

BRINGING THE PIECES TOGETHER

National Safeguarding Framework for the Church of England

Report of the National Safeguarding Panel

The National Safeguarding Panel (NSP) was established in June 2014 to support the Church of England's development of national safeguarding responses, notably in the light of the Chichester Reports. The NSP has performed a key role in providing reference to, and scrutiny of, the Church's development of national policy and guidance over the last two years. The original terms of reference were to:

- Resource the Church of England's leadership (Archbishops' Council and House of Bishops) with good high-level strategic advice and direction on safeguarding
- Ensure that Church of England safeguarding work meets accepted best practice in the UK and globally through assessing implementation and progress of safeguarding policies and practices across the Church in partnership with the Methodist Church and reporting back annually to the Archbishops' Council, the House of Bishops and the General Synod
- Request work and monitor progress made by the groupings established to support Church of England safeguarding work at national level, including the National Safeguarding Steering Group, as appropriate.

The NSP has met a total of eight times between June 2014 and March 2016. Since its inception, the Church of England has significantly strengthened its resources in support of a National Safeguarding Team and the development of a National Safeguarding Framework. Whilst the NSP is not formally part of the Safeguarding Governance Framework, its role as an Advisory body is key to ensuring that the Church of England is utilising external expertise and engaging a range of perspectives within the statutory, voluntary and faith sectors.

Achievements and contributions of the Panel

The achievements of the NSP fall under three key and inter-related themes:

Providing visible leadership and influence

Members of the Panel have provided individual and collective leadership and influence in respect of a number of areas of safeguarding developments. Some examples include:

- Public expression of the Church of England's commitment to improving safeguarding in the context of serious failing, public criticism and a lack of confidence in the Church to respond well to abuse perpetrated within the church community
- Equipping the church through the development of the National Safeguarding Team (NST) and direct engagement in working groups to support delivery
- Interpreting experiences within parish and diocesan context by advocating for policies that are easy to understand and implement
- Advocating for the importance of developing a safer church today and tomorrow at a time when much of the agenda and attention is on non-recent abuse
- Signposting the Church to other sources of expertise and experiences beyond the NSP membership
- Bringing a contextual understanding of parliamentary and government policy

Promoting good safeguarding practice

The Panel has promoted better safeguarding practice across a range of areas – for example, work with survivors, theological underpinning, safeguarding training, clergy discipline, and the development of a range of national policies and practice guidance. The Panel has:

- Promoted a culture of learning and improvement through case reviews and quality audit processes
- Modelled good practice by working with different organisations and using wide range of skills and expertise
- Monitored and scrutinised the work of NST to standardise safeguarding practice across dioceses
- Provided written and verbal feedback on policies and practice guidance
- Brought a criminal justice perspective to the NSP discussions and contribution to the improving risk assessment and domestic abuse responses

Supporting a survivor perspective

“The panel has given me confidence as a survivor that the church is taking safeguarding seriously enabling me to support others who have lost faith in the church and believing that the church can become a safe place again for those who have suffered abuse”

Survivor

The Panel has greatly benefited from the contribution of survivors of ‘church-related’ abuse, in ensuring that a ‘survivor perspective’ influences both the agenda and the discussion of the panel and work of the Church of England to improve its safeguarding responses. This has included the work of the Faith and Order Commission’s theology and safeguarding project and more specifically work in respect of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Areas for future consideration by the Church

Members of the panel have identified a number of areas that the Church of England should consider as part of its continued work to improve safeguarding.

‘Getting onto the front foot’

The Panel are concerned about the impact of non-recent abuse cases in reducing the capacity of the Church for visioning and transforming the level of understanding that safeguarding is everybody’s business. In particular, the Panel recommends that the Church considers:

- Responses to growing number of cases coming to light and the allocation of resources to respond, particularly within parishes to deal with the pressures, alongside the potential for overwhelming parishes and dioceses with national developments
- Moving forward from looking inward to promoting its safeguarding work in the field and with other Christian denominations and faith groups
- Strategies to avoid overwhelming bishops and diocesan officers with ‘dense’ policy and guidance documents and the need to develop better understanding of the resource implications for dioceses
- Improved communication and dissemination of information, fostering a culture of collaboration and co-operation between dioceses

Raising standards and challenging practice

The Panel recommends that the Church of England consider:

- The tension between autonomy exercised by diocesan bishops, expectations of the public and role of national safeguarding team in raising standards, challenging poor practice and creating a more uniformed response as a single institution
- The need for greater clarity about lines of accountability and information relating to standards settings and performance management to help the Panel judge the effectiveness of change
- An assessment of the impact of safeguarding work on fear amongst senior clergy and their ability to influence and lead
- The need to involve the Panel earlier in development of policy and guidance and evidence impact in terms of changes and improvements

Maximising the effectiveness of the National Safeguarding Panel

The Panel have identified a number of areas where it can continue to support the Church of England in respect of safeguarding developments. These include:

- NSP role in supporting and embedding cultural change in complex organisations and improving public confidence in church safeguarding practice
- Act as a steering group with programme of specific changes measured over time, involving people who can make a real difference
- Focus on building a preventative model of safeguarding as part of DNA of the church
- Communicating outcomes of the Independent Inquiry and taking steps to ensure that issues raised by the Inquiry are addressed through policy and practice
- Focus on consistency of approach across dioceses to high national standard and explore how diocesan concerns around funding of safeguarding could be addressed
- Continual evaluation and refinement of the work of the NST, influenced by changes in current national policy and thinking – membership may need to change with this
- Offer independent insight, advice and challenge to CofE thinking on safeguarding – membership must reflect independence but demonstrate an understanding of principles and values that underpin CofE safeguarding practice
- Take a more ‘supervisory’ role as Church embraces a more national approach and need for provision of service to diocese rather than advice and support – greater representation of diocese or Synod without diluting national expertise and experience
- Value in chairing within Church hierarchy but clarity about how to challenge issues and how the various groups fit together

Report prepared by:

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Rt Revd Paul Butler, Bishop of Durham (Chair until July 2016)

Rt Revd Peter Hancock, Bishop of Bath & Wells (Chair from July 2016)

Revd Dr Liz Smith, Methodist Church, Co-Chair of the Joint Safeguarding Working Group

Revd Gareth Powell, Methodist Church, Chair of Methodist Conference

Venerable Annette Cooper, Archdeacon of Colchester (Senior Clergy Representative)

Donald Findlater, former Director of Stop it Now! UK and Ireland, Lucy Faithfull Foundation

Gary FitzGerald, Chief Executive of Action on Elder Abuse (vulnerable adult expert)

Baroness Valerie Howarth, Chair of Safeguarding Group, Livability

Ms Julie Jones, former Chief Executive of the Social Care Institute for Excellence

Ms Jo Kind, and Mr Phil Johnson, Joint Minister and Clergy Sexual Abuse Survivors

(MACSAS) representatives

Matthew Reed, Chief Executive, Children's Society

Sir Roger Singleton CBE (formerly the Government's Chief Safeguarding Adviser)

DCI Duncan Sheppard, Ex-Police National lead for Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements

(MAPPA) Offender Management and Public Protection Group

Rt Revd Mark Sowerby, Bishop of Horsham, Deputy Lead Bishop on Safeguarding for the Church of England.

Chris Pearson, Chair - National Safeguarding Commission for England and Wales, Catholic Church

Peter Wanless, Chief Executive, NSPCC

Graham Wilmer MBE, Founder, Lantern Project