

## GENERAL SYNOD

### Update on safeguarding and discussion on its future governance

#### Summary

This paper summarises work undertaken since the February meeting of Synod in two safeguarding bodies, the National Safeguarding Panel (NSP) and the Independent Safeguarding board (ISB.) It then explores emerging ideas on the possible shape of Phase 2 of the independent oversight of safeguarding in the Church of England

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#### National Safeguarding Panel (NSP)

1. The appointment of Meg Munn in September 2018, as Independent Chair of the NSP, introduced the first independent leadership role into safeguarding in the Church of England. It is a paid role to be carried out in 30 or fewer days a year. All other members of the National Safeguarding Panel serve in a voluntary capacity.
2. Following her appointment Meg led a review of the Panel's terms of reference leading to a clearer focus on providing safeguarding advice and scrutinising policies, procedures and implementation.
3. Meeting six times a year for two hours, Panel members include three victim / survivor representatives, five people with professional expertise in safeguarding and representatives of the Catholic and Methodist churches. The Panel recently recruited a member of clergy serving in a parish to provide a greater focus on the implementation of safeguarding at a local level.
4. Key staff from the NST are in attendance alongside the safeguarding lead and deputy lead bishops. Each meeting examines one policy area in depth and makes recommendations. The Chair writes a blog after each meeting making public the subjects discussed and the conclusions and recommendations. It can be found at [www.chairnsp.org](http://www.chairnsp.org) The Chair sits on the National Safeguarding Steering Group (NSSG) and ensures that the Panel's deliberations are included in the work of the Group.
5. The Panel has influenced decisions on a wide range of safeguarding policy initiatives including:
  - i. Clergy Discipline Measure
  - ii. Redress & the Interim Support Scheme
  - iii. Response to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA)
  - iv. Adult safeguarding
  - v. Complaints
  - vi. Quality Assurance
  - vii. Past Cases Review
6. In addition the NSP has encouraged the Church to focus more on prevention and spreading good practice, through holding four online webinars. The Panel has also questioned both Archbishops about safeguarding.

7. The Panel ensures that the Church benefits from rigorous scrutiny of policy and procedures by victims and survivors and external experts alongside the experience of the Methodist and Catholic Churches.

### **Independent Safeguarding Board (ISB)**

8. The ISB's formal launch took place in January 2022, following the appointment of the third member, meaning the Board is made up of Chair Professor Maggie Atkinson; Survivor Advocate Jasvinder Sanghera CBE, and Independent Member Steve Reeves, all three being supported by an experienced, combined project management and administrative staff member, Niamh Meehan. As a group, we are contactable via [contact@independent-safeguarding.org](mailto:contact@independent-safeguarding.org) and each of us has an individual ISB email address, all of them configured as standard as follows: [firstname.surname@independent-safeguarding.org](mailto:firstname.surname@independent-safeguarding.org)
9. We receive a number of days' time per month from NST senior policy team member Deborah McGovern, who during those days is entirely dedicated to ISB activities. The Board also has formal Memoranda of Understanding with Church House teams for communications, financial, IT and HR advice.
10. In late April 2022 the ISB appointed Plexus Legal LLP to ensure an independent legal offer and support to the ISB. A central qualification in the tendering process was that the company concerned must have had, and must currently have, no business with any part of the C of E.
11. Having taken detailed legal advice on the adoption of an Information Sharing Agreement (ISA) applicable to the work we do, the ISB has agreed to the contents of, and now signed, the NCIs' ISA. This is ICO and GDPR compliant, and gives us information sharing access to dioceses and other C of E bodies without undertaking lengthy separate negotiations on each piece of work the ISB undertakes. Plexus LLP gave us considered legal advice that creating a separate ISA would build in unnecessary delays and duplication to our work, and lead to considerable additional expense.
12. The ISB has its own Privacy Policy and Notice, and its own statement on Reasonable Adjustments for those with Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.
13. Also in the Spring of 2022, we appointed an independent web design and branding business, AVIDD, to help us to develop and at Synod to launch the ISB website. It is independent of, but discoverable through live links to, both the C of E's and a range of external safeguarding bodies' websites. Survivors advised us on its configuration. Its brand and image are distinctive.
14. The site will feature governance content such as our finalised terms of reference and a range of legally required documentation, our work plans, and as we begin to produce them, our reports or publications. Its main purpose is to enable us to

describe what the ISB does and does not do, how to contact us and what we will do if you do so, and in due course a range of ISB webinars and blogs, FAQs and other materials. The site will include a child friendly section so that younger visitors can access and understand our work.

15. We meet 6 times a year, for four business meetings and two longer sessions looking strategically both at where the ISB's energies should be applied, and critically at the C of E's progress in improving safeguarding. The Board has had one away day and two business meetings to date, and plans a longer strategic session in late July, among other topics there being reflecting on what Synod discussions today have taught us as we begin to frame our first Annual Report which will include our advice to all in the C of E on safeguarding issues.
16. The ISB, in its current interim iteration as informed by the relevant Policy Paper of February 2021, is not a casework or primary investigations body. It means the ISB is a Board to which matters may be referred for consideration on whether we will or won't undertake what is being requested; then if we agree, how we will amend reshape or adjust the work so it matches and does not overstep or fail to match our remit as per our ToR. It means we don't act as the first body that reviews or reports on an issue if somebody comes straight to us, unless we originated the work - as we will in the case of Jasvinder's imminent report, Steve's on his national work with DSOs & DSAPs, and the Board's with NSP on Phase 2 advice to the C of E.
17. In Phase 1, it is not granted the overriding authority to direct, regulate or insist. It both oversees the NST, and will advise on how both independence and authority should be assured in Phase 2 and beyond. The ISB is also charged with advising, alongside the NST, NSSG and others, on making safeguarding a habit of everyday practice across the C of E.
18. Although the ISB is not a primary investigator of cases, it can of course, as part of its oversight role, scrutinise or review how the Church has handled a particular case, either on its own initiative, or if it decides to do so after a case has been referred to it.
19. The ISB liaises with, and oversees the quality of the work of, the NST. ISB Members meet regularly with the current Lead Bishop for Safeguarding Bishop Jonathan Gibbs, will do so with his eventual successor expected to be in post from mid-2023, and with the deputy lead bishop on safeguarding, Suffragan Bishop Julie Conalty. The ISB also regularly briefs Archbishops' Council and senior staff, given the ISB's work impacts on them as it does the wider C of E.
20. Victims and survivors inform the ISB's work. No individual survivor, or single representative body, holds a paramount position. The ISB seeks to reach those whose voices might otherwise not be prominent in this area of work. During Spring and early Summer 2022, the ISB's Survivor Advocate met, and listened to the themes emerging from, survivors and victims, and also some respondents. Her report, featuring common themes raised, now forms part of what the ISB says to

Synod today. It will be a prominent first report on the ISB's new website. Its common threads include

- a. a wish to see more agile, flexible, human and responsive approaches both to those who disclose, and respondents
- b. a clearer understanding of both where to go with the concerns and trauma of any form of abuse, and how what is disclosed will be dealt with
- c. a need to be believed, and then kept informed
- d. a need not to be re-traumatised by what then happens, either immediately or over time
- e. for terms like redress, support and understanding to be lived realities, not simply words on a page
- f. an environment in which it is genuinely safe to raise concerns and complaints, which will then not be side-lined but taken up and addressed

21. Jasvinder will speak to her report in greater depth and detail at Synod.

22. ISB members meet with DSAs/DSOs, DSAPs and their Chairs, and C of E bodies responsible for ensuring good practice in safeguarding. Our second report will cover the work done in this space, and seek to give advice on meeting the challenge of unevenness of prioritising safeguarding, resourcing the relevant staff teams, and ensuring continued improvement. Steve Reeves is leading on this work, and is also in discussion with bodies that regulate inspect or uphold and promote professional standards in wider society.

23. The C of E will need to agree whether a necessary independent strand in safeguarding will in Phase 2 onwards be achieved through:

- a. the continuation of the ISB as currently constituted, or
- b. through a new body.

This discussion was at the centre of ISB discussions with the AC and the HoB in Spring 2022 and of the NSP/ISB Fringe discussion at lunchtime today.

24. Discussion on Phase 2 should now gather pace. It should engage diocesan and national safeguarding bodies, and Synod decision making in 2023. This will ensure no slowing of pace in creating Phase 2, scheduled to start in early 2024.

25. The ISB now offers, with the NSP, to coordinate the discussions, and under the advisory element of their remits to advise the C of E on achieving what survivors in particular consider will be necessary: a body to be charged with setting standards, with the power to check they are attained and maintained by all concerned.

26. The ISB advises that vesting authority over the C of E in a Phase 2 independent body will be both vital, and possibly difficult to attain in a distributed, federated governance model. Without "landing" that next step, there will be a danger of any or all of the following resulting:

- (a) A continued sense of victims and survivors finding it hard to believe in the sincerity of the C of E to ensure all involved in it are safe, kept so, and able both to contribute to and trust the church.
- (b) A continued risk that a preoccupation with healing the past could get in the way of shaping the present and creating the future of preventive safeguarding.
- (c) A continued sense of the church struggling to showcase and celebrate good work in parishes, dioceses and the community.

27. The ISB will continue to advise on improvements and at the same time to highlight where the C of E is doing good work, preventing failure and ensuring the wellbeing of all those involved in the Church.

28. In line with reflections at February 2022 Synod, since discussed with the AC and the HoB, the ISB's focus lies on the following. We will report on these, including in an Annual Report at the end of 2022. This will be issued ahead of a year's work through 2023, helping to "land" Phase 2.

- a. We continue to believe the C of E is sincere in wishing to improve safeguarding. Current governance as in the attached diagram does not clearly outline who has authority to ensure the delivery of that intent.
- b. We remain, as the C of E is, aware of - and Jasvinder Sanghera's report explores - past failures, whether or not the Church considers they have already been addressed. The ISB's first report, led by Jasvinder's work, feeds back on Survivors' perspective, and advises on continued improvement.
- c. We believe the C of E needs to look beyond its own boundaries and structures, to learn from safeguarding in localities, where the C of E is serving people who also use public services.
- d. We wish to help the Church to ensure that as well as responding with a stronger victim over an institutional focus, it sustains proactive, preventive, "everybody's responsibility" safeguarding to help prevent failure. The ISB is undertaking several reviews of work already done by others, and will report on what "lessons learned" should feel like in reality.
- e. We will continue to focus on the following, though we remain flexible to react should unexpected events require it:
  - i. Unevenness of experience from diocese to diocese in what people with a safeguarding concern, and in the priority given to safeguarding.
  - ii. Issues when safeguarding is seen as an "also-to-do" task not a culture that infuses all practice, resourced and staffed to match in every diocese, with DSAs/DSOs/DSAPs empowered to work without fear or favour.
  - iii. How well safeguarding issues are dealt with early and flexibly, without the escalation into formal complaints processes.

- iv. Hard-to-navigate structures, a review and reform of which should be undertaken alongside the C of E's reviews of governance.
- v. A sense of "not knowing who can help me" and the need to make better use and stronger promotion of the Safe Spaces service as its new tender is awarded after a recent evaluation of the pilot phase.
- vi. Slow, defensive responses, with the person making a disclosure still too often disbelieved and "institutions" seeming to matter more.
- vii. Promises about remedial action, too often still either partially or not delivered, or delayed and bound about with legalistic defensiveness.
- viii. The ISS and the need for development, governance and consistency of the Redress Scheme to be introduced in 2023.
- ix. We look for positive development in transparent high quality safeguarding that means everybody is assured of being safe.
- x. The development of child-friendly approaches if a child or young person makes an approach for help, advice or redress.

Meg Munn,  
Chair, National Safeguarding Panel

Maggie Atkinson,  
Chair, Independent Safeguarding Board

**National governance structure to support safeguarding in the Church of England**

