

## **Petition P-05-954**

### **Petition for a public inquiry by the Welsh Government into the historic child abuse on Caldey Island**

**Response to the Deputy Minister's letter to the Petitions Committee of 5 November 2020**

**Dinah Mulholland, Caldey Island Survivors Campaign Coordinator**

**22/11/2020**

In response to the Deputy Minister's letter of 5 November 2020, David Greenwood has asked that I pass on to the Petitions Committee that his hopes were that a public inquiry would provide an explanation on the lack of police action, a fuller view of the numbers of children involved, and whether any other statutory bodies were alerted to abuse and what was their response.

I have some comments of my own that I would like to add.

Firstly, a couple of minor points. One is that the Deputy Minister states that the matter of historic child sexual abuse on Caldey Island has come before the Senedd numerous times. I have only been able to find two times when it has been discussed in the Senedd – on 29 November 2017 and on 6 February 2018. If there have been other occasions, it would be very helpful if I could be made aware of them.

The second minor point concerns the Deputy Minister's statement that:

'as the key suspects are deceased any public inquiry or otherwise would not realise any learning ... from the perpetrators motivation'

I find this statement to be a matter of some concern. The motivation of perpetrators of child sexual abuse is not, and should never be, the subject of this proposed public inquiry.

My major points are as follows:

#### **1. Dyfed Powys Police**

The Deputy Minister refers to the letter from the Chief Constable of Dyfed Powys Police, to me, which provides information on the finalisation of their investigation and their reasons for the decision to not investigate further:

'...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.'

The police, and the Deputy Minister, seem to believe that because the named perpetrators are dead that nothing can be gained from further investigation or a public inquiry. But Jimmy Savile died in 2011 and the police investigation into his crimes began in 2012.

One of the reasons for requesting a public inquiry is to examine the responses of statutory agencies, including the police, rather than accepting those responses at face value. A public inquiry could discover not just what the police did, but as David Greenwood has pointed out, what they did not do. There are several areas of concern that have come to light so far regarding the police response to Kevin O Connell, and two other victims have contacted the campaign to express concern about lack of Dyfed Powys Police action after reporting abuse and evidence of abuse.

The police delayed acting in connection with the abuse reported by Kevin O'Connell, and only began an investigation when Ben Lake MP, at the request of Kevin O'Connell, queried their delay.

One officer, whilst taking a statement from Kevin O'Connell, was verbally dismissive of the impact of the abuse, saying, "It was only a bit of touching." This has unfortunately is part of a pattern of not taking either Kevin O'Connell or his experiences seriously. Kevin has been badly let down by them. His emails have gone unanswered. His questions have been ignored, his disabilities and post-traumatic stress disregarded.

Police enquiries into the abuse reported by Kevin O'Connell were so delayed that the second perpetrator that Kevin named, [REDACTED], died a year after Kevin's report to the police, without any contact having been made with [REDACTED] by Dyfed Powys Police. There appears to be a pattern here. Another victim reported their abuse to the Isle of Wight force, who sent the report on to Dyfed Powys. They then failed to make contact with the victim.<sup>i</sup> Yet another victim contacted Dyfed-Powys Police with evidence after the S4C documentary about Kevin's return to Caldey Island was broadcast in May 2019, and to this date has heard nothing back from them.<sup>ii</sup>

Kevin, and other victims, have lost faith in Dyfed-Powys Police and do not feel confident in their ability to appropriately investigate, or their commitment to investigate, historic child sexual abuse on Caldey Island.

The Deputy Minister tasks the victims with a significant challenge which they may not be able to meet. This is to discover what did not happen in terms of a police response, which is undocumented, rather than what did happen which is a documented matter. This is also true of the other agencies that may, or may not, have been involved in reports of abuse on Caldey Island.

## **2. The relationship between Caldey Abbey, IICSA, and the Catholic Church**

One point that I raised in my previous statement to the Petitions Committee has not been addressed in the Deputy Minister's response. In my opinion this point is crucial to understanding the need for an inquiry. It relates to the extraordinary position of Caldey Abbey in relation to the Roman Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church have in recent years improved their safeguarding procedures and practice, and hopefully will further improve safeguarding as a result of IICSA's recommendations. However, the Catholic Church does not in fact have jurisdiction over Caldey Abbey. It therefore cannot ensure effective safeguarding on the island.

In May 2019 ITV Wales reported that the Catholic Diocese of Menevia stated that although they had been advising the Abbey on their safeguarding policies and practices for the last 18 months, Caldey was not their responsibility. Further, despite assurances from the Abbey that they are complying with the 2018 review of the All Wales Child Protection Procedures, the then Bishop of Menevia commented in 2019 that 'the Abbey has insisted on retaining its oversight of any specific cases, past, present, or in the future.'<sup>iii</sup>

Caldey Abbey is not part of the existing structures of the Catholic Church. It is an Abbey of the Trappist Cistercian Order, under the Belgian Cistercian jurisdiction of Scourmont (*Abbaye Notre-Dame de Scourmont, Chimay, Belgium*). The Abbey has no direct accountability to the Catholic Church and Diocese of Menevia and is under no obligation to follow recommendations from IICSA to the Catholic Church.

Neither do the Church of England, or the Church in Wales, have jurisdiction over Caldey Abbey, and the Deputy Minister's remarks on IICSA findings in regard to the Church of England and Church in Wales, lessons learnt and recommendations to improve child protection and safeguarding in Wales with the Welsh Interfaith Council, do not have relevance in the context of Caldey Island unless Welsh Government have the powers to enforce the Abbey's future compliance with those recommendations.

There is a hole in the net of the Abbey's accountability that goes beyond the reach of the institutions and remedies suggested by the Deputy Minister.

### **3. Closure, and the scope of what needs to be discovered.**

Regarding the Deputy Minister's comment that she understands that 'victims want closure and they think a public inquiry would provide this'. Vaughan Gething MS has said, in the context of the UK Infected Blood Inquiry, that an inquiry was necessary, because:

"We do need to understand what went wrong in the past because without that there'll be no sense of closure for people who have absolutely been let down".<sup>iv</sup>

Kevin O'Connell and the other victims desperately need closure, but it is not feasible for them to find closure by the means that the Deputy Minister suggests, ie via police complaints procedures. This is not just because their trust in the police has broken down.

It is also that the range of what needs to be uncovered regarding the perpetration of abuse at Caldey is immense: in terms of the duration of time; the potential number of victims; the possible number of perpetrators; the knowledge or lack of it and response or lack of it from the police and other statutory authorities; the reaction of the Abbey itself; what evidence there is or not within the Abbey's records; whether the police attempted to seek out any evidence within those records, did they visit the island, did they attempt to find any other victims.

It is simply not possible for traumatised victims, lay persons, to find out all of this. It is surely the duty of the Welsh Government to enable this so that everyone, not just the victims, understand how it happened that so many children were not protected from this abuse, and were let down by an overwhelming failure of all the agencies and bodies concerned.

My final point is that Caldey Island is a private owned island off the West Wales coast, that has housed and shielded monks who sexually abused children, housed and shielded convicted paedophiles, and seem to be unaccountable to the law. Children still visit the island. The Abbey is still acting outside of any jurisdiction requiring those children to be made safe.

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<sup>i</sup> Victim can be contacted

<sup>ii</sup> Victim can be contacted

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.itv.com/news/wales/2019-05-14/calls-for-public-inquiry-into-historical-child-abuse-on-caldey-island-as-another-victim-comes-forward/>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-49045953>