

Inquiry Report

Coptic Orthodox Church Foundation Manchester

Registered Charity Number 519300



A statement of the results of the class inquiry into double defaulter charities in particular Coptic Orthodox Church Foundation Manchester (registered charity number 519300) ('the charity').

Published on 4 March 2016.

The class inquiry

On 20 September 2013, the Charity Commission ('the commission') opened a statutory class inquiry ('the inquiry') into charities that were in default of their statutory obligations to meet reporting requirements by failing to file their annual documents for 2 or more years in the last 5 years and met certain criteria, including that:

- the charities were recently (or in the case of charities that would become part of it in due course, would be) given final warnings to comply by a specified date
- on the day after the specified date they were still in default (partially or otherwise)

At the point a charity met the criteria they would become part of the inquiry. The commission started by looking at and sending final warnings to charities with a last known income over £500,000 and then moved on to those over £250,000, and then those with a last known income of between £200,000 and £249,000.

The charity

The charity was registered on 30 September 1987. It is an unincorporated association governed by a declaration of trust deed dated 3 September 1987 as amended by supplemental deed dated 16 October 2003.

The charity's object is:

'To promote the Coptic Orthodox Church in the north of England.'

More details about the charity are available on the [register of charities](#) ('the register').

Issues under investigation

The charity failed to submit its annual returns to the commission for the financial years ending 31 March 2013 and 31 March 2014. During the whole period of default, the charity was sent various computer generated reminders from the commission regarding the submission of their annual accounting documents. Although reminders were sent the charity remained in default of its obligations under the Charities Act 2011 ('the act').

In addition, the charity was contacted by telephone on 4 November 2015 and a final warning letter was issued the same day requesting that the missing accounting documents be provided by midnight on 25 November 2015, and warning the charity that if it remained in default it would become part of the inquiry.

Although the charity submitted its annual return for financial year ending 31 March 2013, it failed to submit its annual return for financial year ending 31 March 2014 by the deadline and became part of the inquiry on 26 November 2015.

The inquiry is confined to dealing with the trustees' mismanagement and misconduct¹ and remedying the non-compliance in connection with the annual accounting documents.

Although the commission acknowledged that the outstanding accounting information was submitted on 26 November 2015, one day after the deadline, in relation to submission of the annual return for financial year ending 31 March 2014 the charity had been in default of its obligations for 299 days. The trustees had been made aware by the commission of the consequences of failing to file the accounting documents by the deadline.

On 8 January 2016 the trustees informed the commission that the reason for not complying with their statutory accounting obligations was due to delays which occurred in preparing supporting accounting documentation to enable their accountant to complete the independent examination of the records. This does not excuse the failure of the trustees to fulfil their statutory obligations.

Once the charity's outstanding document was submitted, the accounts were referred for scrutiny by the commission's accountants. No issues have arisen as a result of that scrutiny.

Conclusions

The charity's trustees were in default of their legal obligations to file accounting information with the commission. This was mismanagement and misconduct in the administration of the charity and a breach of their legal duties.

As a result of the inquiry, the commission ensured the charity complied with its legal obligations to submit its annual accounting information.

The charity ceased to be part of the inquiry when it was no longer in default of its accounting obligations. This happened on 26 November 2015 when the charity filed the outstanding document.

Regulatory action taken

The commission used its information gathering powers under section 52 of the act to order and obtain bank records and financial information of the charity relating to the accounts. These have been used in connection with the commission's scrutiny of the accounts.

The commission provided regulatory advice and guidance about the trustees' duty to file the charity's annual accounting information.

¹ The terms misconduct and mismanagement are taken from section 76 of the act. Misconduct includes any act (or failure to act) in the administration of the charity which the person committing it knew (or ought to have known) was criminal, unlawful or improper. Mismanagement includes any act (or failure to act) in the administration of the charity that may result in significant charitable resources being misused or the people who benefit from the charity being put at risk. A charity's reputation may be regarded as property of the charity.

Issues for the wider sector

Trustees of charities with an income of over £25,000 are under a legal duty as charity trustees to submit annual returns, annual reports and accounting documents to the commission as the regulator of charities. Even if the charity's annual income is not greater than £25,000 trustees are under a legal duty to prepare annual accounts and reports and should be able to provide these on request. All charities with an income over £10,000 must submit an annual return.

Failure to submit accounts and accompanying documents to the commission is a criminal offence. The commission also regards it as mismanagement and misconduct in the administration of the charity.

For those individuals who were not trustees at the initial date of default, when they became a trustee, they became responsible for making good the default.

It is important that the financial activities of charities are properly recorded and their financial governance is transparent. Charities are accountable to their donors, beneficiaries and the public. Donors to charity are entitled to have confidence that their money is going to legitimate causes and reaches the places that it is intended to. This is key to ensuring public trust and confidence in charities.