Rt Revd Rachel Treweek, Bishop of Gloucester

As has been said, safeguarding is integral to our mission and ministry. It is not an ‘add-on issue’ – neither are the issues we have spoken about in this Synod around Living in Love and Faith, or the Windrush legacy – It’s all about how we live as The Church. Our failure in each of these areas is our failure to be the Church, Christ’s body here on earth - our failure to live the good news of the Kingdom of God.

“Creation is groaning”... longing for the “freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Romans 8)

Two years ago in Feb 2018 when I took part in a presentation here at General Synod, we had the Gibb report in front of us – published in June 2017.

Following the publication of that report, and indeed after the IICSA enquiry focused on Peter Ball in July 2018, I publicly expressed my views not only regarding the horrific abuse of one of my predecessors but also regarding the appalling failure of bishops and an Archbishop who utterly failed those who came forward for help at the time –and failed to put survivors at the centre of their response.

I repeated that view following the recent BBC documentary on Peter Ball - and once again I wish to publicly pay tribute to the tenacity and courage of Neil Todd who is sadly not with us today.

I was glad that so many people expressed deep shock following the BBC documentary. And yet in so many of the comments I received or read after people had watched the documentary or seen my response to it - it was almost as if it was the first time that many people had absorbed the facts of Peter Ball’s abuse and the Church’s huge failure. And that in itself has perturbed me. There were hardly any new facts in the powerful BBC documentary. Almost all of what we saw had been in the Gibb report and had been in the public domain during and after the ICSA enquiry.

And so that has said something to me about our learning. We do indeed need to show that we are learning from the past.

I am in favour of reviews. It is very important that we give due attention to what has gone wrong in the past - just as we agreed to do yesterday in our debate around the Windrush legacy. But if we are going to learn from reviews and enquiries, then lament and regret and apology are not enough – as the amendment today has reinforced. Reviews must never become things which tick a box, or which simply get filed away or are the responsibility of other people. They must be read and absorbed by ALL of us. They must ask searching questions which change us - as individuals and worshipping communities and as a national church. ALL of us.

One of the things that concerns me around case reviews is that I wonder how well we test out what we have learnt, to ensure that it goes deep within the way we live as the body of Christ together.

I wholeheartedly support the amendments to the motion we have agreed today, and am grateful for them as they challenge us more deeply about our learning and our accountability to each other. Accepting the IICSA recommendations is not about ticking boxes and doing process a differently. Behind each of these recommendations there is something deep about how we live our lives as The Church.

The past, present and future need to be held together in much greater tension.

Yes - we need to get process and structures and policies right. And we need to put money into all of that where it is needed. ..But we also need to find ways of testing out together how what we have learnt from reviews (...and indeed all that training) is truly changing all of us in the present which is not simply about process at a surface level – but something much deeper.

When it comes to money, there have been discussions in this chamber regarding how we use money that we are fortunate to have because of the past, and to what extent we spend it now in the present, very aware that we are spending the money for the Church of the future (and there have been lots of discussions around that not least around Strategic Development).

However when it comes to safeguarding it is surely right that where we have so appallingly failed people in the past, then money needs to be spent in the present to ensure that both in the present and the future the Church looks very different when it comes to the flourishing of all people, made in the image of God.

But, I finish with my question: How do we truly learn - and how do we ensure that reviews and training are changing us we join in with God’s work of transformation and reconciliation?