

Bishop Jonathan Gibbs, the Church of England's lead safeguarding bishop, opened the meeting and highlighted what he described as the cultural resistance to and complexity of achieving real change in the Church and the personal pressure this puts on safeguarding leaders. He said that the new interim director Zena Marshall is leading through a very busy and challenging time of change and development and the national safeguarding team, NST, and dioceses need to work together to meet the challenges.

Group members acknowledged the need for change and for the terms of reference of the group to be reviewed, particularly given the drive towards independent governance of safeguarding.

The interim director provided a national update and stressed she is building on the good work done by the former director Melissa Caslake who left the role earlier this month. She shared the first quarterly report on the Safe Spaces which showed good use of the service and positive feedback on the caller experience. The pandemic has had significant impact on completion of the Past Case Review 2 project and the Board has now extended the deadline for dioceses to complete. Case work continued to be busy with ongoing media scrutiny on a number of issues. Work is progressing on all IICSA recommendations. Responding the group recognised the difficulties and pressures on all at the moment during the pandemic including the national and diocesan teams, noting that some staff are coping and performing better than others. It stressed that it is essential that those struggling are properly supported personally and professionally.

The group were updated in detail on the planning for independent oversight of national Church safeguarding. A strongly survivor-focused consultation is being facilitated. The key elements of the first phase of implementation are hoped to be developed and presented for discussion by the February informal Synod.

The complexity of many issues is such that there may be a number of interim phases before full independence and governance in a way acceptable to all parties is achieved.

The group were informed that the National Casework Management System is developing well and a procurement process has commenced. The group was asked to consider the options for data migration from current case records. It was agreed that there would be a national protocol on data transfer and file retention and archiving.

The Senior Leadership Safeguarding Training Pathway was presented in detail. This is a radical change to a transformational approach to learning. Participants are encouraged to reflect deeply as individuals and as a leadership team to grow and develop their safeguarding awareness and practice. The group supported provision of the resources needed to implement the pilot phase as soon as practicable.

Workshops continue to co-design the concept of a regional model for safeguarding supervision. Groups may not solely be geographic but consider other commonalities too. The process and discussions will need to integrate with the development of the revised governance structure to achieve independence of safeguarding.

The Serious Incident Reporting policy has been updated and revised to meet new Charity Commission criteria. It has also been tailored to have specific versions for different organisation contexts. Its implementation was approved. Changes to a consent form for use of images in recordings were also approved.

The National Safeguarding Panel Chair Meg Munn reflected on recent meetings including the attendance of both archbishops to respond to Panel questions. The Panel is planning an online webinar on a variety of subjects for the summer. Work is continuing to track the impact of past Panel recommendations.

Discussions are continuing regarding a Safeguarding Code of Practice and the consultation process with Synod members and others on the content.

