



Sam Atkins/Church of England

General Synod today voted in support of next steps on safeguarding independence as outlined in a [paper presented to Synod](#) from the Church of England's lead safeguarding bishop, Joanne Grenfell. Members voted to support the motion which called for detailed analysis of the four indicative options of organisational structures (*Appendix F in paper*), to come back to the February 2025 sitting of General Synod.

Introducing the motion (*text below*), Bishop Joanne (*pictured above*), also noted two of the areas of focus and concern which had come out of the consultation process, overseen by [the Response Group](#) since February's Synod; recommendations from Professor Jay on the definition of safeguarding and definition of spiritual abuse, along with concerns about the role of bishops in decision-making in safeguarding cases. Bishop Joanne urged members to read the theological reflection in the Synod paper (*Appendix E*) on the ways bishops can and should delegate tasks.

The motion was fully debated following a presentation to Synod from the co-chairs of the Church's Response Group, Bishop Joanne as lead safeguarding bishop and Lesley-Anne Ryder (*pictured below*), the external co-chair.

Synod motion

The Bishop of Stepney to move: 'That this Synod thank the Response Group for its work, welcome the progress update set out in GS 2364, and noting that feedback has identified concerns with: (a) Professor Jay's recommendations on spiritual abuse and the definition of safeguarding; and (b) the role of bishops in decision-making on safeguarding cases, ask for detailed analysis of the options set out in the paper to be undertaken for the General Synod in February.'



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Safeguarding Independence presentation General Synod July 2024

Much has happened since we last gathered, and I have many people to thank for pouring their energy, time and wisdom into this work. Their efforts are all reflected in your paperwork. I make no apologies for the length of this material because I think one of the ways in which to rebuild trust is to be as transparent as we possibly can be on the work we are doing.

We have undertaken this work because we know that we need different foundations for safeguarding, fit to undergird the complex and growing task of safeguarding in a Church which is lamenting its past failings, and working hard to improve its practices, policies, processes, and, most importantly, culture. We have been prompted by both Dr Sarah Wilkinson and Professor Alexis Jay to look at what we have got wrong and to face into what must change. I pay tribute to their work, which I have no doubt will be deeply influential in helping us to transform safeguarding in the Church of England.

I need to open with some words of thanks first.

First, to all the survivors and their advocates and people who use safeguarding services within the Church: thank you for your frankness and generosity in offering your practical suggestions for change. We have appreciated having strong and wise survivor representation on the Response Group, and others joining us for focus groups, where we have been able to benefit from your knowledge and experience.

Thank you to the thousands of people in parishes, lay and ordained, who are working day by day to make every church, chaplaincy, and missional community safer. To safeguarding professionals, in dioceses and in the National Safeguarding Team; thank you for your patience and professionalism while we have asked difficult questions which we know affect you deeply.

And a huge thank you to you, General Synod members: many of you have joined in with the deep engagement of recent months. 145 of you responded to our survey and, when we announced focus groups of General Synod members, they filled up so quickly that we had to add further sessions. Thank you for your willingness to participate.

I'm grateful to everyone in the Response Group who has encouraged, challenged and advised me on this work. Of those who are not Synod members (which is most), some are here today in the gallery and others are watching online at home. Thank you.

In a moment, I will set the scene and then hand over to my new colleague and external co-chair Lesley-Anne Ryder, who is not already known to anyone involved in this work and has never served a national Church project before. Bringing huge skill in public and charitable sector change management, she has very kindly agreed to co-chair the group with me to bring robust and necessary challenge and external perspective. Lesley-Anne, thank you for all that you are bringing to this work.

Before that, Synod, I want to ask something important of you.

You might have noticed, in the qualitative analysis which is Appendix B of this paper, that survivors are aware that it is our custom when debating safeguarding matters to remind Synod to consider carefully the ways we talk to and about each other and about survivors of abuse. One of the participants wondered why we needed to do that; “Why do they even need to be reminded?” they asked.

I hope that person will be encouraged by the tone of debates already at Synod. I encourage us all to be mindful of the gravity of the matters we are discussing today. And so, with the Chair’s permission, I suggest we hold a moment of silence to gather our thoughts and remember before God the deep pain carried by many of our sisters and brothers.

1. Process and scene setting – +Joanne

So, to set the scene. In February, you commissioned me to bring together a group to help oversee the work you requested. I hope you will see from the papers that we have done what you asked. We have delivered deep engagement and have listened and learnt from you, from each other and from other organisations.

The paper outlines some *indicative* models which might deliver what you have asked for. They are not proposals “from the centre” – from Church House, or from House of Bishops – but instead a reflection of careful and deep engagement with survivors, people in parishes, General Synod members and others.

We have tried to identify areas of consensus which we might build on, and not propose something which is unworkable or would not command widespread support. We come to this recognising that, among the problems we are trying to solve, are those of not having listened properly, not having been clear with each other about responsibilities and decision-making, and not having understood the practical implications of scrutiny. These failings are detailed in the Wilkinson Report. I am determined that we will not make these mistakes again - and indeed, for our collective credibility with survivors we cannot afford to make those mistakes again.

I invite Lesley-Anne Ryder to lead us, as she does so well, through some of the critical questions that have been raised.

Thoughts from external perspective – Lesley-Anne

As someone external to the Church who is comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty when directing organisational change and holding the patient or client at the heart of my work, but with limited knowledge of the Church as I came into this, I have been struck by how complex the systems and processes of the Church are. I don’t know if this is a familiar refrain?

Seriously, you are very complicated. I cannot easily find out whose job it is to take governance decisions here or how you work out which things

each body or council does. A great deal of my time on this work is spent disentangling this, so that I can ask the most helpful questions possible.

If I am finding this tricky, and I am not currently in crisis, how much more so might a vulnerable person in crisis find it to navigate with confidence your safeguarding systems?

Because of this potential for confusion, at the heart of this response group's work has been our desire to make sure that safeguarding is more straightforward and less daunting for people in parishes – whether they are a volunteer parish safeguarding officer or PCC member, or someone who might need to use a safeguarding service.

We have heard from PSOs that their work often includes other issues that detract their time from safeguarding activities. We must recognise that the parish is where safeguarding happens in practice. I find it interesting that your energies so often appear to be directed to the centre or to the dioceses and that people serving in parishes don't always know what resources are available to them.

Next steps

I hope the paper has clearly explained that we are exploring several models to deliver and scrutinise safeguarding. Of course, organisational form must follow function. Leaping straight to an organisational model before establishing exactly what the organisation must deliver is counterproductive, so we have needed to refine our vision of the functions before deciding whether to create new charities or other forms of non-profit organisations. That function definition is the point at which we find ourselves at present.

The model descriptions we outline in the paper are indicative and require further analysis for feasibility, before clear and costed descriptions can be brought to Synod in February 2025. We clearly have more to do on these, and will need to move some elements around from one model to another until we identify a solution which we can see will work in practice and which will meet the needs of those who turn to the Church for help in a time of crisis.

No change is not an option.

The baseline model reflects work in progress which is bringing about change already. Jay was right to identify professional supervision, consistency and clarity of scope as priorities. Without waiting for this paper to come to General Synod, this work has already begun and we must acknowledge this progress and the immense amount of work which has gone into it. We are also learning from the audits being undertaken with individual cathedrals and dioceses.

Having come to this from outside, I wondered whether I might find that everything is completely awful. That is indeed the impression one might reasonably gather from the various narratives and reports we hear.

I was delighted to be pleasantly surprised. I didn't know there was so much good practice . You are right to face your failings and to change. You can also be encouraged that you are doing some things very well. This was a very clear theme of the insights our engagement process gathered: don't lose what is good.

So that will be a priority for the coming months: to keep the helpful learning and good practice while designing models for the delivery and scrutiny you require for the future.

Next steps – Bishop Joanne

Dr Sarah Wilkinson recommended that we all understand and carry out trauma-informed practice. I think that should be all of us.

I commend to you the offer of training which we note in the paper, and I hope we will all find it helpful.

I have heard some harrowing stories of people who have experienced bullying and serious misconduct by office-holders. They tell us that this is not always addressed properly and that its consequences are devastating. Sometimes, such matters are passed to the diocesan safeguarding team because there is nowhere else to put them. And it is not wrong that they should be consulted. Sometimes, in the most complicated of situations we need a safeguarding person to tell us what is not safeguarding, as well as what is. But the point is that serious, non-safeguarding conduct matters do need their own appropriate response. And safeguarding professionals need to be able to get on with safeguarding.

Therefore, I propose in this paper that development work in this area should happen in parallel. For the sake of good safeguarding and good conduct, we must address this properly and seriously.

We have prayed this weekend for our new Prime Minister and Government. We await their response to IICSA recommendations relating to mandatory reporting and, in the meantime, we continue to implement our work in response to IICSA.

As I conclude, I encourage us to reflect theologically. 1 Peter chapter 2 reminds us how we are brought together with a common identity in Christ.

Whilst in the past we were not a people, now we are a people: the people of God. And because we are God's people, knowing his mercy and the transforming power of his love, we are called to be living stones, people who make up a church which unites around the person of Christ, which turns to him in repentance, and which commits to walking in his light.

Safer foundations, for living stones. That's my longing for safeguarding in the Church.

My colleagues heard from one parish safeguarding officer about someone in their village who, during lockdown, had encountered a really difficult situation and didn't know whether it was a safeguarding issue. This was not a person who normally had any church connection, but they saw a church poster giving contact details in case of a safeguarding concern. The church was the only place in the village that displayed anything about

safeguarding. They made contact, and the parish safeguarding officer was able to signpost them appropriately.

The parish is where the realities of life are present and where ministry in all its forms touches everyday lives. All the work we are doing has to be tested against this fundamental question: does it make the Church safer?

Safer foundations, for living stones. As we move into our debate, I encourage us to hold this aim closely. With Christ as our rock, we need to be living stones: churches with healthy cultures, which prevent harm, which manage risk well, which listen to victims and survivors, and which commit to keep on learning.

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