

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



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-954
Ein cyf/Our ref JM/00186/2

Janet Finch-Saunders AM
Chair, Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Ty Hywel
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

6 April 2020

Dear Janet,

Thank you for your letter of 11 March.

The matter of Caldey Island has been in front of the Assembly Chamber numerous times since 2017.

Ministers have all 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. I too would reiterate this call.

Some of the victim / survivors have received compensation, those who have not should seek legal advice if they wish to pursue a case for compensation.

If any victim / survivor wants to share their experiences I would urge them to contact the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse's Truth Project; The Inquiry's office in Wales is taking statements from those people who want to share their experience of abuse with them. The sessions are held in private.

Feedback received from victims and survivors who have attended sessions has been very positive.

The petition you are considering says:

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
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Gohebiaeth.Julie.Morgan@llyw.cymru
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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 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.”

Welsh Government has considered this issue a number of times. It has, to this point, resisted the calls for an inquiry and does not think the case for it has been made.

As a government we are entrusted with duties, and responsibilities, to reach evidence based decisions, without favour. We have considered whether or not an inquiry would realise outcomes from which learning would occur to improve future safeguarding outcomes.

We considered the actions of the police. The police did investigate the allegations in 2014 and 2016 and in each case decided not to pursue the matter any further. The first time the allegations were brought to the attention of the police were in 2014. The petition is not correct as there is we have no evidence of an ongoing 29 year investigation.

Two critical factor affected the Police decision not to progress matters.

First the unavailability of the two key people who could give evidence in regard to any allegations. The perpetrator Kotik and the Abbot, both of whom had died. Neither could be charged or compelled to give evidence.

A public inquiry or otherwise would not realise any learning either from their motivation, nor how the perpetrator managed to evade capture for such a period. This would have been a key inquiry outcome. The police would have little to offer the inquiry in terms of learning from the investigations. We also considered that there is an ongoing Independent Inquiry (the Independent Inquiry in to Child Sexual Abuse - IICSA) which is looking at institutional failure to protect children and young people. Welsh Government has informed the Independent inquiry into child sexual abuse of the Caldey island events. IICSA has said this is a matter of interest to them. We did not consider it is a good use of our limited resources to duplicate the IICSA inquiry.

Secondly, we considered that the police interviewed the parents who were told about the abuse by their children and chose not to inform the authorities.

We considered if such an inquiry would assist those abused to obtain swift justice and or compensation. As reported in the Western Mail, in 2017 six women received compensation from the island’s abbey after bringing a legal action highlighting they had been abused by Father Thaddeus Kotik. We considered as this action had already successfully resulted in justice for those women, and compensation, and without any public inquiry in place; we are not convinced an inquiry would add anything that has already been achieved through the available routes to support further claims for redress.

We considered a further purpose (of an inquiry) would be to learn lessons about the behaviour of institutions. Firstly, this is the key reason for the Independent inquiry (IICSA) and to hold an inquiry in this case would be duplicating that inquiry’s work. Secondly, we noted in the view of the Children’s Commissioner there is insufficient detail to conduct an investigation.

Finally we considered the ongoing legal action being pursued by Kevin O’Connell who is a victim of historical Child Sexual Abuse at Caldey Island. Mr O’Connell, was recently featured on a TV programme, and has called for a public Inquiry into the events on the island, he has begun legal action through his solicitor, Michael Imperato. It would not be

appropriate to announce if the Welsh Government would or would not launch an inquiry into these events whilst the legal action is pending.

We consider there are strong reasons, other than simply costs, not to proceed with an inquiry. It is unlikely the Government will change its mind without evidence to the contrary.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julie', written in a cursive style.

Julie Morgan AC/AM

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