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Government response

Watch Tower: Statement on administrative court proceedings

From: The Charity Commission (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission>)

Part of: Statements on live cases: Charity Commission
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statements-on-live-cases-charity-commission>)

First published: 19 January 2017

Commission issues public statement on settlement of legal proceedings.



CHARITY COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

The Commission opened a statutory inquiry into the Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society of Britain (<http://apps.charitycommission.gov.uk/Showcharity/RegisterOfCharities/CharityWithPartB.aspx?RegisteredCharityNumber=1077961&SubsidiaryNumber=0>) ('the charity') on 27 May 2014, to investigate how the charity safeguards children and adults at risk. Although the charity challenged the Commission's decision to open a statutory inquiry in a number of courts, its challenge to the inquiry decision was concluded in July 2016 when the Supreme Court refused to grant the charity permission to appeal further.

As part of the inquiry, on 20 June 2014 the Commission issued a Production Order (Reference No. 346/1415) to the charity and its trustees under section 52(1) of the Charities Act 2011, requiring the disclosure of documents that the Commission considered were relevant to the inquiry. The charity challenged the Commission's Production Order by way of judicial review and in March 2016 the Court of Appeal decided that the application should be heard by the Administrative Court rather than the First-tier Tribunal. The Administrative Court was due to hear the charity's challenge to the Production Order, following the Supreme Court decision in July 2016.

The charity has now provided a response to the Production Order by making certain documents available for inspection by the Commission and, since the Production Order was issued, the Commission has obtained additional information from the charity and other sources. The Commission has therefore decided to revoke the Production Order and the charity has agreed to withdraw its application for judicial review. A Consent Order has been made by the Administrative Court to conclude the proceedings.

With the legal proceedings now settled, the Commission will continue to work with the charity to establish the facts and understand the charity's safeguarding policy, procedures and practices in order to explore the issues that are the subject of the ongoing statutory inquiry and address the Commission's regulatory concerns. The inquiry remains ongoing and the Commission will publish a report of its findings at its conclusion.

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