

# Press release: New Charity Inquiry: Birmingham Diocesan Trust

The Charity Commission, the independent regulator of charities in England and Wales, has opened a statutory inquiry into The Birmingham Diocesan Trust ([234216](#)). The inquiry is focused on the charity's safeguarding governance and the adequacy of its response to recent reviews. The inquiry was opened on 21 December 2018.

The charity's objects include the provision of religious services and education across Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Oxfordshire, Sandwell, Solihull, Staffordshire, Walsall, Warwickshire and Wolverhampton.

In February 2018 the charity notified the Commission that the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) had selected them as a case study and had listed a hearing into historic safeguarding issues at the charity for November 2018.

During the summer of 2018, as part of the charity's preparation for the hearing it proactively commissioned a number of reviews of its safeguarding policies, procedures and practices. In late October and November the charity provided the Commission with copies of the results of these independent audit reviews, which highlighted some serious failings and concerns over how the charity was handling safeguarding matters.

The Commission's role includes holding charities to account for their actions and/or inactions. The Commission requested further information from the charity via its solicitors about its response to the results of the reviews, to assess its management of any live risks, if the charity had adequate procedures on safeguarding in place and its response about the areas in need of improvement. The responses supplied during November and December were not sufficiently timely or adequate to satisfy the Commission, given the gravity of the issues raised by the reports nor did it provide adequate reassurance that the key risks were being swiftly and effectively managed.

Part of the charity's response to the review findings was to recruit a new interim head of safeguarding. His first report, three weeks in, emphasised the need to address the governance failures and ensure that the charity was taking sufficiently timely action and applying sufficient resource to respond to the concerns.

As a result, the Commission opened a statutory inquiry to examine and provide assurance about the charity's governance, operational management and its policies and practices with regard to safeguarding and people protection issues, particularly in relation to:

- Its risk management procedures, and handling of incidents reported since 2016
- Its responsibility to provide a safe environment for its beneficiaries,

staff and other charity workers

- Vetting and following of DBS procedures in relation to its employees, volunteers and other charity workers
- Its response to and actions in relation to the audit report review
- Sufficient steps are being taken to ensure public trust and confidence in the charity.

Safeguarding procedures in the schools that come under the oversight of the diocese are not, at this time, within the scope of the inquiry.

**Harvey Grenville, Head of Investigations and Enforcement said:**

The public rightly expect charities to ensure safeguarding is an absolute priority, so when anyone comes into contact with people representing a charity, they are protected and the risks managed.

The Birmingham Diocesan Trust is a large charity, providing services accessed weekly by some 60,000 people and has a wide scope; it works across many different regions and has a wide range of beneficiaries. The beneficiaries quite rightly expect to be confident and assured that the charity's safeguarding governance is fit for purpose, and any areas identified for improvement are swiftly and properly addressed.

We have opened a statutory inquiry into the charity to ensure it addresses these specific concerns as a matter of urgency. We are in liaison with, and working with the relevant statutory agencies to, ensure that any safeguarding risks are being managed appropriately.

After the opening of the inquiry, the Commission immediately met with the trustees. They are fully cooperating with the inquiry, and have confirmed that they are committed to resolving matters as soon as possible. They have taken some further actions to respond to the reports issues, including the appointment of two additional assistant safeguarding coordinators, a reorganisation of how safeguarding matters are reported to the trustees and the commissioning of external consultants to work with statutory agencies to ensure all live safeguarding risks are being managed appropriately. These will be relevant when considering our next regulatory steps.

Anyone who wishes to discuss safeguarding and the Archdiocese's work can contact the charity on 0121 230 6240. Alternatively, to contact the National Association for People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC), the number is 0808 801 0331 or the IICSA Truth Project can be contacted via its website [www.truthproject.org.uk](http://www.truthproject.org.uk) to discuss historic issues. For current safeguarding concerns that are of a criminal nature please contact your local police force on 101.

It is the Commission's policy, after it has concluded an inquiry, to publish a report detailing what issues the inquiry looked at, what actions were

undertaken as part of the inquiry and what the outcomes were. Reports of previous inquiries by the Commission are available on [GOV.UK](#).

Ends

## **Notes to Editors**

1. The Charity Commission is the regulator of charities in England and Wales. To find out more about our work see the [about us](#) page on GOV.UK.
2. Search for charities on our [check charity](#) tool.
3. Section 46 of the Charities Act 2011 gives the Commission the power to institute inquiries. The opening of an inquiry gives the Commission access to a range of investigative, protective and remedial legal powers. The Commission is not a statutory safeguarding agency. Further information on the Commission's remit in relation to safeguarding can be found in our [guidance](#).