

# **A Determination by the Bishop of Sheffield**

in the light of the Report of the Commissaries following a

Visitation at Sheffield Cathedral

1st November 2020 to 28<sup>th</sup> February 2021

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**Introduction**

*‘Finally beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things... and the God of peace will be with you’. Philippians 4.8-9*

I am immensely grateful to Peter Bounds (Chair of Council, Liverpool Cathedral; formerly CEO Liverpool City Council), Dee Cooley (Chapter Safeguarding Adviser, York Minster), Ellie Gage (Director of People and Culture, Christians Against Poverty) and Peter Holliday (Chapter Member and Chair of Finance Committee, Lichfield Cathedral; former member of the Choral Foundation; former CEO of St Giles’ Hospice, Lichfield) for the skill, wisdom and dedication with which they have discharged their responsibilities with respect to this Visitation. I am also extremely grateful to the Chapter and staff of Sheffield Cathedral for the support they have offered to the Visitation Team in challenging circumstances, and to all the participants in the Visitation for their readiness to speak with team members with honesty and courage.

I have read the Visitation Report with care. The Report, which runs to nearly 80 pages, is confidential to me – though I have chosen to share it, confidentially, with the members of the Cathedral Chapter. Overall, it is undeniably uncomfortable reading.

However, it is important to reiterate here the mitigations noted by the Visitation Team in the introduction to their Report.

They acknowledge, first, the severely restricting impact of the pandemic, which has meant that team members have not even been able to meet with one another in person, never mind with those they have interviewed. The whole exercise has been conducted remotely, without a single opportunity to visit the Cathedral in person. In addition, it means that the Visitation took place when the Cathedral Chapter and staff were at full stretch dealing with the challenges of the present time.

Secondly, the Team acknowledge that the report does not offer a complete overview of Cathedral life. Rather, it focuses on seven areas about which concerns had been raised with me: inevitably therefore it creates an unbalanced impression and overlooks or downplays the many successful and valued aspects of Cathedral life.

Moreover, in relation to the issues addressed in the Visitation, I must acknowledge my own responsibility. Throughout 2020, and even before, I failed to find a swifter, more effective way to address matters of which I was being made aware, and I profoundly regret this. I feel this keenly, because I am in absolutely no doubt about the value of Cathedrals to their cities and regions, and to their Dioceses, as the seat of the Bishop and as centres of worship and mission. The years I spent as Canon Chancellor at Lichfield Cathedral (2006-2012) and as Dean of Liverpool (and therefore as a member of the College of Deans, 2012-2017) were profoundly formative for me, leaving me with a high regard for the civic influence and evangelistic potential which our Cathedrals enjoy, and with a deep appreciation for the English Cathedral choral tradition.

Finally, I recognise that my decision to initiate a Visitation of the Cathedral, following the unexpected resignation of the Dean of Sheffield on 1 October 2020, and the subsequent Visitation process itself, have been the source of considerable distress and anxiety to many members of the Cathedral

community. I am particularly sorry that this additional strain has come at a time when, on account of the deprivations associated with the pandemic, many of us have been struggling with our mental health and wellbeing, and not least because I am well aware that the Cathedral is blessed with a wealth of good-hearted and selfless servants across the organisation, for whom I thank God.

Nevertheless, I believe the Report to be a thorough and perceptive exploration of the issues identified in the Visitation Schedule and I welcome the recommendations made by the Team. I am immensely grateful to the Cathedral Chapter for its readiness to engage with the findings of the Report as well as with its recommendations. This gives me real hope, that this Determination will assist the Chapter addressing the distressing events of 2020, and will help to clear the way for the appointment of the next Dean of Sheffield. It has been my heartfelt prayer throughout this process, and will remain so in the coming days, that, by the power of God's Holy Spirit, and through the mercy of Christ Jesus, the Cathedral will indeed realise its vision to be 'a place for all people'.

In the light of the findings and the recommendations of the Report, I am setting out now, in this Determination, for the public record, my directions to Chapter. I am grateful for the extent to which, following our conversations, Chapter has already indicated its readiness to embrace them.

### **Section 1: The culture and HR ethos of the Cathedral**

The Visitation Team found evidence of an environment at the Cathedral which has tolerated bullying and blaming and has been characterised by a fear of speaking out. There is a pattern of people who have fallen out of favour at the Cathedral subsequently exiting the organisation, and the perception of this for onlookers among the staff and volunteers has only served to reinforce their fears and concerns. It is clear to me that members of Chapter were genuinely unaware of this pattern. They have expressed to me in the strongest possible terms their abhorrence of such behaviour and their readiness to work energetically to prevent any future recurrence of it. I welcome this.

In addition, a lack of cross-department engagement has meant weak relationships, which have in turn resulted in poor interactions and have created room for distrust and misunderstanding.

Finally, the Visitation Team found that the stretched capacity of senior managers, coupled in some instances with inexperience, and the fact that they have not been given adequate supervision, development or training to fulfil their roles effectively, have been key factors in the issues this Visitation was commissioned to explore.

#### **In the light of this, I direct that Chapter should:**

1. Engage an expert third party to undertake an audit of senior management skills, capabilities and management styles, to ensure that all staff, but especially senior managers, are equipped with the requisite experience and abilities to enable a journey to a healthy and happy future for the Cathedral, including, eg, where appropriate the introduction of performance management plans that specifically seek to strengthen and develop staff. Where appropriate, individuals should be encouraged to achieve qualifications from national awarding bodies.
2. Introduce and sustain a fully-fledged pattern of routine line-management and staff meetings across the Cathedral, together with annual appraisals, properly recorded, and with goals agreed for each employee which are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound.
3. Fully review and refresh the Staff Handbook, in particular reducing the warning for failure to follow the Code of Conduct to being 'may', rather than 'will' result in disciplinary action.
4. Create a bespoke Volunteer Handbook as part of a dedicated volunteer engagement strategy.
5. Ensure that all recruitment processes are robust and open and in line with Safer Recruitment

6. Review job descriptions to ensure that they are in line with Cathedral aims and objectives, and that there is clarity of responsibilities and accountabilities, for example in Safeguarding or volunteer engagement.

## **Section 2: Safeguarding good practice**

The Visitation Team found evidence of real progress in relation to Safeguarding since 2019, especially in the process of preparation for the SCIE audit that autumn.

In addition, the Visitation Team found, specifically in relation to interventions where the running of the Cathedral Toddler group and the regulation of online activity by the Music Department were concerned, that the application of Church of England policy and guidance to children's activities was appropriate and proportionate – although other factors meant that the cost of implementation was unnecessarily high and resulted in the closure of both the Cathedral Toddler Group and (ultimately) the Cathedral Choir. The Visitation Team therefore concluded that the Cathedral has not always evidenced a good, child-centred culture in its management of activities involving children.

Moreover, in the case of the application of safeguarding policy to the Master of Music, the Team found the interventions were inappropriate and disproportionate – although, in mitigation, the Team also found that a lack of clarity on the part of partners, including the Diocese of Sheffield, played a part in this regard.

Further, the Visitation Team found no evidence of a strategic approach to improving and embedding safeguarding and some real confusion about the purpose and function of the Music Department Learning Lessons Review as the Terms of Reference and the expectations of some Chapter members (as commissioners) are misaligned.

### **In the light of this, I direct that Chapter should:**

1. Develop a Safeguarding Strategy to embed a good safeguarding culture across the whole Cathedral, with a clear action plan for meeting this objective.
2. Re-affirm the Mission of the Cathedral, as 'a place for all people', with particular emphasis on children and young people, and create a clear strategy to affirm and involve children in the life of the cathedral.
3. Revise the membership of the panel before the Music Department Learning Lessons Review is resumed, to ensure the necessary arms-length independence, by excluding members of the Chapter and its officers; and revise the terms of reference to ensure they align with the expectations of all the members of the Chapter.
4. Ensure that all Church Officers understand the safeguarding responsibilities pertaining to their role, including in the planning of activities and in following processes and procedures. This responsibility should be clearly conveyed in the recruitment, induction and regular formal supervision of all staff and volunteers.
5. Ensure clarity and transparency in the interface between HR and safeguarding processes, with no ambiguity about which is being followed at particular points and why.
6. Revise the *"Joint Protocol between Sheffield Cathedral and Sheffield Diocese – Cathedral Safeguarding Advisor"* and the *"Sheffield Cathedral Safeguarding Handbook"* to ensure that they align, with particular attention to the relationship between the DSA and the CSA and their respective decision-making responsibilities.
7. As a step towards enabling the whole Cathedral community to move on, express its regret that in the case of the former Master of Music there was some confusion of HR and safeguarding processes.

### **Section 3: Chapter's handling of complaints**

The Visitation Team found that the Cathedral Complaints Procedure raises a question about its robustness for matters relating to senior managers, on account of their own place in the procedure, but found no evidence that Chapter saw the invidious position in which this placed senior members of staff.

The Team also heard from multiple people that they were not confident in the Cathedral complaints and grievance processes. A few participants in the Visitation even noted that some who had raised a complaint or grievance were no longer in employment or service of the Cathedral, and that life could become difficult for some people who raised complaints or grievances.

In relation to two specific complaints processes in 2020, the Team found evidence that recommendations had not been followed through. It has to be admitted that in these instances, the poor behaviour of complainants was not helpful. However, this fact does not remove from Chapter its obligations as a governing body to fulfil the role of objective oversight.

The Visitation Team has encouraged me to put some parameters in place for Chapter to guide its future handling of any complaints.

#### **In the light of this, I direct that Chapter should:**

1. Ensure that any complaints against members of the Cathedral staff are handled with an independence and thoroughness not evident in the cases reviewed by the Visitors.
2. Ensure that complaints are handled in strict accordance with the ACAS code, with appropriately expert HR advice
3. On the first such occasion, provide me with an account on completion to reassure me that due process has been followed, and followed through.

### **Section 4: Lessons to be learned from the decision to disband the Cathedral Choir**

The Visitation Team found there was no meaningful consultation with stakeholders concerning closure of the choir prior to the decision on 6 July 2020. This failure, together with the failure to deliver a clear and consistent message about the reasons for the decision, compounded the reputational and relational hurt.

Moreover, the Visitation Team found that, according to testimony of choir parents, the disbanding of the choir impacted on the young people, not only on their mental health, but also on their faith.

#### **In the light of this, I direct that Chapter should**

1. As a step to enabling the whole Cathedral community to move on and to the repairing of relationships, give serious consideration to issuing an unreserved apology for the unintended hurt that has been caused by the closure of the Cathedral choir and in particular to former choristers.
2. Explore the possibilities for some process of mediation with former members of the Cathedral choir and chorister parents.

### **Section 5: Governance**

The Visitation Team does not believe that the Chapter has been curious enough, or challenging enough, in fulfilling its role to ensure the good governance of the Cathedral. There is a natural propensity in Cathedrals to accept without scrutiny information and advice from the Dean, the residentiary canons and senior managers, but that only makes proper scrutiny by the executive members of a governing body all the more essential.

The Team found that while some of the requisite tools of good governance are in place (such as a risk register), they are not necessarily well used.

**In the light of this, I direct that Chapter should:**

1. Undertake a thorough review of the Cathedral's governance arrangements
2. Review in particular the adequacy of the flow of information to Chapter members from all areas of Cathedral life, seeking ways to access information proactively.
3. Adopt a more open approach with regard to their own membership and to their proceedings, publishing names of Chapter members, and (redacted) minutes of meetings, on the Cathedral website, and inviting communication and interaction from members of the Cathedral community and its users.
4. Re-engage with the College of Canons, and ensure that it meets as required under the Statutes
5. Review with the Cathedral Council the need for a replacement body, in the light of the pending Cathedrals measure
6. Consider with me how the Cathedral can more fully undertake its role as Mother Church of the Diocese and seat of the Bishop

**Section 6: Cathedral strategy**

The Visitation Team endorses the vision of the Cathedral to be '*a place for all people*' and celebrates with the Chapter the way that significant improvements to the buildings and an increasing programme of cultural and hospitality activities, have brought more people and a broader spectrum of people into the Cathedral.

However, the Team found no evidence of any approach to considering the full ramifications of such a vision; no objectives or targets have been set and accordingly there is no means of monitoring progress towards the objective.

**In the light of this, I direct that Chapter should:**

1. Continue to define the ingredients of a new strategy (without pre-empting the need for the new Dean to take the lead on its development) and, in particular, consider how the Cathedral can contribute to and benefit from the Diocesan Strategy.
2. Evaluate those areas of Cathedral life which should be priorities for target-setting and monitoring, with well thought-out answers to the questions 'how will we achieve our goals?' and 'how will we know we're doing it?'

**Section 7: Financial sustainability**

The Visitation Team notes that Cathedral has responded well in the area of its finances to the challenge of Covid-19 and will have concluded the 2020 financial year in a better financial position than originally budgeted. This is an achievement to be celebrated.

The Team also notes that Cathedral remains highly dependent on the grant received annually from the Sheffield Church Burgesses.

It further notes that the incoming Cathedrals Measure will require tighter financial governance.

**In the light of this, I direct that Chapter should:**

1. Discuss with the Sheffield Church Burgesses the possibility of setting the annual grant the previous October rather than in January, at the start of its financial year.
2. Prepare a longer-term financial plan than one year, perhaps adopting a three-year rolling budget

3. Commission a review of the organizational structure and capacity of the Cathedral, to ensure that all necessary outputs are achievable, and where they are not to provide the necessary support and reinforcement.
4. Create a governance finance committee, to consider also issues of audit and risk
5. Ensure tender documentation is complete
6. Agree with the incoming Dean a transparent level of personal expenses, which should not include purchases made directly on behalf of the Cathedral

Finally, I endorse the first general recommendation of the Visitation Team and therefore direct that Chapter should *'reflect on the events of the last twelve to fifteen months and the circumstances that gave rise to the Visitation, and consider how such contention and disharmony might be avoided in the future'*.

These are weighty matters. Our capacity to meet the demands of this situation inevitably fall short. *'Who is sufficient for these things?'* (2 Corinthians 2.16b). As we approach the climax of our journey through Lent, to Holy Week and the glory of Easter, may Christ Jesus give us grace to grow in holiness, to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him; and may the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.

The Rt Revd Dr Pete Wilcox, Bishop of Sheffield  
19<sup>th</sup> March 2021