

Proposed details of the Church of England's national redress scheme for survivors of Church-related abuse have been published today

The purpose of the Redress Scheme is to demonstrate in tangible and practical ways that the Church is truly sorry for its past failings relating to safeguarding.

There will be a presentation and debate at the Church's General Synod next month and it is hoped legislation will progress through Synod in forthcoming sessions after which it will need Parliamentary approval.

Following the Church's IICSA (Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse) hearings, General Synod committed in February 2020 to a more victim and survivor-centred approach.

This included making arrangements to provide redress, which was recommended in IICSA's final report for the Church of England and Church in Wales, published in October 2020.

The final overall IICSA report in 2022 for all its investigation strands recommended a national redress scheme. The Church remains committed to implementing a scheme specifically for people who have experienced abuse in the Church of England.

The Church's national proposals for redress are about more than money; financial payments will be offered alongside therapeutic, spiritual and emotional support, acknowledgment of wrongdoing on the part of the Church, and apology and support for rebuilding lives.

Where possible apology will be from the institution where the abuse took place (or from a part of the Church appropriate to the survivor's needs) in a format which is most appropriate to the survivor.

The victim and survivor working group* have laid out principles for this and are developing proposals for non-financial redress, following the wider consultation with other survivors. All survivors of sexual, physical, psychological, and emotional abuse (including spiritual abuse) relating to the Church will be eligible to apply for redress.

The initial details of the scheme, released today, have been developed under the direction of the Redress Project Board, chaired by the Bishop of Truro, Philip Mounstephen; a victim and survivor working group* has been set up and operates at the heart of the process of developing the scheme and two members sit on the Board.

Along with the working group there continues to be extensive engagement and consultation with key stakeholder groups across the Church including a Finance Focus Group made up of diocesan secretaries and other professionals.

The Project Board has agreed that, to be as meaningful as possible, at least some responsibility for offering redress should be taken as close as possible to where the abuse was perpetrated, or harm was done.

The overall objectives of such a whole Church approach are:

- Together, as one body, the Church of England must collectively show contrition for its failings, and for the pain and suffering that has occurred.
- Nationally, the Church of England will set up a single point of access to the Scheme, to offer a consistent service and to minimise as far as practicable further delay and trauma for victims and survivors.
- To the extent possible, the Church body which is nearest in governance terms to the source / perpetrator of the abuse should make a contribution to redress.

In order to deliver this consistent service around the country, through a range of institutions, legislation will be required because the Church of England comprises a large number of free-standing legal charitable bodies subject to the oversight of trustees or the equivalent.

Given that trustees must exercise independent judgement to act in their respective charity's best interests, it is difficult without statutory provisions to achieve a consistency of approach.

This will help ensure that service to survivors will not be impacted by this process, and that funds for redress payments will be available centrally once a survivor's claim has been processed.

The Church Commissioners' board, which has always been committed to supporting the Scheme, has agreed to allocate £150m in funding to be released once the key parameters of the Scheme are in place.

Funds will be provided to the Archbishops' Council, and this is likely to take place in stages once the Scheme is better defined.

A procurement process is being developed to identify a third-party firm with the necessary expertise and experience to administer the Scheme.

This approach underlines the importance of independence, fairness, transparency, and accountability. Survivor working group members are fully involved in this process, including looking at the survivor journey through the scheme and ensuring independent support and advice is available.

Applicants to the Redress Scheme will be assessed according to agreed criteria: firstly, as to whether they qualify, and secondly, as to what level of financial redress is appropriate to their experience of abuse.

The Project Board has agreed the Redress Scheme will run for at least five years, and the contract between the Archbishops' Council and the third-party supplier will reflect this delivery period.

Delivery of the Scheme will be reviewed regularly, with a major review approximately two-thirds of the way through the contract period to assess

effectiveness of the Scheme and to advise on whether the Scheme should be extended.

It is not clear to the Board whether all the Church's responsibilities to survivors will have been fulfilled within that time, so the Scheme will be properly reviewed in case there is a need for it to be extended beyond this term.

A draft measure is expected to be brought to Synod in November 2023 or February 2024.

Alan Smith, the First Church Estates Commissioner, said: "Establishing a robust redress scheme is an essential step in the Church of England taking responsibility for the damage and hurt caused to the victims and survivors of church-related abuse.

"Their interests must be paramount. In making this allocation of funding, the Church Commissioners is signalling its commitment to working as part of the whole church to deliver the redress scheme and ensuring that justice is done for those who have suffered, for which we are truly sorry".

Bishop of Truro, Philip Mounstephen, said: "As Chair of the Redress Board, I have heard first hand of the experiences of those who have suffered Church-based abuse and how deeply it has affected their lives.

"While redress may go some way to righting wrongs, for survivors the effects of the abuse will be with them all their life: that we must acknowledge, with the deepest regret.

"The Board is deeply committed to developing a robust scheme that is fit for purpose in as timely a manner as possible.

"Whilst the time required for this was underestimated at the start, we are making significant progress, especially given the Scheme's significant complexity, and for the sake of all survivors and victims, it is vital that we get this right."

More information

The Church of England Redress Scheme Survivor Working Group is made up of seven survivors of church related clerical abuse, two of whom have voting rights on the board. They ensure the voice of survivors and survivor experience is represented in the development and implementation of the Redress Scheme; as well as being a critical friend/independent voice in their relationship with the Redress Scheme Project Board.

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