

Chapter 22: Contents

Module 15 – Bawnmore Boys’ Home

	Para
Introduction..	1
Bawnmore and its origins.	5
The buildings	7
Numbers	8
Staffing..	17
Absconding..	21
Conditions in Bawnmore..	23
Bullying..	25
Physical and emotional abuse	28
Sexual abuse	29
Records, monitoring and inspection	52
Departmental inspections	55
Findings of systemic failings	57

Introduction

- 1 Although Bawnmore Boys’ Home was examined as part of Module 15 of the Inquiry because a number of those who were resident there were later moved to Kincora Boys’ Hostel, we consider that Bawnmore should be dealt with in a separate chapter of our Report. Bawnmore is not to be confused with another children’s home of the same name in South Belfast. The Bawnmore in this chapter was the home at Mill Road, Newtownabbey, Co Antrim, which existed between 1952 and 1977.
- 2 The evidence relating to Bawnmore was considered on days 208, 209 and 210, during which we heard evidence in person from four applicants: HIA 112, HIA 532, HIA 199 and HIA 409. We considered the evidence of HIA 83 who gave evidence at an earlier stage of the Inquiry, and we considered it unnecessary to ask him to give evidence again. We also received evidence from two former members of staff: BM 4 gave evidence in person, whilst BM 13 provided the Inquiry with a written statement.
- 3 We received a witness statement from Fionnuala McAndrew on behalf of the Health and Social Care Board, as the successor to the Belfast Welfare Authority and the Northern Health and Social Services Board (NHSSB), which took over Bawnmore with the reorganisation of local government in 1973 and ran it until it closed in 1977. We also received a witness statement from Dr Hilary Harrison on behalf of what was at that time the Department of Health and Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and is now the Department of Health, and from Richard Pengelly, who is Permanent Secretary of the same department.
- 4 Bawnmore was one of the homes investigated by the Hughes Inquiry because of offences involving the abuse of children at the home. They came to light during the wider Caskey Phase One investigation by the RUC, which had been set up following the publication of the article in the Irish Independent of 24 January 1980 to which we refer in greater detail in the chapters relating to Kincora. The Caskey Phase One investigation was not simply confined to Kincora; it covered a number of children’s homes or hostels, including Bawnmore. As a result of that investigation the police uncovered allegations against five men, two of whom (Peter Bone and Robert Elder) were prosecuted, pleaded guilty and were sentenced by Lord Lowry, Lord Chief Justice, on 16 December 1981 for offences relating to Bawnmore, at the same time that Mains, Semple and McGrath were sentenced for offences related to Kincora, and Eric Witchell was sentenced for offences relating to Williamson House.

Bawnmore and its origins

- 5 Bawnmore House was situated on the Mill Road on the outskirts of North Belfast. As was the case for a number of the institutions we examined during this Inquiry, it had been a large private family residence. It became a children’s home as the result of an initiative by the then Board of Guardians of the Belfast Union to provide accommodation for children who had been living in the workhouse. The property was purchased in 1948 and transferred to Belfast Corporation. After the Children and Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) 1950 became law the Belfast Welfare Authority opened it as a children’s home in May 1952.
- 6 For some years the home accommodated both boys and girls, and as late as August 1959 five girls were still resident. In due course it became solely a boys’ home, although there was a plan which was never implemented to re-admit girls in the 1970s. No girls came forward to our Inquiry to complain about their time in Bawnmore. This chapter therefore deals only with allegations made by boys, and so we refer to it by the name it bore for much of its existence, Bawnmore Boys’ Home.

The buildings

- 7 Bawnmore was a large building. Plans from the time it was purchased show a drawing room, dining room, billiard room, morning room and cloakroom on the ground floor. On the second floor there was a ballroom and bedrooms. In the attic there were rooms used as apartments by the maids. As well as an internal courtyard, there were garages, an open yard and stables. It was set in extensive grounds, and in later years a football pitch was laid out.

Numbers

- 8 Although the home had accommodation for 28 to 30 children, in the late 1960s and during the 1970s overcrowding was a recurring problem. In June 1969 there were 31 boys in residence.¹ By September of that year the number had increased to 33,² although by the end of October 1969 the number had been reduced to 29.³ By April 1971 the number of boys had risen to 32.⁴

1 BWN 7676.

2 BWN 7682.

3 BWN 7683.

4 BWN 7707.

- 9 During this period the Belfast Welfare Authority recognised that conditions in the home were unsatisfactory. In August 1969 it was noted that:
- “It is becoming increasingly apparent that the facilities at Bawnmore are not adequate for the number of boys cared for there and it would seem that consideration must also be given to increasing the staff in order to allow for more individual attention to be given.”⁵
- 10 In September 1969, when there were 33 boys, it was accepted that despite the home being fully staffed, “it is probable that the staff/children ratio is too low”.⁶ In October, the number of boys had reduced to 29, and efforts were being made to retain this level of occupancy, even though it meant refusing to admit children to care. In his report on the home to the Welfare Committee the Children’s Officer pointed out that there was a vacant post of housemother’s assistant, and the remaining staff were finding it extremely difficult to afford each boy the individual attention which he required.⁷ The difficulty experienced in filling the vacant post was similar to that experienced when filling vacancies at Kincora which we examine elsewhere in this Report. At this time local authorities throughout the United Kingdom found it hard to recruit suitable staff for such posts because the posts were residential, demanding, poorly paid and involved long hours.
- 11 In November 1969 the Welfare Committee decided a new home to accommodate 36 boys should be built on the Bawnmore site.⁸ However, by 1971 the necessary plans had not been prepared because of the pressure of other work in the City Architect’s Office.⁹ The plan to build a new building does not appear to have proceeded any further.
- 12 By this time such large institutions were completely out of date, and we find it surprising that it was thought appropriate to consider building a new institution of this size. This is particularly the case because in 1955 the Belfast Welfare Authority put forward a plan to build cottages on the site to provide family group homes. This was not favoured by the Ministry of Home Affairs, which preferred the establishment of family group homes, or Family Unit Homes as they were called, in ordinary dwelling houses scattered throughout the residential areas of the city. The Minister

5 BWN 7678.
6 BWN 7682.
7 BWN 7683.
8 BWN 7688.
9 BWN 7709.

reluctantly agreed to withdraw the Ministry’s objection to the scheme if the cost could be significantly reduced because it had gone so far.¹⁰ However, it proved impossible to reduce the cost to acceptable levels, and in 1957 the Minister refused to approve the plan because it was too expensive, and expressed the hope that “family-group homes, if needed, will in due course emerge in the various City residential areas.”¹¹

- 13 By the time the 1969 proposal was put forward, Belfast Welfare Authority had seven group homes in various areas, which makes it even more surprising that such a proposal was put forward at all. In any event, the proposal never came to fruition, whether it was recognised to be undesirable in principle, or because of the imminent reorganisation of local government.
- 14 *A Review of Bawnmore Boys Home* was prepared by the NHSSB in April 1984, evidently for the Hughes Inquiry. This described how Bawnmore left a great deal to be desired as a children’s home when it was taken over by the NHSSB on 1 October 1973 as a consequence of the reorganisation of local government and the health and social services which resulted in the creation of four regional health and social services boards. It identified three major deficiencies: the records were incomplete; some 75% of the staff, including the superintendent and deputy, had chosen to transfer to the Eastern Board; and, finally, the building was in a poor physical condition, and a high level of vandalism “and an almost self destructive behaviour” existed among the boys, resulting in widespread damage to the furniture, decor and fabric of the building.¹²
- 15 Almost immediately, planning began for a replacement of Bawnmore. In the interim, steps were taken to introduce a group living system, and by February 1976 the necessary structural alterations had been carried out, and the group system was said to “have settled down and was beginning to produce benefits in standards of child care.”¹³
- 16 Unfortunately, the location of the home and its extensive grounds brought additional problems. The grounds were used as a public park, and there were clashes, mainly of a sectarian nature, between locals and children and staff from the home. By 1976 the situation had deteriorated to such an extent that staff were frightened and childcare practice affected, and

10 BWN 5583.

11 BWN 5559.

12 BWN 5705.

13 BWN 5708.

the author of the *Report re Situation at Bawnmore Children’s Home* recommended that the Board find alternative accommodation for the home.¹⁴ In October 1976 a decision was made to close the home, and new premises were purchased at Coulter’s Hill, Ballyclare. The children and staff were transferred to Coulter’s Hill, and Bawnmore officially closed on 30 March 1977.¹⁵

Staffing

- 17 The problem with staffing in 1969 that has already been referred to was not new. A note made by the MoHA in December 1965 following an inspection referred to;
- “Shortage of staff, high numbers [of residents], delays in providing adequate heating/decoration suggests that this home is not getting enough priority in Belfast...Staff shortage in particular seems to need positive action.”¹⁶
- 18 Staff shortages seem to have been a recurring problem from time to time during Bawnmore’s existence. In 1955 there was a reference to the strain placed on the matron who had almost no time off because her assistant had left and not been replaced.¹⁷ In 1967¹⁸ and 1968¹⁹ there are references in MoHA inspection reports to vacant posts. This meant that some staff were required to work for long periods of time without any time off.
- 19 BM 4 worked at Bawnmore for almost two and a half years between 1963 and 1965, and again for almost a year from February 1968.²⁰ He told the Inquiry that he once had to work constantly for three months without a break because of the lack of staff,²¹ although he did not say in which of his two periods of employment that occurred. This experience echoed that of Joseph Mains at Kincora, who worked for very long periods of time without any staff to help him as we point out in that part of our Report relating to Kincora.

14 BWN 5700.

15 BWN 5710.

16 BWN 5724.

17 BWN 5754.

18 BWN 5752.

19 BWN 5751.

20 BWN 26574.

21 Day 209, p.8.

- 20 The Belfast Welfare Authority faced recurrent staffing problems, which indicates that insufficient resources were being provided to improve staffing in Bawnmore. Although the MoHA were told in December 1965 that it was hoped “to authorise more attractive salary scales”,²² staffing problems continued to be noted in 1969, which suggests that more needed to be done to try and resolve this problem.

Absconding

- 21 Absconding appears to have become a major problem in October 1974, with almost 50% of the boys absconding at that time. It would appear from the *Review of Bawnmore Boys Home* to which we have already referred, that at least four members of staff, and the new superintendent, were felt to have, “very rigid and inflexible approaches to care”.²³ The implication was that these members of staff were not satisfactory, and this may have contributed to the high level of absconding. It is noteworthy that later in the *Review* the author refers to a number of those named as having departed during 1975, saying this meant there was a considerable period of major staff instability.²⁴
- 22 The absence of reports from the Social Work Advisory Group (SWAG) of the DHSS for the period from 1973 until Bawnmore closed in March 1977 means that there is no further information about the rate of absconding, although it is perhaps fair to surmise from the absence of further references to it in the reports to which we have referred that the problem diminished. However, that it reached almost 50% at one point indicates that at that time insufficient, or inadequate, efforts had been made to address the causes of absconding. Absconding at this level suggests that, in part at least, it was due to failings on the part of a number of members of the staff at that time, because earlier reports from the MoHA do not contain references to significant levels of absconding from Bawnmore, and so there is no evidence that absconding was a problem in earlier years.

Conditions in Bawnmore

- 23 Of the four applicants who had been in Bawnmore and who spoke to the Inquiry, HIA 199 and HIA 409 had no complaints about their time there. HIA 199 was at Bawnmore when there were still girls in the home, and

22 BWN 5728.

23 BWN 5708.

24 BWN 5709

remembered trips to the seaside. Although there are references to poor heating in the home, and to the need for redecoration in the mid and late 1960s, none of the applicants complained of being affected by such problems to a degree that would amount to neglect. Facilities for recreation included the construction of a football pitch in 1965.²⁵ Recreational activities in the 1960s were provided with the help of volunteers who helped with Scouts, cookery, woodwork and drama.²⁶ At one stage a magazine was produced, although this lapsed, at least for a while, due to staffing problems.²⁷ Other activities, such as trips to a nearby swimming pool, were recorded by inspectors.

- 24 Considerable efforts appear to have been made by BM 3, who was the Superintendent at the time, to ensure that a wide range of activities were available to the children in the 1960s and early 1970s. Whilst the staffing difficulties to which we have referred raised concerns from time to time about the ability of staff to devote enough time to the children, overall the amount of attention given to the children appears to have been satisfactory.

Bullying

- 25 HIA 112 was in Bawnmore from May 1966, although it is not possible to establish how long he was there as no records had been found relating to him. He told the Inquiry that although he was bullied by older boys, who took a pair of jeans from him that had been given to him by his mother, and some older boys beat up younger boys, he did not regard it as really serious, seeing it as just the kind of boisterous behaviour engaged in by older boys.²⁸ He said that the staff turned a blind eye unless there was a particularly serious fight when they would intervene.
- 26 HIA 83 was in Bawnmore from mid-December 1976, and then moved to Coulter's Hill for a short time after Bawnmore closed at the end of March 1977. In his statement, HIA 83 described being bullied by three brothers in both Bawnmore and Coulter's Hill, and as a result said he started to run away and truant from school. He claimed that he told BM 13 a member of staff, who did nothing about it. BM 13 made a statement to the Inquiry in which he said that he had no recall of being told this, although he

25 BWN 5719.

26 BWN 5721.

27 BWN 5718.

28 Day 208, pp. 81 and 82.

accepted that HIA 83 was one of the children staff identified as vulnerable and prone to being bullied. He said he had no difficulty in accepting that HIA 83 had been bullied, adding;

“...it is also the case that this was an endemic problem within that environment affecting many children and is something that as a staff group we were fully aware of and did our best to manage.”²⁹

- 27 Bullying can be a risk in any children’s home. Staff have to be alert to that risk, and take suitable steps to prevent it wherever possible. As only two individuals have alleged that they were bullied, we consider that this is insufficient to the level of widespread bullying that would amount to systemic abuse.

Physical and Emotional Abuse

- 28 HIA 112 alleged that he was called a “dirty wee taig” by BM 3 – the Superintendent – and by BM 4 – the Assistant Superintendent. BM 3 is dead and BM 4 denied doing so. HIA 112 was a Roman Catholic in a home that was predominantly composed of Protestant boys during his time. Using such terms, particularly by staff, would be wholly unacceptable. HIA 112 also alleged that when he wet his bed BM 4 rubbed his face in the wet sheet, spat on his face, stripped him naked and put him in a cold bath. BM 4 denied each of these allegations, and pointed to his efforts to reduce the prevalence of bed wetting during his time at Bawnmore. He explained that children with enuresis were referred to hospital, and a programme was then put in place in the home to help the children concerned. As a result, at one stage where there had been 24 children bed wetting the number was reduced to 4. While we accepted HIA 112’s account of his experiences, we are satisfied they were an isolated series of events, and do not amount to a systemic failing. We accept that the methods described for dealing with bed wetting were appropriate.

Sexual abuse

- 29 As we have explained, Bawnmore was one of the homes investigated by the RUC during the Caskey Phase One investigation. The police were provided with files relating to 135 boys dating back to 1963, although this was only a small proportion of the total number of residents who had

29 BWN 35035.

passed through the home.³⁰ Although not all the boys on the list could be traced, the police investigation identified eleven former residents who between them made allegations of sexual abuse by five men. Two of these, Peter Bone and Robert Elder, were subsequently convicted.

- 30 A third person, S 2, was traced by the RUC to Canada and was interviewed by them in 1982. At that time he denied any offences. In 1985 S 2 visited Northern Ireland on holiday, and was again questioned by the RUC. On that occasion he admitted masturbating HIA 532. He also admitted similar activity in Firmount Children's Home in Antrim. The DPP directed no prosecution, pointing out that the only criminal offence that could be established in relation to HIA 532 was one of indecent assault. As the offences occurred seventeen years before, it was considered that the passage of time rendered proceedings stale and inappropriate.³¹ Shortly after S 2 returned to Canada in 1985 he wrote to the RUC admitting masturbating another juvenile at Conway House Children's Home. The RUC decided not to refer the letter to the DPP, no doubt mindful of the DPP's earlier decision. Allegations of abuse were also made against two other former staff members, S 1 and BM 1.
- 31 Peter Bone was a married man with grown-up children and worked as an architect employed by the North Eastern Education and Library Board. He was prominent in the Scout movement, and another interest was photography. His initial involvement with Bawnmore came about when he went there to study arrangements for social service. He later returned to Bawnmore as a volunteer to help staff with activities. Over a period of several years he took HIA 532 on numerous trips in his car, including some visits to Bone's home. Bone admitted sexually abusing HIA 532, and to taking nude photographs of him and other boys. A search of his home discovered photographs of other naked boys who had not been resident at Bawnmore. Three of those boys who were traced by the police alleged that Bone had sexually assaulted them. On 16 December 1981 at Belfast Crown Court he was sentenced to a total of two years imprisonment on eight charges of gross indecency and eight charges of indecent assault.³²
- 32 Although the offences against HIA 532 were committed outside Bawnmore, they are relevant to our Inquiry because the opportunity for Bone to commit

30 BWN 20014.

31 BWN 20199.

32 BWN 20665.

these offences came about when he was permitted to take HIA 532 out of the home. At that time there were no formal instructions in place for members of the public to be vetted who wished to take children out from time to time, although there was a formal vetting procedure for individuals who wished to befriend a child in care on a more continuous basis. The level of contact between Bone and HIA 532 was very substantial and lasted for a considerable period of time. We consider that formal vetting of Bone should have taken place, and **the failure to vet him amounted to a systemic failing by the Belfast Welfare Authority.**

- 33 However, we recognise that such vetting would not have revealed his predilections for sexual abuse of children. To all outward appearances at the time he was a respectable person. He had no previous convictions, was married with children, and employed in a responsible position by a public authority. He was also prominent in the Scout movement, something that suggested he had a genuine interest in youth work. HIA 532 said he did not reveal Bone’s behaviour to the Superintendent BM 3, to his social workers or to his parents as “I was embarrassed to even think of it and just could not face actually telling anyone.”³³ In the absence of a complaint it is difficult to see how Bone’s behaviour could have been discovered or prevented by any form of vetting procedure at that time.
- 34 However, although HIA 532 did not tell anyone about the abuse at the time, he told us that after he left Bawnmore he told BM 1 about it. BM 1 had been employed as a house-master in Bawnmore from December 1965 until 1975 when he moved to work in the Palmerston Assessment Centre. HIA 532 told us that he visited BM 1 at Palmerston and told him about the abuse. He recalled that BM 1 told him he had a vague recollection that he suspected something was going on because Bone was persistently buying HIA 532 things.³⁴ In his response to the Inquiry Warning Letter BM 1 denied that he was told of allegations of abuse at Bawnmore while working at Palmerston, or that he was aware of concerns about Bone from HIA 532 or anyone else.
- 35 This suggested that if staff in Bawnmore had been more questioning about the extent and nature of Bone’s relationship with HIA 532 that could have served, at least, to put Bone on notice that his contact with the boy was being monitored which might have prevented some of the abuse. Although

33 KIN 021.

34 KIN 021.

HIA 532 was no longer in care when he told BM 1 about the abuse, BM 1 was employed by the Eastern Health and Social Services Board and it would still have been appropriate for BM 1 to report the abuse to his seniors and for them to have reported Bone to the police. As we consider later, BM 1 was himself subsequently convicted of indecent assault of boys in Palmerston and it may be that his decision not to report Bone’s abuse of HIA 532 was in order to avoid a more widespread investigation. Whatever the reason, **we consider his failure to report the abuse amounted to a systemic failing.**

36 HIA 532 was also abused by S 2, the Assistant Superintendent. Although S 2 initially denied the allegations, he later admitted masturbating HIA 532 on one occasion when HIA 532 stayed overnight at S 2’s parents’ home in 1968 as HIA 532 alleged.³⁵ However, S 2 denied that he rubbed HIA 532’s penis through his trousers whilst the boy was lying on his bed after he had been to hospital to have stitches removed from a cut to his hand.³⁶ Again HIA 532 explained why he did not report what had been done to him by S 2 when he said:

“I did not tell [BM 3] about [S 2] abusing me in my room, nor about Peter Bone. I think this was because I was young and I did not really know that what they were doing was abuse and was wrong. I just thought it was part of growing up.”³⁷

37 HIA 532’s explanation was perfectly understandable. However, he was also sexually abused by Robert Elder whilst Elder was on a short term student placement at Bawnmore. HIA 532 made two distinct allegations against Elder. The first was that when HIA 532 was about ten, Elder took him from his room at night to the room where Elder slept when he was on night duty, masturbated him and performed oral sex on him. HIA 532 also alleged that Elder tried to make him perform oral sex.

38 The second allegation related to the day when S 2 touched him sexually while HIA 532 was lying on his bed. He said that Elder came to his room and showed him pornographic photographs of young boys and girls, and told him to keep them. However, a few minutes later Elder returned and retrieved the pictures, telling HIA 532 not to tell anyone what happened, and threatening to involve him in the activities depicted in the photos.

35 KIN 023.

36 KIN 021.

37 KIN 022.

HIA 532 said he was terrified by this because the photographs showed bottles being inserted into the children.

- 39 He told an older boy about this later the same day, and that night the boy brought HIA 532 to see the Superintendent in his bungalow, which was on the site. HIA 532 said to the police that he told BM 3:

“...what this man was doing to me. He asked me to try and get one of the photographs as proof as there was little he could do without something to go on.”³⁸

BM 3 told the police that HIA 532 only complained to him about Elder showing him “dirty photographs”. BM 3 said:

“I spoke to Elder and he admitted having these photographs and I told him not to have them in the house as they were not proper things for young boys to see.”³⁹

- 40 BM 3 told the Hughes Inquiry that HIA 532 did not speak to him about anything other than the photographs. At first sight that may seem plausible, because HIA 532 had said he did not mention the abuse to anyone. When he described these events in his evidence to the Inquiry on Day 208 at p.121 he was unsure whether he told BM 3 about the abuse as well as about the photographs. However, Elder admitted to the police that BM 3 spoke to him about what HIA 532 had said.

“I remember [HIA 532] told [BM 3] the Head of the Home about what had happened. [BM 3] approached me about this and I denied it. [BM 3] obviously believed me and all he told me was not to become too friendly with any of the kids.”⁴⁰

- 41 The Hughes Inquiry considered the apparent conflict between these accounts and concluded at 6.38 of its Report:

“On balance, however, we believe the evidence is that a complaint about Mr Elder’s homosexual activities was made and that [BM 3] was deceived by a denial and a story about the photographs which he should at least have sought to check by insisting on their production.”⁴¹

The reference to a “story about the photographs” refers to BM 3’s evidence to the Hughes Inquiry that he was told the photographs were of “famine stricken countries showing native people partially dressed.”⁴²

38 KIN 20041.

39 BWN 20070.

40 BWN 20091 and 20092.

41 BWN 25168.

42 BWN 25167.

- 42 In view of Elder's admission to the police that BM 3 spoke to him about the sexual abuse, we are satisfied that BM 3 was told about that, and not just told about the photographs.
- 43 We consider **there were a number of systemic failings in the way this matter was dealt with:**
- **No written record was made of the allegations, or of Elder's response, by BM 3.**
 - **BM 3 did not investigate the allegation about the photographs by asking to see them as he should have done.**
 - **BM 3 did not report the matter to his superiors as he ought to have done.**
- 44 HIA 532 connected these events to having stitches removed from his hands in February 1968.⁴³ If he were correct that these events happened in February 1968 that is significant, because that would place it after the investigation by Mr Mason into the 1967 allegations at Kincora. In the chapter dealing with Kincora we say that Mr Mason should have issued instructions to all the homes run by the Belfast Welfare Authority that any such allegations should be reported to him. Had such procedures been in place at that time then that should have resulted in the matter being investigated, and possibly that would have led to it being referred to the police. These events involving Elder at Bawnmore are a further illustration of the consequences of there not being such a procedure, and as a result senior staff were being kept in ignorance of serious allegations by the failure of staff at a lower level to report such matters.
- 45 Elder was also prosecuted and pleaded guilty at Belfast Crown Court to two counts relating to HIA 532, one of indecent assault and one of gross indecency. On 16 December 1981 he was sentenced to one year's imprisonment suspended for two years on both counts.
- 46 S 1 spent two periods working in Bawnmore as an assistant house-father. The first was from mid-January 1963 until the end of May 1965. The second was from February 1968 until February 1969. During the Caskey Phase One investigation four former Bawnmore residents made allegations against him, ranging from attempts to kiss them, to several allegations of alleged anal penetration. He resigned in 1969. By 1982 he had emigrated to Canada, where he was questioned by Detective Superintendent Caskey

43 KIN 021.

and Detective Sergeant Elliott. He denied all of the allegations. In 2012 another former resident of Bawnmore came forward to Manchester police and alleged that S 1 liked to rub himself against the boys, and always had an erection.

- 47 In 1980 BM 20 complained that when he was smacked by BM 1 with his hand, the hand would remain on his bottom between smacks. BM 1 denied these allegations and the DPP directed no prosecution.
- 48 In January 1982 BM 1 was suspended following complaints to the police during the Caskey Phase Two investigation. He admitted that he had left his hand on children’s bottoms for longer than was necessary after smacking them. Some of the boys had been clothed, others were unclothed. He denied allegations that he touched some of these boys on the penis.
- 49 BM 1 was prosecuted in the Magistrates Court on nine charges of indecent assault in respect of the offences at Palmerston. He pleaded guilty, and was given an absolute discharge. In 1992 he was acquitted of charges of indecent assault on a boy Scout.
- 50 We are satisfied that several boys were sexually abused by staff members while living in Bawnmore, and those abused included HIA 532 who was abused by Bone, a regular visitor to Bawnmore. **The number of offences amounted to systemic abuse.**
- 51 We have given considerable thought as to how it was that there were a number of sexual abusers of children connected with Bawnmore. We have found nothing to suggest a pattern that would suggest that such abusers were knowingly recruited to Bawnmore. We consider that the sexual abuse to which we have referred was able to take place because the abusers were able to exploit a culture of lax supervision of staff by the superintendent.

Records, monitoring and inspection

- 52 The Hughes Inquiry examined the relevant records from 1963 to 1973 and concluded that there was almost complete compliance with the statutory obligation on the Children’s Officer to visit the home every month. Although the reports were described as tending to be short and stereotyped, from time to time they contained references to the condition of the home, truanting and absconding. However, the absence of records relating to Bawnmore prevented us, as it did the Hughes Inquiry, from establishing what action, if any, was taken to deal with such problems.

- 53 Although the absence of some records may be attributed to the inevitable disruption caused by the transfer of the home from the Belfast Welfare Authority to the new Northern Board in 1973, and to the rapid closure of the home in March 1977 when residents and staff moved to Coulter’s Hill, that may not be the whole story. The *Review of Bawnmore* referred to records being incomplete when the NHSSB took over responsibility for Bawnmore on 1 October 1973. When the police carried out their investigations in 1980 they found that the admission’s register had gone astray. These deficiencies suggest that record keeping at Bawnmore may have left something to be desired, but the absence of records makes it difficult for us to establish to what extent that may have been the case.
- 54 The Hughes Inquiry noted that whilst members of the Welfare Committee visited regularly between 1960 and 1965, there were frequent gaps in such visits in 1967 and 1968, followed by a significant further decline from 1971 onwards.⁴⁴ We agree with the Hughes Inquiry that it was unsatisfactory that the Welfare Committee neglected its statutory duty to visit, and **we regard its failure to fulfil that duty as a systemic failing.**

Departmental inspections

- 55 Until the childcare function of the Ministry of Home Affairs was taken over by DHSS in 1973 such records as had survived satisfy us that there were regular visits by MoHA inspectors. Some reports by Miss Hill and Miss Forrest have survived. Records from other homes show that the Ministry inspectors were regular and conscientious in their inspections, and we see no reason to conclude that regular inspections at Bawnmore did not take place when that was the responsibility of the MoHA.
- 56 There are no records of any formal SWAG inspections of Bawnmore being carried out between 1973 and 1977. Although the Department’s response to the Warning Letter sent to it by the Inquiry points to evidence that there were some inspections of other statutory homes during this period, the routine destruction of inspection records makes it difficult to establish which homes were inspected and which were not. However, Mr Armstrong confirmed to the Hughes Inquiry that at that time the emphasis of SWAG was on inspecting voluntary homes. We are satisfied that because some homes were inspected it cannot be assumed that Bawnmore was also inspected. Elsewhere in our report we explain why we

44 BWN 25165.

consider the absence of such inspections by SWAG was unjustified, and we consider **that the failure to ensure that inspections of Bawnmore were carried out by SWAG between 1973 and 1977 was a systemic failing by the DHSS.**

Findings of systemic failings

- 57 **The failure to vet Peter Bone amounted to a systemic failing by the Belfast Welfare Authority.**
- 58 **The failure of BM 1 to report the abuse of HIA 532 by Bone to his seniors.**
- 59 **In relation to the allegations made against Elder by HIA 532 to BM 3.**
- **BM 3 did not make a written record of the allegations, or of Elder’s response.**
 - **BM 3 did not investigate the allegation about the photographs made by HIA 532 against Elder by asking to see them as he should have done.**
 - **BM 3 did not report the matter to his superiors as he ought to have done.**
- 60 **A number of boys were subjected to sexual abuse by staff members.**
- 61 **The Welfare Committee neglected its statutory duty to visit the home.**
- 62 **The failure by SWAG to carry out inspections.**

