

NSSG Response to SCIE Report

The National Safeguarding Steering Group welcomes [this independent report](#) and acknowledges that the results of the survivor survey makes for very difficult reading. Our failure to respond compassionately has undermined confidence in the Church's safeguarding practice. Whilst the overall report does recognise the Church has made significant improvements since the start of the audits in 2015, we fully accept that more must be done. The NSSG is committed to making this happen and we outline below our initial response to both parts of the report.

The Social Care Institute for Excellence ('SCIE') was commissioned by the National Safeguarding Team to independently audit all 42 diocesan safeguarding arrangements between 2015 – 2017.

Part One of the report provides an overview of the learning from these audits. In recognition of the need to ascertain the experiences and views of victims and survivors, the NST commissioned a further piece of work from SCIE which was undertaken in 2018. The findings from this survey form **Part Two** of the report. The final part of the report brings the learning together and provides the church with an analysis of systemic issues for consideration for the Church.

The 'Learning Together' methodology used by SCIE provides for what they refer to as a 'future orientated focus', namely that the learning and analysis is couched in a way that poses questions for the Church to consider as it seeks to continue to improve its safeguarding practices and arrangements. It also provides the Church with an opportunity to involve victims and survivors in helping to identify best practice in engaging with and supporting survivors of abuse.

We recognise at the outset that there is a personal cost to everyone who has contributed to the survivors' survey and it is the Church's responsibility to make sure this information is used to further develop and improve our safeguarding practice. The Church acknowledges that victims and survivors of church-related abuse have not received a consistently good response from the Church and this can lead to being retraumatised. The impact of abuse is life long and it is essential that the Church responds well to disclosures and is able to support survivors on an ongoing basis. The five-staged model adopted by SCIE but developed by a survivor of church-related abuse, both reinforces this and provides a helpful platform on which the Church can build.

The Church notes the overview findings arising from the independent diocesan safeguarding audits and the 32 'Considerations for the National Safeguarding Team.' A significant number of these already form part of the NST's work programme for 2019 and beyond. SCIE recognise that there have been major improvements in the safeguarding resources, policies, guidance and training and in terms of how casework is managed within the dioceses, stating that collectively these have contributed to making significant progress to the safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults.

Their outstanding concerns lie in underlying systemic arrangements and how safeguarding is managed within the Church of England, which may enable potential vulnerabilities to arise in the future. The Church will continue to reflect on these alongside learning arising from evidence given to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA). In addition to seeking to strengthen the support to victims and survivors, it is taking forward a number of key actions arising from evidence to the Inquiry to date including reforms to the Clergy Discipline Measure, strengthening complaints and whistleblowing and the establishment of an independent safeguarding Ombudsman service, and work to strengthen the selection, suitability and capability of clergy. Above all, it is seeking to focus on embedding safeguarding in the culture and mission of the Church. This will take time and there is much to do, and this report provides further impetus to the Church to maintain and where possible accelerate these improvements.

The NSSG will respond in more detail to some of the individual considerations during 2019 but in its initial response to the report, it has agreed the following actions:

- The NST will work with survivors to codesign a Victim/Survivor Charter. This will be a statement of principles regarding good practice in responding to, supporting and communicating with survivors.
- The NST will work with survivors to develop a more systematic way of engaging their views and experiences in their work and the work of diocesan safeguarding advisory panels and the National Safeguarding Panel, NSP.
- The NST will explore how the use of both mediation and restorative practices may be used to address more fully the experiences and concerns of victims and survivors.
- The NST will commission a piece of work to develop a range of materials, for instance testimonies, video's etc that capture a wide variety of 'stories' of abuse across church bodies, including church leader's responses and the voices of survivors. These materials can be used in the Church's core training modules, discernment processes, during clergy training by Theological Training Institutions and in the Church's leadership training and wider communications.
- The NST will commence the revision of practice guidance detailing how the Church responds to victims and survivors of church-related abuse.
- This process of revision will include the direct engagement of survivors, with a view to developing a 'menu of support' that should be available to all survivors regardless of where they live.
- The NST will continue to work with the Catholic Church in England and Wales, and other Christian denominations in the future, to develop and commission an independent helpline and community advocacy services, a project known currently as 'Safe Spaces.' Funding is now in place and that the final details are being worked out. This project, which has been established working with survivors, aims to:
 - Establish a central hub with skilled first response advocates trained in trauma informed support and guidance.

- Offer online sessional counselling for survivors of church related abuse.
- Develop a digital data base of community spokes made up of existing local, national statutory voluntary and community-based services that can support survivors.
- Develop 10 new or existing community based therapeutic initiatives that support survivors of church related abuse co-produced with survivors.