

Elliot Review Findings

Introduction

A review of the case of Rev A was commissioned in September 2015. This followed the disclosure of alleged sexual abuse committed by Rev A on Survivor B, decades ago, when he was a young person. B also reported that he had disclosed this abuse to a number of different people on separate occasions through the intervening years, both within and outside the Church. On each occasion, B reported that he had not received a response which he felt adequately addressed his needs. B also reported two other allegations of abuse - one by a senior church figure, (Brother C).

The National Safeguarding Adviser, Graham Tilby, along with the diocese of London, formally commissioned CCPAS (Churches Child Protection Advisory Service) to undertake the review to establish what lessons could be drawn from an independent examination of the case.

CCPAS engaged Ian Elliott, Safeguarding Consultant, with whom they have a joint working agreement, to undertake the review to establish what lessons could be drawn from an independent examination of the case.

In December the Church of England issued a statement about the review in response to a newspaper interview with the survivor, offering an unreserved apology and confirming that a settlement had been reached with the survivor. The Church's response is still ongoing and further details will be released at a later stage.

Response

A senior woman in the Church of England, the Bishop of Crediton, Sarah Mullally, received the report, at the request of Survivor B. [Read her response to the report here.](#)

Conclusions:

1. The reports of abuse that B has made are credible. They contain a tragic catalogue of exploitation and harm. The many attempts made by B to secure help from the Church within which he had grown up, resulted in frustration and failure. This increased his sense of anger at what had happened to him. He felt ignored.
2. His loss of faith is another tragic consequence of the experiences that he was subject to. The impact on his health appears to have been significant and continues today. Despite all of this, B retains a desire to see practice in the Church greatly improve. He wants to ensure that others who present in a similar way to himself and who are seeking to be heard, helped, and healed by the Church, will receive a fundamentally different response than he did.
3. The expectation that a survivor of abuse would have in contacting the Church, would be shaped by the policy documents that it has produced. As has already been stated, the

reviewer holds the main policy document for the Church in high regard. Unfortunately, practice in this case does not comply with what is contained in this policy. It falls short of it in that it did not place the pastoral needs of the survivor in a position of priority. Financial interests were allowed to impact practice.

4. Significantly, those involved in providing a pastoral service to B from within the Church, all expressed their concern about this direction that they were given. It grated with them and they felt unhappy about it. However, that unhappiness did not reach a sufficiently high level to cause them to openly question it or to reject it.

5. It is hard to accept that those who receive a disclosure of sexual abuse can fail to recall that it happened or to make an appropriate record of what was said. It is reported that this is what happened in this case. Practice of this nature is simply not acceptable and must be addressed. All who find themselves to be in this position must know what to do and must have some understanding of how they should respond. To have no records and to rely entirely on memory is simply not good enough.

6. It is important that practice is routinely monitored by a body that is outside of the diocese but within the Church. This body needs to have the power to intervene and seek change where this is considered necessary. The present structure within the Church does not allow for this to occur. Although there is a central safeguarding resource, its role is primarily advisory. It cannot intervene and address poor or inadequate practice when it becomes aware of it within the Church.

7. Where policy is created, there is no central monitoring process that routinely checks that it is being implemented. This approach of relying on widespread goodwill and a shared commitment to best practice across the Church, has been shown in other situations to be fundamentally flawed. In the opinion of the reviewer, there is nothing to suggest that this is not the case within the Church of England. It is not a secure enough basis for delivering a safeguarding service that may involve challenge, and direction.

8. Although resources have been created, they exist primarily at the level of the diocese and report within the diocesan structure. As outlined to me, the role of the bishop is critical and exerts a strong influence on the safeguarding decision making that takes place. Within this case, it is alleged that two of the abusers were senior members of the hierarchy which would suggest that they would be unlikely to make sound safeguarding decisions. Similarly, if a bishop is unable to recall a disclosure of a serious sexual assault occurring, this would cause the reviewer to doubt their ability to respond appropriately to identified risk in their diocese. These are not trivial issues. Behind every disclosure that is received lies human pain and suffering that can be so intense as to be life threatening. It deserves everyone's close attention.

9. There are positives in the case that it is important to note. Perhaps the most significant is the fact that this review was commissioned by the Church itself. No barrier was placed in the way of the review and all requests for information were responded to promptly. It has already been noted that all of those who were interviewed for this review expressed a sincere desire to learn from what had happened with the intention of ensuring that similar

mistakes were not made again. This is a very significant fact that must be seen as a real positive for the future.

10. An important and underused resource for the Church in guiding its safeguarding practice, is the experience of survivors of clerical abuse. As in this case, B holds great anger about what happened to him but despite this, he was able to share great wisdom with regard to how survivors can be reached out to, engaged with, and helped. There is a need for a dialogue to be established with B and others like him so that the Church can reach a position where it is complying with its stated policies.

11. The Church is to be commended that it has created the policies it has. It now has to focus on the ensuring that those policies are fully complied with by everyone within the Church. To achieve this, the reviewer believes that structural change is recommended if the mistakes that have been made by other Churches are to be avoided. The existence of policies alone, is not enough. What matters are the actions that are taken to implement those policies and deliver high quality safeguarding services to those who require them.

Recommendations:

The eleven recommendations reflect the key findings of the review and are presented under three headings.

Receiving Disclosures

- i. All those who may receive a disclosure of abuse should be provided with training that is aimed at ensuring that they have the skills, and knowledge necessary to respond in accordance with the stated policies of the Church.
- ii. All those who have received a disclosure of abuse should record what information has been shared with them and ensure that they explain to the person making the disclosure, what actions they will take, when they will take them, and why. Those in positions of seniority in the Church are more likely to be approached by a survivor of abuse to report what has happened to them. It is particularly important that these people have a comprehensive understanding of the policies of the Church, and also have an ability to implement those policies. Where help is needed to develop skills or knowledge in this area, this should be provided. Where the abuse is communicated through correspondence, guidance should be produced that is available to those handling correspondence to support them in determining how to respond to this situation. It is important that this guidance is fully compliant with the stated policies of the Church.

The Role of Advisors

- i. All advice received by agents employed by the Church, should be referenced against the stated policies of the Church before it is followed. Emphasis should be placed on ensuring that financial considerations are not given a priority that conflicts with the pastoral aims of the Church when engaging with survivors of abuse.

- ii. The Church should seek to create written down guidance with regard to how it will respond to claims for compensation from survivors. This guidance should be shared with survivors from an early juncture in the process. Every effort should be made to avoid an adversarial approach, placing emphasis on the provision of financial compensation as an aid to healing and closure for the survivor.
A first response to a survivor of abuse within the Church should be the issuing of an apology.

The Safeguarding Structure

- i. The Church should create a means by which it can inform itself as to what the reality of safeguarding practice is across the entire Church, as experienced by those receiving a service. The National Safeguarding Team should be given the power and the responsibility to monitor practice and to intervene where it is thought necessary to do so. It cannot do this if it is limited to an advisory role alone. The reviewer would believe that this can be achieved without diminishing the authority of the bishop in their diocese if carefully constructed and approached as part of the structure of the Church as a whole body.
- ii. Safeguarding decisions as they occur across the Church, should be subject to review by an independent body within the Church, which has the skills, knowledge and expertise to do this. The role of the National Safeguarding Team should be looked at again to enable it to possibly fulfil this requirement. The experience of other Churches who have sought to respond well to the issue of clerical abuse should be carefully examined and attempts made to ensure that mistakes made elsewhere will not be repeated within the Church of England. Survivors of clerical abuse hold great wisdom as to how the Church can prevent what happened to them reoccurring. To that end and where the motivation exists on the part of the survivor, a mechanism should be created that is aimed at creating a means whereby that knowledge can be directly shared with those involved in safeguarding in the Church.