young people was monitored over a long period and he had named people within the parish and Diocese to support and oversee his work. The lack of documentation, however, was a crucial factor in the failure of the disciplinary process against PM in 2015-17 and the absence of clear, defined expectations hindered any meaningful efforts to hold him to account.

Recommendation 1:

When a member of the clergy is given a warning, or a safeguarding agreement is reached, the subject should receive, and sign to indicate acceptance of, a document which sets out the precise terms and expectations and the sanctions for non-compliance. The document should be witnessed by whoever serves it on behalf of the Diocese. Any formal warning or agreement needs to be properly recorded, saved and retrievable, but only accessible to those with a legitimate need to see it.

Care needs to be taken that any action in relation to giving “advice”, issuing a “warning” or reaching an “agreement” is compatible with the Diocese’s and wider Church’s policies and procedures. The process also needs to demonstrate fairness in terms of Human Resources practice and natural justice, such as in giving the respondent due notice of meetings and their purpose and offering a right of representation. In this case, concerns were raised about a meeting in June 2015 set up to give “formal advice” to PM in advance of a disciplinary investigation. See the chronology entry for 22/06/15.

6.6 Issue: Though PM's activities were being supervised after 2004, his relationship with his key support person seems to have been viewed as a confidential, counselling arrangement, rather than including any formal accountability. The review has also highlighted issues around the role of Churchwardens in monitoring safeguarding arrangements.

Though it seems there was no written safeguarding agreement following the events of 2004 until a "protocol" was formulated early in 2008, arrangements were clearly put in place earlier, as noted by the Diocesan Child Protection Adviser in 2004. These included the establishment of regular meetings between PM and a named priest, with some additional supervision by Churchwardens in PM's parish.

As part of the meetings with the priest supporting and supervising him, PM logged his activities with children and young people over a long period and produced written records for their discussions.

Unfortunately, the relationship between PM and the priest seems to have been viewed as a confidential mentoring and counselling arrangement, rather than one with any explicit accountability, beyond the keeping of the written records. The Bishop of Newcastle said as much in an e-mail of October 2009: "we should be very careful about asking (the supervisor) to break the confidential basis and nature of the counselling relationship". PM himself also seemed to see the relationship in these terms. When offered pastoral support by the Diocese (after ending his arrangement with the supervising priest over his contribution to the risk assessment of 2015), PM commented (in an e-mail): "the last person I confided in... broke boundaries regarding confidentiality and colluded with the investigation, so I feel it is difficult to talk with anyone in the Diocese". In a meeting of March 2017, with the Bishop of Newcastle, PM expanded on this, alleging that his supervisor had "colluded with a seriously ridiculous risk assessment, handing over information that was ... incorrect".

This review has also highlighted some issues concerning the Diocese's expectation that Churchwardens should supervise clergy under a safeguarding agreement or other arrangement. This may be appropriate in some cases, such as when a priest understands and accepts responsibility for misconduct and wants to work positively and openly with others, but it was a lot to ask in the case of PM. In addition to the obvious power imbalance, the impression is that he resented the supervisory role. PM is on record as having told the Bishop of Newcastle, in 2009, that "he has finally managed to get rid of (one of the supervising Churchwardens) who has been a problem for him". In the same meeting, as well as requesting that his supervision be reviewed, which was granted, he also asked if he might select his own supervisors in future, though that was not agreed. Then in March 2017, in discussing his return to work after suspension, PM challenged a proposal for having any sort of new safeguarding agreement.

Recommendation 2:

Where someone subject to a safeguarding agreement, or other formalised constraints on their work, is given a named contact to monitor the arrangements, it needs to be very clear to all concerned that the relationship is not confidential. It needs to be based on both support and accountability. Any lack of clarity on that point risks a blurring of the accountability and, thus, a weakening of the risk management aspects of the relationship.

Fortunately, more recent developments in safeguarding practice, both nationally and locally, should ensure that this recommendation is likely to be met in current and future cases. Newcastle Diocese, for example, has published a leaflet which very clearly defines a “link person” role. This is drawn from the national Church document, “Practice Guidance: Responding to, Assessing and Managing Safeguarding Concerns or Allegations against Church Officers” (October 2017). The Newcastle leaflet is commendably explicit in saying what the “link person” role is not, as well as describing what it is. For example, it states, “the link person is NOT the confidant of the respondent” and goes on to outline the requirement for disclosure of information to the appropriate authorities, not just within the Diocese, under a range of circumstances. Had this role been defined in 2004, the balance of support and accountability for PM would have been clear for all concerned and not open to any misunderstanding.

This recommendation, based on the above context, is simply that the Diocese should continue to establish the “link person” role which is already defined.

Recommendation 3:

The Diocese should also review the role of Churchwardens in the management of safeguarding arrangements. In some cases, particularly where there is no acceptance of misconduct, it may not be sufficient. Effective monitoring at local level is crucial, as this is where any future concerns are most likely to be identified.

6.7 Issue: PM was able to continue offering “counselling” to children and young people after 1998 and even after the second complaint, which also centred on a “counselling” relationship, in 2004, albeit with some constraints. It seems that PM had no counselling qualifications, nor access to the necessary clinical supervision.

The aspect of this case which is probably hardest to understand by those outside the Church is why PM was allowed to continue offering “counselling” to children and young people after 1998 and even, though with some constraints, after a second complaint in 2004, which centred on a counselling relationship, carried out over a long period in a teenager’s bedroom.

There are also references throughout the records of PM’s time in Newcastle Diocese to him “teaching” in schools, including outside his parish.

It seems that some, at least, of what he was teaching was not religious in nature, such as a “philosophy for children” course over a significant number of years (though he has noted that sometimes these sessions had adults present). Those involved in this case have commented that PM had no counselling qualifications, nor experience nor, crucially, access to regular clinical supervision. It seems, from his personal file, that he had no background in teaching either.

Regardless of the explicit, but unproven, sexual allegation of 1998 against him, PM was clearly putting himself at risk by “counselling” young people alone. He was also placing the Diocese and wider Church at risk of reputational damage, if only because of the potential for false and malicious allegations. By his own admission, he had, at the very least, acted unwisely in 1998, by meeting Mr A in private.

The President of Tribunals stated, in 2017, that there was no conclusive proof or admission that PM had “counselled” young people alone after 2004, despite claims to that effect in the 2015 risk assessment. However, PM’s own records of his activities suggest he was, at the very best, keeping to the letter of the understanding rather than the spirit. In short, he did see young people alone, though usually noted that this was with a door open, or other people in the same building. Was this what the Diocese had in mind as an acceptable way forward? The Diocesan Child Protection Adviser in 2004, had “... strongly recommended that there should be no individual work with teenaged boys”. Surely that was a clear enough intention subject, of course, to PM being able to continue, with suitable safeguards, his pastoral work in his parish? PM, according to his own records, offered bereavement counselling to a ten-year-old in 2007. He was commended for that (or another case very like it) in an employment reference written for him by a Head Teacher (see the chronology entry for 29/10/07).

Recommendation 4:

The Diocese should assure itself that it has clear and widely understood policies, procedures and practice guidance for clergy working on a one-to-one basis with anyone, but especially children and young people. Best practice would suggest that those engaging in such activities should follow the same lone working and safeguarding procedures and practices adopted by all trained teachers, counsellors, tutors and private music teachers (etc) who see clients at home or in the practitioner’s home.

Anyone subject to a safeguarding agreement should expect further limitations on their activities, or even prohibition. The safeguarding of the vulnerable must be the paramount concern.

If “counselling” is to go beyond the pastoral support offered by all clergy, those practising it should be trained (including having access to ongoing professional development), suitably qualified and have access to regular, professional, clinical supervision. Even in terms of pastoral support to parishioners, appropriate safeguarding and lone working procedures should still be defined and followed, to protect all parties and the wider Church.

Issue: Delays in, and the eventual failure of, a disciplinary action against PM during 2015-17.

Despite the extensive time and effort invested by the Diocese in a submission under the Clergy Discipline Measure of 2003 (CDM) and the availability of all the Police witness statements from the criminal investigation of 2014, no disciplinary tribunal was allowed by the President of Tribunals, as recorded in his letter of February 2017. Several people involved at the time have spoken about a sense of anger within the Diocese at this decision. On reflection, however, it appears unsurprising. The reasons for the failure of the disciplinary action against PM were these:

- The lack of clarity on the nature of both the warning referred to as being given to PM in 1998 and the supposed safeguarding agreement of 2004 (see 6.5 above).
- The basis of the CDM complaint. Originally, the disciplinary complaint against PM was to consist of three elements, including a failure to adhere to the warning of 1998. Permission was not given to proceed with that element, as it became clear that no information could be found about what the warning required of PM. The CDM submission therefore proceeded on two counts: firstly, a failure to keep to the “agreement” of 2004. The President of Tribunals subsequently saw no conclusive evidence of either the existence of that agreement or, therefore, its breach. The second count was the alleged, but unproven even after two investigations, sexual abuse of Mr A in 1998.
- The lack of rigour in holding PM to account in terms of his work with children and young people. As there was no written agreement of any sort until 2008, and the monitoring arrangements relied heavily on a seemingly confidential arrangement between PM and his supervisor (see 6.6), it was hard to prove any breach of requirements with sufficient clarity to support disciplinary action.
- The Child Protection Adviser’s (CPA) comments on PM’s supervision as the CPA prepared to leave the Diocese at the end of 2013. The CPA recommended that their successor need not supervise PM: “I am not sure anything could be gained by continuing”. The CPA also stated that no concerns had been raised about PM’s ministry with children and young people in the last seven years. “...there has never been any hint of a suggestion of grooming behaviour with Peter”. A similar view was expressed in the meeting of 13th August 2014 (see chronology): “As far as the Diocese is concerned, PM has done everything asked of him in keeping to the arrangements that were put in place in 2004”. The President of Tribunals specifically highlighted the discrepancy between the CPA’s view and that expressed in the 2015 risk assessment, that PM had continued to see children and young people alone after 2004. This was a key element of the President’s decision not to allow the disciplinary process to continue.

- Inconsistencies in how Mr A reported the alleged abuse. The President of Tribunals noted “Mr A had given two different versions of his alleged assault by the respondent”. It is true that Mr A initially gave an account to his head and deputy head teachers, soon after the alleged event, which was different to his later descriptions. This is not, however, unusual in victims who have suffered trauma. The President also referred to further discrepancies given to the Designated Officer who was dealing with the disciplinary complaint. This, presumably, was in the meeting of 22/9/16, which was stopped by the Police officer present, who was concerned at the line of questioning and its impact on Mr A’s mental health. This element of the failure of the CDM was not in the Diocese’s control, but we should not see a level of inconsistency as proof that allegations made by Mr A were false or malicious. It takes a great effort for a teenager to make allegations of sexual misconduct against an adult in a position of trust and power. The Church’s Child Abuse Policy of 1995, which reflected the organisational position at the time of Mr A’s first complaint, acknowledged the personal cost to someone making an allegation of abuse and cautioned against the temptation to become defensive of the person accused or of the institution of the Church.

Delays in the CDM process

There were significant delays in this process, which immediately followed another period of uncertainty (mid-August to Christmas Eve 2014), pending the Crown Prosecution Service decision not to proceed with PM’s prosecution following his arrest (see chronology 08/08/14). This was clearly outside the Diocese’s control. In his interview for this review, PM spoke about feeling “stranded” for two and a half years, from August 2014 until the decision in February 2017 that the CDM submission would not go to a tribunal. For all of that time, PM said he was living in his vicarage but unable to work and forbidden to talk to anyone about the case.

It took from Christmas 2014 (in effect, given the holiday period, early January 2015) until June 2015 for the completion of an independent risk assessment and the submission of a request to make a CDM complaint out of time. The independent risk assessment itself was provided on 30th March and the Diocese then moved to obtain a Barrister’s opinion on its options. This timeframe seems reasonable, given the complexity of the case.

The CDM delays were then largely outside of the Diocese’s control once again, including the time taken (June to November 2015) to receive a decision on proceeding with the disciplinary case outside the usual time limit. This should not be an issue in any future cases, since the limitation of time for sexual abuse complaints was amended by the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure of 2016.

Once permission to proceed with the CDM was granted, the Diocese moved very quickly to submit its complaint to the President of Tribunals early in 2016. The CDM investigation then took up the rest of that year and the first weeks of 2017 and was carried out by the Designated Officer working on behalf of the President, not the Diocese.

Later in the narrative, there was clearly another significant delay, as PM's prosecution for his offence against Mr C, in late March 2017, was only concluded over two years later, because there was a need for two Crown Court trials. Once again, this was not in the Diocese's control. The Courts system in England and Wales was under great pressure at that time and significant delays in finalising cases, even with a single trial, were common. Any new disciplinary action against PM had to be suspended until the criminal case was concluded.

On reflection, all these delays are regrettable, but it is difficult to see how the Diocese could have moved forward much more quickly under the particular circumstances. However, PM's comments on the impact he and his family felt should be acknowledged.

The following recommendation is made in the knowledge that the Clergy Discipline Measure is currently under review. A working group set up for that purpose made its final report to the General Synod in July 2021. As set out in a response from the Church Commissioners to a written question in January 2022, there is now a smaller implementation group established which will carry out a consultation process before bringing proposals to the General Synod in July 2022.

Recommendation 5:

The Diocese should reflect on the CDM submission of 2015-17, as set out above, and apply the learning to any future processes. A strong disciplinary case needs to start with a clear, demonstrable analysis of how a respondent has failed to meet organisational standards, including any evidence of efforts made to support that person in compliance, or otherwise manage risk and performance, such as by offering a change of role. It needs to be equally clear and demonstrable that the respondent was aware of what was expected and held to account appropriately and consistently.

6.9 Issue: The overlap between a Police criminal investigation and the Church of England complaints process in 2017.

A criminal investigation needs to take precedence over any internal procedure and this is accepted across UK public, private and third sector organisations. However, in 2017, the Diocese immediately drew Mr C into the process for making a formal complaint about misconduct by a member of the clergy, despite the seriousness of his allegation and the likelihood that a Police investigation would follow within a very short time, which it did. At that point, the complaint process was rightly suspended.

This overlap, though brief, and the very formal nature of the Church's communication, would surely be difficult for a traumatised victim to deal with. Mr C was asked to provide a written description of his alleged assault by PM, which he did. The Bishop of Newcastle responded in very formal terms to say that the complaint would be passed to the Diocesan Registrar to decide on eligibility and whether or not it contained "sufficient substance". Mr C was told that the Registrar would report back within 28 days (and at the latest 56 days).

Mr C was very critical of the Diocese in his personal statement to the Crown Court after PM's conviction and his words were reported at length in the media. In contrast, Mr A, in his interview for this review, felt that his own treatment by the Diocese had been supportive and responsive throughout and spoke very highly of the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser in post at the time and indeed the current DSA, who continues to offer him support. Mr A was in court when Mr C's victim statement was read out and said he was surprised at the criticism. It may be that this was because Mr A was never asked to make a complaint under Church procedures. In 1998, he had made a disclosure to his school and the same allegation, in 2014, directly to the Police. When that did not proceed to prosecution, his allegation against PM became part of a disciplinary process, but the complaint under the Clergy Discipline Measure was in the name of an Archdeacon, not Mr A himself.

Recommendation 6:

Where there is a complaint which seems to include criminality, the earliest possible liaison between the Diocese and Police is essential and a joint decision needs to be made about the way forward, prior to the commencement of any disciplinary investigation. In the case of Mr C, though his first contact was with the Diocese, the matter was obviously a potentially serious criminal offence and it was equally clear from the outset that he was very willing to engage with the Police.

Complications may arise, of course, if a complainant is initially uncertain about, or later withdraws from, Police involvement. But the formality of the Church process is unlikely to support a positive outcome without a better understanding of how difficult it is for victims of abuse to come forward and the trauma they may be experiencing.

Recommendation 7:

A further recommendation is that the Diocese should take due account of the need for "trauma-informed" responses in dealing with all complaints alleging any form of abuse.

6.10 Issue: Some aspects of the Church's disciplinary practices which were out of step with Police procedures.

For most of the period under review, clergy accused of abuse could not be suspended without an arrest, though Police practice on arrests had evolved over the years, not least in response to the growing number of historical allegations. The same could also apply to allegations of recent criminality: PM was never arrested in relation to Mr C's complaint. He attended for interview on a voluntary basis, prior to being charged some months later.

Over the years, the Church, at national level, has made progress to resolve some policy and procedural anomalies and bring its practice into closer alignment with the statutory safeguarding networks. For example, some revisions to the Clergy Discipline Measure of 2003 were brought into effect as the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure of 2016. Though the implementation of the changes was phased, all were in place prior to Mr C making his allegation against PM in March 2017.

The 2016 revisions to the Clergy Discipline Measure which are relevant to this review are, firstly, one that allows the suspension of clergy without an arrest if the Police (or Local Authority) confirm a "significant risk of harm". The other change, which would have been relevant to the case of Mr A had it been made sooner, was the lifting of the usual twelve-month limitation on bringing a disciplinary case where there is an allegation of sexual abuse of a child or vulnerable adult. Had this change been in place in 2015, it would have removed one stage, and a lengthy delay, from the complaint process regarding Mr A, as discussed in 6.8.

In their interviews for this review, the police officers involved in the case of Mr C spoke of feeling some pressure to arrest PM and the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser remembered some "quite heated" discussions in the Strategy Meetings at the time. Whilst it was academic, in that PM was not at, and did not return to, work, those involved clearly still remember those discussions. The possibility of suspension without arrest had only recently been implemented at the time in question, in January 2017, as part of the phased implementation of the 2016 changes.

It is not clear from the records at what stage those involved in the Strategy Meetings on PM in 2017 became aware of the revised position on suspension, but there is a reference in the meeting of 25th April that, "The Bishop could have suspended (PM) if an arrest had taken place. Otherwise, the Church would not be able to suspend." That said, all present at those meetings were clear and committed that PM should not return to work during the investigation. Had he expressed an inclination to do so, no doubt closer attention would have been given to suspension.

Leaving the 2016 changes aside, there are two aspects of the Diocese's complaints practice during 2017 which must be questioned. The Police officers involved in the case of Mr C raised these issues:

- A document was sent to PM from the Diocesan legal advisers about the complaint against him, which contained Mr C's contact details.
- PM was made aware of the complaint before the Police had a chance to question him.

The Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser in post in 2017 has confirmed the Police account is accurate and that documents in complaints procedures were routinely copied to the respondent.

Recommendation 8:

Once again, as in 6.9, this highlights the dangers of parallel processes and the vital importance of clear and timely liaison, and a joint working agreement, with the Police at the earliest possible stage. Under different circumstances, disclosures to a potential offender, alerting them to the nature of a complaint, and even containing an alleged victim's contact details, could place the complainant at serious risk, as well as jeopardising the collection of evidence and the likelihood of securing a conviction. The Diocese should assure itself that its procedures, however formal, do not allow for a respondent to receive sensitive information about a complainant or to be alerted to a complaint in advance of initial Police contact in a potential criminal investigation.

6.11 Issue: How the Diocese dealt with allegations against PM which did not proceed to prosecution or other formal investigation.

The Diocese's focus on the complaint of 2004 seemed to be almost exclusively about PM's "counselling" relationship with Mr B, largely ignoring the other elements of the complaint from his former parish (see 2.9 and 2.10). Those elements included concerns about PM's behaviour on a parish holiday at the Northumberland coast. See the chronology entries for 13/09/04, 18/10/04 and 21/10/04. Without going into details here about the other issues, a very senior Police officer was clearly concerned enough to recommend PM's removal from his role as a Police Chaplain.

The description of the allegations against PM raised by Mr and Mrs G in 2014 (see table at section 3) shows that the Diocese determined that no action could be taken unless the couple were willing to give up their anonymity, despite the raising of some significant concerns.

The table at section 3 also refers to two men (Mr D and Mr E), who had both been teenagers when Mr A made his first complaint about PM in 1998. They came forward, separately, in late 2017, to say that they too had suffered abuse when they were young. One of their disclosures led to a full Police investigation, including an interview of PM under caution; the other did not go beyond the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser.

Finally, section 3 of this report also describes a complaint made on behalf of Mr F, a man with special needs, by a third party who was concerned at an interaction witnessed between him and PM.

Clearly, in dealing with these matters, the Diocese needed to balance the protection of potential victims with the rights of PM. However, risk assessment, perhaps especially in relation to safeguarding issues, is rarely clear cut. It is, inevitably, based to some extent on a balance of probabilities in that incontrovertible evidence that would satisfy a criminal court is only rarely available. Further, if allegations against someone holding a position of trust with vulnerable people are not proven, it does not mean that things can simply go back to how they were before. A potential risk has been raised and, therefore, has to be responded to in some way, with all due sensitivity to the possibility of false claims. The risk management principle of “defensible decisions” applies and safeguarding vulnerable people takes precedence over all other considerations.

What seems to be missing here is assurance that the Diocese held an overview of the various allegations and pieces of intelligence in the form of a dynamic risk assessment, one subject to regular review. The information noted here is all important, even if some allegations, for many good reasons, could not be taken forward.

That said, this need not always be a passive process of information-gathering, evaluation and review. It may be that more could have been done at the time, at least regarding more of the elements of the complaint of 2004 and the allegations made by Mr and Mrs G in 2014. The couple indicated that there had been other witnesses to some of the alleged behaviour by PM and they clearly understood the need to come forward in order to stop the same things happening to others. What prevented that was their stated fear of an adverse reaction from PM, should their concerns be disclosed to him. They may have felt differently at a later stage, once it became clearer that PM would not be returning to his parish, or they may have been willing to name other witnesses to what they saw as PM's abuse, who may have been able to provide other or further information.

Recommendation 9:

Even if allegations cannot be formally tested or proven, there should be a single point of contact within the Diocese, such as within the Safeguarding Team, holding an up to date, collated and evaluated overview of any and all risk information in each safeguarding case. Such risk assessments (and the risk management plans which flow from them) need to be dynamic in nature, updated on a regular basis but also, crucially, whenever new information or intelligence emerges.

6.12 NOTE: in the full version of this report, the conclusions and recommendation regarding Mr H are placed at this point. The associated recommendation is [Recommendation 10](#). The sequencing of recommendations in this version omits number 10, so that the rest of the numbering is consistent in both versions of the report.

6.13 Issue: Communication between Dioceses on safeguarding issues.

The chronology (23/06/17 and 06/07/17) indicates how Durham Diocese became aware of the pending action against PM. This was late in the history of this case and seemingly coincidental; it was the result of an enquiry to Newcastle Diocese from the Durham Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser, who was updating her list of clergy with Permission to Officiate (PTO) there. PM had held PTO in Durham since 2001.

The Bishop of Durham acted quickly to suspend, and later rescind, PM's PTO. The minutes of a Core Group meeting within Newcastle Diocese on 6th July 2017 record that, "it has come to the Diocese's attention that PM holds a PTO from Durham Diocese". If Newcastle Diocese was previously unaware of the PTO, it explains why Durham had not been informed of the situation, which would otherwise be a reasonable expectation in any case with safeguarding concerns. Durham was, thus, unaware not only of the Police investigation of PM during 2017 but also his arrest, though it did not lead to prosecution, in 2014 and the subsequent efforts to bring a disciplinary action. As PM had held PTO in Durham since 2001, there will have been no notification about the events of 2004 either.

The Durham Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser (DDSA) was interviewed for purposes of this review. The DDSA confirmed the above narrative and also that PM's Durham PTO was largely a convenience, to ease his work as a Police Chaplain, given that Northumbria Police covered some areas within Durham's Diocesan boundaries. PM did not generally minister in Durham's churches. Nevertheless, good safeguarding practice would indicate the need for disclosure between Dioceses where a priest works, or potentially works, in both and where risk has been identified.

More generally, the management of PTO was an issue that emerged during the Church of England's Past Cases Review (PCR2) of safeguarding cases, which was completed in 2021. The work on PCR2 in Newcastle Diocese noted improvements in practice over recent years, including a move to PTO increasingly being granted by Bishops only on a time-limited basis and a growing number of cases in which PTO was removed in response to safeguarding issues. However, PCR2 also noted the need for recording systems to keep pace with these welcome developments. It seemed often to be unclear which clergy were active in using their PTO and which were not, especially those who had retired but retained, or sought, PTO later. Other complications, in cases where clergy held PTO in more than one Diocese, or a PTO alongside a substantive role in different Dioceses, were noted.

Another issue of communication and information exchange between the Newcastle and Durham Dioceses in the PM case stemmed from the letter of 10th September 2020 (noted in the chronology) from the Archbishop of York to the Bishop of Newcastle, to confirm that the Diocese should appoint a pastor for PM, and anyone else who may need pastoral care. This was following PM's prohibition from ministry. It is recorded in this report that PM had already received counselling over a very long period, first within the Diocese from the priest who provided support and supervision to him following the complaint of 2004 (see 6.6). PM ended this relationship when he disagreed with the priest's contribution to the risk assessment of 2015. PM then turned down another offer of support, but has confirmed recently that he then had a private relationship with an independent counsellor, paid for by the Diocese. Notes of a Core Group meeting in early July 2019 saw this as an open-ended, though not indefinite, arrangement. However, it seems, according to the Diocese, that PM decided to terminate it, later in July 2019.

On PM's retirement, according to the Bishop's Chaplain, the Bishop of Newcastle spoke to the Bishop of Durham about longer-term pastoral care, as PM was moving to that Diocese. However, in his interview for this review, PM said that he had never heard from Durham Diocese and that, since his retirement, has had only his own personal support network to fall back on.

Subsequent enquiries for purposes of this review indicate that there is no written record in Durham Diocese of an enquiry about pastoral support for PM, though there may have been a personal approach. There is, however, a letter to PM from the Durham Safeguarding Adviser, dated 11th March 2019, setting out expectations on him, and the need for a safeguarding agreement, should he wish to worship in the Diocese. In that letter, PM was invited to contact the DSA should he wish to discuss anything.

It should be noted that the Clergy Discipline Measure, under which PM's prohibition from ministry was issued, does not require an offer of pastoral support. Also, he had been absent from work since August 2014 and the Diocese had already provided, and later paid for, support until July 2019, when the private arrangement in place at that time was ended by PM.

Recommendation 11:

Where safeguarding issues cross Diocesan boundaries, it is important to assess the need for communication and appropriate disclosures, including the potential for inter-Diocesan meetings. There is a very good example of this in this case; an invitation for the Durham DSA to attend Core Group meetings concerning PM after January 2018. However, the management of the PTO and pastoral support issues noted above suggest a need for closer scrutiny.

A system to ensure the Diocese is aware when its clergy hold PTO elsewhere, or if those with its Bishop's PTO have a role in other Dioceses, ought to be in place.

The management of PTO is picked up in the Gibb Review of 2017, referenced elsewhere in this report, with a recommendation that the Church should:

- “establish clear and consistent national guidance for granting and reviewing PTO in the case of clerics who have been the subject of substantiated safeguarding concerns;
- introduce arrangements for a national register of clergy with PTO;
- ensure that relevant safeguarding arrangements are applied consistently to retired clergy who are exercising ministry through a PTO and
- audit those arrangements to enable a regular report to the House of Bishops.”

These should be read as appropriate recommendations from the present review; hopefully they are already being taken forward at national level.

Recommendation 12:

Specifically on the issue of pastoral support for PM, it seems reasonable to suggest that, once the Archbishop had raised an expectation that he would be offered support following his prohibition from ministry, the Diocese should have ensured that this was seen through to some sort of conclusion.

6.14 Issue: Some administrative issues relating to Diocesan record-keeping and the archiving of documents.

There is a huge amount of documentation in this case, spread across a significant number of folders and files held in at least two locations in the Diocese. The same material often appears in several files.

In terms of electronic data storage, there has not been, until recently, a protocol for dating and naming documents, nor a consistent file structure, even within the safeguarding function.

Older documents, though that includes many produced in the present century, often lack dates or the names of those responsible for them. This includes letters and notes of meetings. The former Archdeacon of Lindisfarne interviewed as part of this review agreed with this observation.

The impression is that secretarial practice was, for some considerable time, to keep the correspondence and other filing for individual Bishops, Archdeacons (etc) as they each required, with no movement towards a single system. This may have sufficed for most purposes, but it is hard to sustain when documents are later copied to other people and form part of, for example, a separate, composite, safeguarding file. Despite these issues, the Diocese seems to operate efficiently enough but, and this is only another impression, that efficiency relies heavily on the personal knowledge and organisational memory of some key members of staff.

Recommendation 13:

Fortunately, and this was also noted in the Diocese's report on its PCR2 findings, there has been a considerable improvement in recording in recent years.

At the present time, the Diocese of Newcastle is one of ten dioceses involved nationally in the piloting of a new case management system for safeguarding records. Since June 2020, its Safeguarding Team has been operating a single, consistent system for dating, naming and storing electronic records. There are plans, over time, to scan and store older, paper documents. This recommendation, therefore, is simply that the Diocesan Safeguarding Team should continue with the progress currently being made towards this new recording and data storage system. Other Diocesan functions are outside the scope of this review, but it may be hoped they would wish to adopt a similar approach if this is not already in hand.

Appendix A: Sources

This review is based on:

- Scrutiny of all relevant documents held by the Diocese in relation to safeguarding procedures and investigations concerning Peter McConnell (PM) from 1998 to 2020.
- Examination of PM's "Blue File" (and two associated folders) held at Bishop's House, Newcastle upon Tyne.
- Transcript of the trial Judge's summing-up for the jury at PM's Crown Court trial in 2019 and later remarks at the point of sentencing.
- Reading of "An Abuse of Faith: The Independent Peter Ball Review" by Dame Moira Gibb, 2017. Referred to here as "the Gibb Review". This landmark case covers much of the same time period as that of PM and is a key document in the development of the Church of England's thinking and practice regarding sexual abuse by clergy.
- "Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy" (2015 edition, Church House Publishing).
- Church of England "Policy on Child Abuse 1995".
- Church of England "Policy on Child Protection 1999".
- Church of England "Clergy Discipline Measure 2003".
- Church of England "Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016".

Meetings and Interviews:

- Two interviews with the former Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser (2014 – 2020).
- Interview with the author of the independent risk assessment of PM completed in March 2015.
- Joint interview with the two Northumbria Police officers most closely involved in this case from 2014 to 2019.
- Two interviews with a former Archdeacon of Lindisfarne who was a key participant in the case, including leading for the Diocese on the disciplinary complaint of 2015-17.
- Interview with the Human Resources Manager for Newcastle Diocese, who provided Human Resources advice on issues relating to both PM and Mr H.
- Interview with the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser in Durham Diocese, where PM held Permission to Officiate alongside his positions in Newcastle.
- Interview with Mr A, who made an allegation about PM via his school in 1998 and the same allegation to Police in 2014.
- Interview with Peter McConnell, the subject of this review.