

## GENERAL SYNOD

### Progress Report by the National Safeguarding Steering Group

#### Summary

1. In July 2018 General Synod resolved to endorse the priorities for action in GS2092. That report outlined 3 emerging themes from evidence given to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) and proposed 13 actions arising from these. This report sets out the latest in relation to the themes and actions.
2. At its forthcoming meeting, Synod will also have the opportunity of a question and answer session specifically focussed on safeguarding. To provide an introduction to this there are short updates on IICSA and a brief description of the National Safeguarding Panel. The report concludes with a summary of other national safeguarding developments.

#### The National Safeguarding Steering Group (NSSG)

3. The NSSG was created in 2016 and is responsible for the strategic oversight of national safeguarding activity. It has delegated authority from the House of Bishops to agree safeguarding practice guidance which has “due regard” status. On those matters requiring additional consideration and/or decisions, it makes recommendations to the Archbishops Council and House of Bishops.

#### Support for and engagement with victims and survivors of abuse

*Publish the research being undertaken by the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE).*

4. The results of a survivor survey were published on 04 April 2019 alongside the overview report of independent audits of diocesan safeguarding activities also conducted by SCIE. The latter recognises that the Church has made significant improvements since 2015 in resources, policies, guidance, training and complex casework.
5. SCIE present 32 considerations for further development, many of which have already been actioned or are included in the National Safeguarding Team’s work programme, and the NSSG has responded to these.
6. In contrast the report of the survivors’ survey makes for difficult reading and illustrates the distance which the Church has to go in responding well to disclosures and supporting survivors.
7. The full reports and the NSSG response can be found at  
<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/SCIE%20Final%20overview%20report%20of%20the%20independent%20diocesan%20safeguarding%20audits%20and%20additional%20work%20on%20improving%20responses%20to%20survivors%20of%20abuse.pdf>  
<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/NSSG%20Response%20to%20SCIE%20Overview%20Report.pdf>

*Work with the Catholic church to develop and commission a central hub and community spoke model of support to survivors – Safe Spaces.*

8. The Safe Spaces project will provide a fast response service to survivors; on-line sessional counselling; and a database of local services. Work has progressed conjointly with some survivors, to develop an invitation to tender. It will be published by the time Synod meets with the independent provider appointed by late Autumn 2019. Four representatives from each of the Church's survivor groups will participate in the selection of the provider. Ongoing consultation is continuing with Diocesan Safeguarding Advisers from both churches to develop the interface which will be required between the independent provider and the dioceses. The project is being co-funded by the two churches together under a grant of £292,000 from the Allchurches Trust Ltd.
9. There will be a national Safeguarding Summit on 9-10 September 2019. The first day will concentrate on survivor engagement and the Survivor Reference Group will be playing a significant part in the design of the programme.

*Work with survivors to establish an independently chaired Survivors Panel.*

10. Since the last Synod, a group of 17 survivors have been meeting together as a Survivor Reference Group to look at developing a future engagement strategy between the Church and survivors. It is hoped that this work will help to formulate the structure for a national Survivors Panel, which will act as a reference group for the future safeguarding work of the Church.
11. To spearhead this and work with the Survivor Reference Group, the NST has created a new post of Advisor on Survivor Engagement. The priorities for this role are
  - a. To co-produce with victims and survivors a 'Survivors' Charter'.
  - b. To revise the 'Responding Well' guidance. Once this is drafted it will be sent to victims and survivors for consultation and further revision before it is published.
  - c. To explore whether restorative practice can be brought into the Church to help to address long-standing conflicts in our relationships with some survivors. This does not seek to replace the existing mediation processes, but rather to complement them.

*Undertake exploratory work to consider spheres for the Church's approach to redress.*

12. Other demands on the National Safeguarding Team have prevented work on this task to date. We expect to engage on this with IICSA.

### **Clergy selection, suitability and discipline**

13. Candidates coming to Bishops Advisory Panels are required to satisfy the Panel that they understand and will adhere to the Church's safeguarding policy. Ordinands need to complete the appropriate module of training before ordination. A process has been established whereby the advice of the National Safeguarding Team can be obtained in relation to any concerns which come to the attention of the Crown Nominations Committee as candidates are considered for preferment.
14. Disciplinary action is being taken where, prima facie, it appears that due regard has not been paid to the provisions of Practice Guidance, particularly in relation to the notification to relevant parties of safeguarding disclosures or concerns.

*Implement new policy in respect of Permission to Officiate*

15. An audit of the PTO arrangements has been re-scheduled for 2020. Initial progress has been made on this.

*Develop and implement a National Clergy Register*

16. A new integrated People and Data system is being developed and this will support the new National Clergy Register.

*To review the Clergy Discipline Measure (CDM) and consider more robust processes for the handling of safeguarding concerns and complaints*

17. The National Safeguarding Team has conducted a consultation on the effectiveness of the CDM and two members of the House of Bishops have consulted all diocesan bishops on their views. The House of Bishops has now decided to establish a Working Group to develop proposals for including the management of safeguarding shortcomings for which action by means of a CDM is not appropriate.

**Structure, independence, oversight and enforcement**

*Develop and analyse options for further strengthening independent elements of oversight, scrutiny and powers of intervention*

18. There will be some changes in the leadership structure of the National Safeguarding Team in the coming months. Melissa Caslake, currently Director of Children's Services in the City of Westminster and Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea has been appointed Director of Safeguarding and will commence on 29 July 2019.
19. A greater element of independence is being brought to major investigations and lessons learnt reviews. For example, retired judge His Honour David Pearl is leading the review into allegations against the Rt. Rev. Hugh Whitsey, former Bishop of Chester. Further announcements are pending of independent people to conduct investigations.
20. IICSA is expected to make some observations about independence within the Church and its recommendations will need to be carefully considered.
21. Given the exceptional demands on the National Safeguarding Team it has not been possible to progress work on further quality assurance systems. This will be taken forward as soon as possible and meanwhile the programme of independent audits of cathedrals is underway with several already published.

*Continue to emphasise the duties and accountabilities of all clergy, church offices and Diocesan Bishops for safeguarding*

22. The national training programme has recently been revised. This places emphasis on the respective roles of all church offices. The practice guidance "Key Roles and Responsibilities of Church Office Holders and Bodies" is on the schedule of policies due for revision. Action taken in relation to senior clergy who appear to fail to discharge their responsibilities appropriately is further evidence of commitment to creating a safe Church.

*Develop a business proposal for the establishment of an Independent Ombudsman Service*

23. A proposal was developed by the Legal Office for such a service. Consultation including some survivor interests suggested it would not meet the needs of survivors. Further discussions have been held to create a different brief for an independent complaints mechanism and these will be developed over the coming weeks.

*Undertake an analysis of the benefits and risks associated with developing a national safeguarding service empowering all safeguarding staff continually*

24. As reported to the last Synod the Archbishops' Council does not consider that the benefits of such an arrangement currently outweigh the risks. The NSSG will however, continue to consider carefully all proposals for change and reflect on whether such proposals are an appropriate and adequate response to the perceived shortcomings in the present arrangements.

### **Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA)**

25. IICSA, has published its report into the Chichester Diocese and Peter Ball Anglican Church case studies. A response was provided from the lead safeguarding bishop and the House of Bishops. The National Team is now working towards the wider Church hearing which begins on Monday 1st July for two weeks. The Inquiry has already announced that it is looking at sample dioceses (London, York, Sheffield and Worcester) and will also be focusing on a range of other topics and witnesses. IICSA will publish a full list of witnesses it is calling nearer the time. During this third public hearing the Inquiry will return to a number of issues which emerged in the Diocese of Chichester and Peter Ball case studies. These are listed in paragraph 56 of the Conclusions section of the report.
26. IICSA has also announced a new investigation into child protection in religious organisations and settings. The investigation is thematic and will review the current child protection policies, practices and procedures in religious institutions that have a significant presence in England and Wales. It is holding a preliminary hearing on 23 July.

### **National Safeguarding Panel (NSP)**

27. The NSP is an independent panel led by an independent chair who is Meg Munn, a former social worker, MP and Minister. Its role is to provide independent advice on the Church's policies and practices in safeguarding and independent scrutiny and challenge to its safeguarding work. Its terms of reference and membership are determined by the Archbishops' Council on the advice of the independent chair.
28. Meg Munn has recently revised the method of working of the NSP and she will describe this to Synod. NSSG sees the NSP as an important element in the scrutiny and oversight of the Church's safeguarding activity.

### **Other National Safeguarding Developments**

29. The second phase of the Past Cases Review is due to commence shortly. This should provide assurance that in church records there are no known cases of abuse or neglect of children or vulnerable adults which have not been scrutinised and appropriate action taken.

30. The new arrangements for reporting serious safeguarding incidents to the Charity Commission have been implemented. This will provide a further source of data which will enable the Church to know the extent of abuse and neglect by church officials.
31. The House of Bishops has discussed the Seal of Confessional following publication of its working party report in May. The house agreed to strengthen the training element both within safeguarding and ministry modules as well as to consider whether regulations or guidance can be strengthened in relation to hearing confessions of minors.
32. The National Safeguarding Team has analysed data received from annual diocesan returns and reported on this to the NSSG in April. The NSSG will shortly be considering the publication of this data and it is planned to place this on the Church of England website.
33. Work is proceeding to provide a case management system which will initially provide a facility for the National Safeguarding Team and later for those dioceses which lack electronic recording systems.
34. The process of reviewing the content of policies and practice guidance to transfer it to a single electronic manual continues. This is expected to be launched during the Autumn.
35. The National Safeguarding Team is considering commissioning a piece of work on how to engage children and young people in co-producing safeguarding materials to raise awareness of ways to remain safe and to contribute towards prevention.
36. Arrangements are well advanced for independent reviews to be conducted in relation to the Church's involvement in the cases of John Smyth QC and Trevor Devamanikkam. Some delay has been caused by the necessity to ensure that information sharing mechanisms with the independent reviewers are GDPR compliant.

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Bishop of Bath & Wells and Lead Bishop for Safeguarding

Chair of the National Safeguarding Steering Group

3 June 2019