

The General Synod today gave final approval to a package of proposals intended to take further the process of making the Church a safer place for children and vulnerable adults - both by making the disciplinary processes under the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003 more effective where safeguarding issues arise and by strengthening the Church's wider legal framework in relation to safeguarding in various ways.

The legislation was originally introduced in February 2014 following a consultation launched at Synod in July 2013.

Speaking in the debate, Bishop Paul Butler, lead bishop on safeguarding, said: "We all want every single one of our churches and institutions to be safer places and communities for all people; notably for children and adults at times of risk and harm, whether that be long or short term."

He added that along with facing up to the consequences of the past "our emphasis has to be on prevention" stressing that, along with the new legislation, high quality training, safe recruiting and effective quality assurance needed to be implemented at every level of church life.

The Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure and draft Amending Canon No. 34 (links below) contains a range of elements including:

- Adding to the bishop's existing powers to suspend a priest or deacon, extending to circumstances where the local authority or police provide information which leads the bishop to be satisfied that they present a significant risk of harm. With similar powers for an archbishop to suspend a bishop in such circumstances. (As with all existing provisions this includes a right of appeal to President of Tribunals where suspension occurs).
- Provision for the disqualification from office as a churchwarden or member of a parochial church council ('PCC') anyone whose name appears on a statutory barred list (under the Safeguarding and Vulnerable Groups Act).
- Provision for the bishop to suspend a churchwarden or PCC member on safeguarding grounds in circumstances similar to suspending clergy (with a similar right of appeal).
- For the first time a statutory obligation on office holders in the Church to have regard to safeguarding advice issued by the House of Bishops (it has previously been expected of clergy but it is now formalised into a statutory provision).
- Removal of current one year limitation period that applies generally to complaints of clergy misconduct: in relation to complaints of clergy sexual misconduct towards children and vulnerable adults there will be no time limit.
- Canonical duty on diocesan bishop to have a Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser ('DSA') to carry out certain functions. Dioceses have in fact had DSAs for a number of years but this formalizes the requirement to ensure proper provision is in place.
- A new power given to archbishops and bishops to direct bishops and clergy to undergo a risk assessment (with it the right to request that the President of Tribunals reviews the direction). Subject to this review, it would be misconduct to refuse to undergo the assessment.

Similar powers for the bishop in relation to readers and layworkers.

The aim is to secure Parliamentary approval and the Royal Assent by the end of the year.

Notes

- The [Bishop of Durham's speech](#) on Final approval for the Draft Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure
- [Bishop of Durham's speech](#) on the Final approval for the Draft amending Canon No. 34
- [The Draft Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure](#)
- [Draft amending Canon No. 34](#)
- The [latest practice guidance](#), approved by the House of Bishops, May 2015

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