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## Jehovah's Witnesses drop application for judicial review

19 January 2017 by Rebecca Cooney , 14 comments

The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Britain had sought a review of a Charity Commission order to hand over documents relating to its statutory inquiry into the charity



*WTBTBS headquarters*

The body that oversees Jehovah's Witness congregations in Britain has dropped its application for a judicial review of a Charity Commission order.

The move brings to a close a two-and-a-half-year legal dispute between the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Britain and the regulator, which opened a statutory inquiry into the organisation in May 2014 because of safeguarding concerns.

As part of that investigation, the commission issued the charity a production order, requiring it to hand over certain information to assist the inquiry.

The WTBTBS requested separate judicial reviews against the inquiry and the production order. In August the Supreme Court ruled that the charity could not stop the inquiry going ahead, but it had already won the right to apply for a judicial review of the order in March.

Today, the commission announced it would be dropping the production order and, in return, the WTBTBS had agreed to withdraw its application for a judicial review.

In a statement, the commission said: "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."

The WTBTBS confirmed it had supplied the documents and had agreed to withdraw the review.

A spokesman for the charity said: "Watch Tower will now work with the commission to explore the issues that are the subject of the statutory inquiry and to address the commission's regulatory concerns."

The commission's inquiry into the WTBTBS remains ongoing.

In its statement, the commission said: "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 withdrawal of the judicial review application marks the end of legal proceedings over the inquiry into the WTBTSB as a whole.

But the charity is still fighting to block a separate statutory inquiry into the Manchester New Moston Congregation, opened at the same time as the one into the WTBTSB.

These came after it emerged that victims of sexual abuse by a former trustee of the charity's Manchester New Moston congregation had been required to meet and answer questions from their abuser, who had just been released from the prison sentence he was given for abusing them, according to tribunal documents.

WTBTSB lost an appeal against the New Moston inquiry in the first-tier tribunal in April 2015, but has appealed to the upper-tier tribunal against the first-tier tribunal's ruling, and the case is expected to be heard on 2 March.