

General Synod voted today to acknowledge and apologise for past safeguarding wrongs. It also voted to endorse work on legislative and non-legislative changes to tighten procedures which have been identified following the Chichester Commissaries interim and final safeguarding reports.

Opening the debate, the Rt Revd Paul Butler, Bishop of Southwell and Nottingham, Chair of the Churches National Safeguarding Committee, said: "We cannot do anything other than own up to our failures. We were wrong. Our failures were sin just as much as the perpetrators sinned. By failing to listen or act appropriately we condemned survivors to live with the harm when we should have been assisting them into whatever measure of healing might be possible."

The motion - that Synod accordingly acknowledges and apologises for past wrongs and seeks endorsement from the Synod for legislative and non-legislative progress to be made during the period of this Quinquennium - was debated.

An amendment moved by the Revd Preb Stephen Lynas was carried.

Following a division of the Synod, the motion, as amended, was overwhelmingly carried (360 for, 0 against, 0 abstentions).

It had been brought to Synod following consideration by both the House of Bishops and Archbishops' Council so it could approve the next steps. (The proposed changes - including a consultation on certain legislative areas are outlined in Notes below).

In a follow up to the Commissaries' reports the Archbishops of Canterbury and York wrote: "It is right, therefore, that the General Synod should receive an account of the actions that the House and the Council have put in hand, have an opportunity to comment on the next steps, and be able to identify with the apology that we wish to offer unreservedly for the failure of the Church of England's systems to protect children, young people and adults from physical and sexual abuse inflicted by its clergy and others and for the failure to listen properly to those so abused.

Notes

Possible legislative Changes

The House of Bishops and the Archbishops' Council have agreed that given their importance and, in some respects, their sensitivity, the matters below should be the subject of a consultation over the course of the summer, with a view to the introduction of draft legislation as soon as possible, so that the necessary legislation receives Final Approval in the course of the current quinquennium. [Read the Consultation](#)

- Removal of the 12 month limitation period for the bringing of complaints under the CDM in sexual abuse cases
- Extending the bishop's power of suspension under the CDM
- Amending canon law so that clergy can be required to undergo risk assessments
- Preventing prohibited and suspended clergy from robing
- Extending the circumstances in which churchwardens and PCC members can be suspended and/or disqualified from holding office

• Amending Canon C 8

Two further proposed changes to the legislative framework have already been approved at this group of sessions by Synod. The first of these is an amendment to the Code of Practice under the CDM to clarify when a complaint can be made under the Measure notwithstanding an acquittal in criminal proceedings. The second is an amendment to the Clergy Discipline Rules made under the CDM so that victims will be able to withhold their contact details from respondents when making complaints.

Non-Legislative Changes

These take the form of actions proposed by the commissaries where changes to practice but not legislative changes are needed.

- Changes to the culture of the Church - Implementing cultural changes to any organisation is a complex task and does not happen quickly. However, this process can be facilitated by identifying areas where cultural change should happen. The proposal for an audit of diocesan safeguarding is intended to address both the more and less obvious areas where cultural change needs to happen.
- Ensuring that existing and new safeguarding policies are properly implemented at diocesan level - Further work needs to be done to support safeguarding advisers in the effective roll-out of these policies.
- Ensuring that every diocese has adequate safeguarding expertise with a professional adviser and an effective safeguarding group - There will be a need for national advisers to provide bishops with a checklist to carry out an immediate review of provision, including an assessment of diocesan websites and an audit of their current provision and future needs.
- The roll-out of a national programme of safeguarding training - This will require the development of training material at national level and advice to dioceses on how to use this material, who should attend, and encouraging dioceses to commit to the necessary training.
- Introduction of best practice guidance on responding to serious situations - This includes putting in place adequate resource at diocesan level to respond quickly to serious situations and developing guidance for dioceses on best practice in such situations. This will also require resource at national level to address situations which require national attention.
- Development of guidance on safe working practices - this guidance is being worked on by the Joint Safeguarding Liaison Group.
- Review of risk assessment processes - this will need to be developed and agreed at national level before it is rolled out at diocesan level, and will require additional national resource to ensure that risk assessment processes are consistent, robust, of a high standard and compliant with human rights requirements.
- Improved policy and practices on responding well to survivors - This will require additional resource at national level to help dioceses respond better and to recruit and train Authorised Listeners.
- Safeguarding standards for ministers from other denominations - This is dependent on the implementation of the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 after which further guidance can be developed.
- Further clarity on the issue of confidentiality, including with regard to the Confessional, where some additional guidance may be needed.

Chichester Commissaries reports and statements

Wider Non-Legislative Changes

These take the form of actions proposed by the commissaries where changes to practice but not legislative changes are needed. The general actions which are being proposed are as follows:

- The undertaking of an audit of safeguarding provision in every diocese
- The review of risk assessment procedures
- The development of core material and expectations around attendance for safeguarding training.

Most of these actions will require increased national resources at least in the short term (and possibly in the long term as well) and the audit itself may show the need for many dioceses to increase their resourcing on safeguarding. The Synod is asked to note that the Archbishops' Council has now allocated additional funds at national level for the national work. This will be in addition to any funding which will need to be found by the dioceses to support increased work on safeguarding.

The non-legislative actions can be broken down in more detail as follows:

- Changes to the culture of the Church - Implementing cultural changes to any organisation is a complex task and does not happen quickly. However, this process can be facilitated by identifying areas where cultural change should happen. The proposal for an audit of diocesan safeguarding is intended to address both the more and less obvious areas where cultural change needs to happen.
- Ensuring that existing and new safeguarding policies are properly implemented at diocesan level - Further work needs to be done to support safeguarding advisers in the effective roll-out of these policies.
- Ensuring that every diocese has adequate safeguarding expertise with a professional adviser and an effective safeguarding group - There will be a need for national advisers to provide bishops with a checklist to carry out an immediate review of provision, including an assessment of diocesan websites and an audit of their current provision and future needs.
- The roll-out of a national programme of safeguarding training - This will require the development of training material at national level and advice to dioceses on how to use this material, who should attend, and encouraging dioceses to commit to the necessary training.
- Introduction of best practice guidance on responding to serious situations - This includes putting in place adequate resource at diocesan level to respond quickly to serious situations and developing guidance for dioceses on best practice in such situations. This will also require resource at national level to address situations which require national attention.
- Development of guidance on safe working practices - this guidance is being worked on by the Joint Safeguarding Liaison Group.
- Review of risk assessment processes - this will need to be developed and agreed at national level before it is rolled out at diocesan level, and will require additional national resource to ensure that risk assessment processes are consistent, robust, of a high standard and compliant with human rights requirements.
- Improved policy and practices on responding well to survivors - This will require additional resource at national level to help dioceses respond better and to recruit and train Authorised Listeners.
- Safeguarding standards for ministers from other denominations - This is dependent on the implementation of the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 after which further guidance can be developed.
- Further clarity on the issue of confidentiality, including with regard to the Confessional, where some additional guidance may be needed.