

March meeting

The NSSG chair and Lead Bishop for Safeguarding, Jonathan Gibbs, opened the meeting and introduced the Bishop of Stepney, Joanne Grenfell, as the new lead safeguarding bishop from April. Members thanked Bishop Jonathan for his work over the past three years.

National Safeguarding Team, NST, staffing updates

The national director updated on leaves of absence and staff changes that had had an impact on some of the work streams. He explained this was no different to other safeguarding services in other organisations and plans were in place and adverts out to cover the short fall. There was a wider discussion around the wellbeing of staff.

NST Prioritisation

A discussion led by the director and a senior staff member focused on what to prioritise, budget, and what can be shared across the work streams. A draft set of priorities have yet to be shared with the NSSG but they will consider what can be paused, what may be already paused and what is completed.

Members acknowledged that the NST cannot do everything and need to push back if requests do not fit work-streams. There was a wider discussion around stakeholders and expectations of the NST and it was agreed to take forward this discussion.

National Safeguarding Panel

The independent chair spoke to her paper focusing on survivor engagement, the last topic the Panel had discussed. There are planned best practice webinars for September, following the success of previous webinars run by the NSP and the Panel is looking at a bespoke event for survivors, NST and DSAs to discuss survivor engagement further.

Safeguarding Learning & Development Framework Implementation Survey

Members noted the progress in the implementation of the Safeguarding Learning and Development Framework to date. A number of issues were highlighted in the survey results including an increase in referrals, as the training has been rolled out, particularly around domestic abuse. Although there was a high response rate to the survey (85%) the NSSG asked the remaining 15% to be chased for a response.

Implementation of House of Bishops' Guidance on 'Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse'

Members heard feedback on a baseline survey which was circulated to dioceses in order to determine their current position with regard to the implementation of the policy. Responses were received from all dioceses, mainly from Diocesan Safeguarding Advisors. It was suggested that, in the future, DSAP Chairs should also receive this type of surveys, given the role of DSAPs in providing oversight of safeguarding in dioceses. The NSSG was invited to note the findings of the survey and approve the next steps, including publication of a summary of the key findings

Development of new Code of Safeguarding Practice Guidance on 'Responding to, assessing and managing safeguarding allegations and concerns against church officers'

Members heard that this new Code intends to simplify the current guidance and differentiate between various types of allegations. Discussion concerning the timelines took place, as well as looking at the complex nature of achieving a culture that approaches this type of allegations in a proportionate manner. The NSP offered to be engaged in the consultation for this Code. Members agreed the importance of moving forward with the development of the Code. Members suggested an interim report be brought to the NSSG in September, with the final version being presented for approval in November, ahead of General Synod approval in February 2024.

Members heard and approved a technical change within safeguarding guidance relating to Deliverance Ministry. The NSSG approved the additional Good Practice Advice in this area of ministry.

Safeguarding Practice Reviews Code

The draft new policy was well received by members, and will replace the current two pages on lessons learnt case reviews that sits within Responding to and managing allegations in respect of church officers. It was agreed that a sub-group should review and approve via e-mail after further work based on comments with the final document coming to May NSSG and Synod in July.

National Safeguarding Standards

Members had a discussion around aspirational standards and those that are non-negotiable and noted the progress on this work.

National Safeguarding Casework Management System (NSCMS)

Members had a discussion around fees for annual licences for the NSCMS noting disparities in the system as data ownership is separate in some cathedrals and parishes dioceses and sizes of parishes dioceses vary significantly. This was referred back to the Archbishops' Council as the decision makers.

Independent Safeguarding Board recommendations.

Members were informed that the NST has responded to the ISB in detail and will meet with the acting chair to discuss in the light of prioritisation work.