

Julie Morgan AS/MS  
Y Dirprwy Weinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol  
Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref JM/01323/20

Janet Finch-Saunders  
Chair  
Petitions Committee

5 November 2020

Dear Janet,

**Petition P-05-954 Petition for a public inquiry by the Welsh Government into the historic child abuse on Caldey Island**

Thank you for your letter dated 7 August and for sharing the letters you had received from the following:

Encl:

1. Switalskis Solicitors to Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services, 20 May 2020
2. Ben Lake MP to Chair of the Petitions Committee, 28 May 2020
3. Dyfed Powys Police to Caldey Island Victims Campaign Coordinator, 1 June 2020
4. Watkins and Gunn Solicitors to Chair of the Petitions Committee, 5 June 2020
5. Caldey Island Victims Campaign Coordinator to Chair of the Petitions Committee, 29 June 2020
6. Petitioner to Petitions Committee, 8 July 2020

With the exception of the first letter from Switalskis Solicitors this is the first time the Government is seeing the other 5 letters you have shared.

The Welsh Government has considered our position in light of the correspondence you shared and provide this further response to our previous letter dated 6 April 2020, giving particular consideration to the indications noted by the Committee that:

- The petitioner's intended civil case against the organisation which operated and controlled monks at the Abbey is on hold pending a police investigation and the inquiry being called for;
- The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) will not be specifically considering the abuse which took place on Caldey Island and expressed a desire that the Welsh Government should give further consideration to the issues of a public inquiry in light of this.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

As set out in my previous correspondence dated the 6 April 2020, the matter of Caldey Island has been in front of the Senedd numerous times since 2017.

Ministers have indicated their abhorrence at the historical abuse that took place on Caldey Island. We have consistently encouraged any person who has any information of abuse in Caldey Abbey, Pembrokeshire to contact the police.

The petition you are considering says:

‘As a victim of child abuse by catholic priests and monks I wish to get the Welsh Government to hold a public inquiry into the historic child abuse on Caldey Island. Victims need the truth and answers as to why an ongoing investigation for 29 years has failed the victims. The inquiry will help to safeguard children in the future.’

As previously advised the Welsh Government has considered this issue a number of times, and has to date resisted calls for an inquiry on the basis that it did not believe the case had been made. We have considered this decision taking into account the information that has become available since my letter to you dated the 6 April 2020, and Welsh Government’s view remains unchanged for the reasons set out below.

We were made aware of the police decision to conclude the investigation on 13 August 2020. In their letter to Ms Mulholland, dated 1 June 2020, the police confirmed their reasons for finalisation of their investigation and gave their reasons as set out below:

‘...the identified suspects are deceased; there is insufficient information to prove that persons in authority failed to act to safeguard O’Connell, prevent offences, or that they concealed offences committed at Caldey Island.’

This supports the decision set out in my letter dated 6 April not to proceed with an inquiry due to their being insufficient information available; on the basis that as the key suspects are deceased any public inquiry or otherwise would not realise any learning either from the perpetrators motivation, nor how the perpetrator managed to evade capture for such a period. This would have been a key inquiry outcome. It is also clear that as a result of the limited information available the police investigation would have little to offer any inquiry in terms of lessons learnt. We do not believe that there is sufficiently strong new information to make Welsh Government rethink its case.

We acknowledge and have considered the contribution from other correspondents who have written to the Petitions Committee in support of the petitioners call for an inquiry. We have considered these and have responded where they are material to considering the call for an inquiry.

In the event that the petitioner or any other individual, takes issue or has concern with regards to the police investigation, and/or their decision not to investigate further, it is open to them to raise this through the appropriate Police channels.

On 25 August 2020, IICSA confirmed that it held its last public hearing in its Roman Catholic Church investigation in November 2019 and is due to publish the resulting report this coming Autumn. It has also announced its final investigation and that public hearings will conclude this year, and that in these circumstances, the Inquiry will be unable also to look at allegations relating to Caldey Island in its busy investigation and public hearing programme.

Your letter asserts that IICSA “*expressed a desire that the Welsh Government should give further consideration to the issue of a public inquiry in light of this.*” IICSA has NOT expressed or indicated to Welsh Government, nor can we find a public comment attributed to IICSA of this desire.

Whilst IICSA has not specifically considered Caldey Island as part of its inquiry, there will be wide ranging lessons learnt and recommendations made as part of its investigation into Religious Institutions and Setting, and, the Anglican Church investigations. In both of these investigations Welsh Government provided witness statement to. As you may be aware only as recently as 6 October, the inquiry published its report in to the Anglican Church. It made many recommendations for the Church in England and for the Church in Wales. For the Church in Wales it included recommending that:

- operational advice of provincial safeguarding officers must be followed by all members of the clergy and other Church officers.
- those who are volunteers and who do not follow the directions of provincial safeguarding officers should be removed from working with children and this should be enshrined in policy
- provincial safeguarding officers should have the right to see personnel files of clergy, office holders, employees or others if concerns and complaints are raised about child protection or safeguarding.
- And that the Church of England and the Church in Wales should each introduce a Church-wide policy on the funding and provision of support to victims and survivors of child sexual abuse concerning clergy, Church officers or those with some connection to the Church. The policy should clearly set out the circumstances in which different types of support, including counselling, should be offered. It should make clear that support should always be offered as quickly as possible, taking into account the needs of the victim over time. The policy should take account of the views of victims and survivors. It should be mandatory for the policy to be implemented across all dioceses.
- And it says the Church should have independent auditing of its safeguarding

Welsh Government is subject to the inquiry’s findings and recommendations. We have already committed to take into account any findings, lessons learnt and recommendations it makes to improve child protection and safeguarding in Wales.

Having had the opportunity to reconsider this matter, and taking into account the petitioners legal representatives letter dated the 20 May, we can confirm that the fact that the petitioner has a civil claim pending has not been taken into account when coming to this decision.

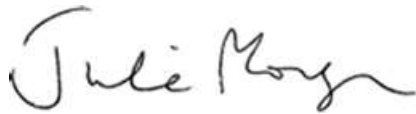
The Government also refutes the assertion that it ‘vehemently opposes’ a public inquiry and this is in some way equates to an institutional cover up. Welsh Government has given careful consideration to its position, taking into account the correspondence received since the 6 April 2020, and remains of the view that there are strong reasons not to proceed with a public inquiry.

We have yet to see the response of the Church in Wales to the IICSA recommendations and will work with the Welsh Interfaith council to ensure the recommendations are applied and acted upon.

Finally and by no means last. The Inquiry will close its doors to the Truth Project during 2021. We have urged all victims and survivors of historical abuse to share their experiences with the inquiry so that we may all learn from them. The inquiry recognises their value in both learning and providing a closure for most if not all victims and survivors. The Truth project can be contacted on 0800 917 1000, by email at [contact@iicsa.org.uk](mailto:contact@iicsa.org.uk) or in writing at Freepost IICSA Independent Inquiry.

I understand that victims want closure and they think a public inquiry would provide this. However, on the basis of what we know, there really does not seem to be the case for one and there is no indication that a public inquiry would uncover any significant insights we do not already have into the situation. We will however of course revisit this decision in the light of any new information we receive.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie Morgan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Julie Morgan AS/MS**

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Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services