

We have been made aware of a complaint to the Charity Commission and of course will cooperate fully with any future process, because we are absolutely committed to the importance of safeguarding throughout the life of the Church of England.

Since I have taken up the lead safeguarding role in April I have been amazed at the number of issues that come into the National Safeguarding Team and must be looked into – whether to review existing information or investigate new information - to ensure good safeguarding across the Church. It would be completely wrong if we failed to act when safeguarding concerns are brought to our attention.

I am very aware of the current criticism of our core group process and some of this seems to be based on misunderstandings about what is involved. There has been confusion as a result of them being likened to core groups in the statutory sector which have a different purpose and follow different processes. Revised guidance will make it very clear they are more equivalent to a statutory strategy meeting (there will also be a change of name to help make this clear), where decisions are made collaboratively about what the next steps should be. This may include an independent investigation of allegations that have been made, including that senior members of clergy have not followed due safeguarding processes. As part of such investigations, those concerned are given details of any allegations and the opportunity to respond. These processes are confidential while they are taking place and therefore we cannot give public explanations of everything that is happening, which of course brings its own challenges.

It is evident that about three quarters of current national cases are about senior clergy failing to act rather than a direct allegation of abuse, but that can still have serious consequences. We always try to make that difference clear, and although the current guidance does not distinguish between those accused of abuse and those accused of failing to act properly on information received, the revised guidance will address this difference. Statistics about the number of cases involving senior clergy (currently around 30) can also be misleading as a significant number relate to concerns raised about the past conduct of now retired clergy.

While I do not deal with details of casework I am absolutely assured that the process is the same for all, but the evidence and the circumstances are not, and therefore outcomes are different. No one gets any special treatment, I would be the first to object if they did and I know those in very senior roles have made that very clear themselves.

The NST, which was restructured last year, should be respected and trusted for the work it does. Yes processes must be fair and open to scrutiny, which is why our guidance is being revised, but we must not lose sight of the central issue, which is that the Church has failed victims and survivors of abuse in the past and needs to take responsibility for that.

I came into this role out of my personal commitment to making the Church of England a safer place for all, and I hope that is a goal around which all of us can unite.

