

The Archbishops' Council, at its meeting on Wednesday (Sept 23), voted unanimously for safeguarding proposals to offer both immediate practical support to survivors of abuse and also to strengthen independence in the Church's safeguarding work.

The Council approved a proposed plan for an interim pilot support scheme for survivors and agreed to draw down reserves for an initial support fund to support those who have come forward. The Council also committed to urgently pursue the principle of independent safeguarding recognising the need for greater independence and transparency of safeguarding

The pilot scheme is designed to enable the Church to respond in particular to those survivors' cases which are already known to the Church, where the survivor is known to be in seriously distressed circumstances, and the Church has a heightened responsibility because of the way the survivor was responded to following disclosure. Experience with these pilot cases will help inform the setting up of the Church's full redress scheme for victims and survivors of abuse as that is developed. Part of the value of a pilot scheme is that it will enable the Church to explore different ways of working and to learn important lessons for the future.

The full paper put to the Council contained further details of how the interim pilot support scheme would be run.

The vote followed a detailed discussion by Council members on the importance of safeguarding in the Church including a presentation from the national director of safeguarding Melissa Caslake and input from the lead safeguarding bishop, Jonathan Gibbs.

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York said:

"Today the Council discussed the safeguarding challenges that face our Church. We acknowledged how we have responded badly to survivors, and what that means for the Council as a trustee body. It was a long, honest and soberingly frank discussion. There were some very personal reflections and comments, including from both of us. This reflects the seriousness with which the Council took the proposals under discussion. The issue of independence is something we have taken a personal lead on and are very committed to. We are glad that we the Church is now going to make this happen. Along with providing redress for victims and survivors this is the next step we must take. Today's meeting and these decisions feel like a turning point. As we await IICSA's report into the Church of England we continue to pray for survivors and all those the Church has failed. We are profoundly sorry for our failings, but today our words of sorrow are matched by actions that will believe will lead to real change. We hope that this will provide some hope for the future."

Bishop Jonathan Gibbs said: "While there is much work now to be done the decision to start a support fund is an important and vital step in our response to survivors. This is an endorsement by the Archbishops' Council of General Synod's unanimous vote in February for a more fully survivor-centred approach to safeguarding, including arrangements for redress."

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