

GENERAL SYNOD

Update from the National Director of Safeguarding

Summary

This report is to update General Synod on my first six months in role as the National Director for Safeguarding for the Church of England. The report will set out my experiences and observations with regard to safeguarding within the Church and the role of the National Safeguarding Team.

Content

1. The report considers the following themes:

- Culture and history
- Workload
- Treatment of staff
- Accountability
- Prioritisation
- Independence
- Vision

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January 2023

Published by the General Synod of the Church of England
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GENERAL SYNOD**1. Culture and history**

- 1.1. I have found that the Church is a very complex system to navigate as it has hundreds of years of history, tradition, and ways of doing things.
- 1.2. It goes without saying that the Church has not been a safe place for all, which will be in the forefront of people's mind's especially for those that have not been protected or heard, and feel a great sense of betrayal and injustice.
- 1.3. In the last 18 months we can see a positive shift in the right direction but the perception of safeguarding is still poor in the eyes of many. This sadly may be the case for some time.

2. Workload

- 2.1. The Church has undertaken some significant work in recent times to both improve and understand safeguarding across the Church notably PCR2, IICSA, Safe Spaces, a recording system, the Interim Support Scheme and governance to ensure accountability.
- 2.2. It should not be underestimated the amount of work this has meant for all involved and the commitment it has taken to do this work. We must also recognise the hard work and commitment from the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisors , Clergy , Bishops and Diocesan Secretaries who try their best to improve safeguarding everyday amidst many other pressures.
- 2.3. It is commendable the work that has been undertaken thus far and credit should be given too all the wider safeguarding partners and Zena Marshall who in the last 18 months has undertaken some incredible work and improved relationships across the system.

3. Treatment of staff

- 3.1. I have been taken aback with the amount of abuse, bullying and harassment that colleagues receive and threat to life on occasions. This has predominately been from a small number of survivors , advocates and others who have concerns with regards to safeguarding across the wider church community . The NST are at the forefront of this abuse which has a detrimental impact on them and their families. I have not witnessed or been informed of any bullying or harassment within the NCI's .
- 3.2. All of them come to work to do a good job, but this is often received with abuse and harassment. However, there is not always a sense of how staff can be protected from such horrific abuse and bullying.
- 3.3. As a Church we do have a duty of care to them. There are both legal and moral obligations to protect staff from this. As a result of this, staff will often shut down and not want to engage with the people who are abusing staff which in turn has a detrimental effect on all involved. It must be noted this behaviour is across the

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NCI's and is directed from the wider church community to every level of the organisation.

4. Accountability

- 4.1. It is not always clear who is responsible for elements of safeguarding or services and who makes the decisions. This in turn leads to a blame culture and issues with trust and reputations.

5. Prioritisation

- 5.1. There are some big projects that have been commissioned which I truly believe has come from a good place. However, in some cases, this causes more trauma than good for those that are receiving or expecting to receive a service.
- 5.2. Often there are not moments to pause and reflect on the decisions to determine if it is giving the desired impact and value for money.
- 5.3. I have been told that the Church has spent a significant amount of money on safeguarding. However, it should be noted that safeguarding within the Church started at a low base.
- 5.4. There is often a sense of delay in progressing safeguarding activities within the Church which to some extent is true. However, consideration is not always given to the mammoth task at hand bearing in mind some of the systems that are needed to ensure practice is consistently good across the system.
- 5.5. The Church needs to manage expectations and not to overly promise. As a survivor said, *"the issue with the church is they over promise and underdeliver and that it might make more sense to under promise and over deliver."*
- 5.6. There needs to be better engagement with survivors and victims. This may include a complete overhaul for the safeguarding website to make it more user friendly and this should give more transparency. Including issues that have delayed work and to celebrate the good work that has been done and continues to happen across the system.

6. Independence

- 6.1. The Church has a vision that safeguarding should have independent scrutiny which is a good concept and if done properly will help to raise the standards in safeguarding. That is very much wanted and can also highlight areas of strengths that can be built on.
- 6.2. I am not always clear if people can articulate what this looks like and I am unclear if this vision gives the impression that the Church will not be accountable for safeguarding failures within the Church.

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- 6.3. For example, in Local Authorities safeguarding responsibilities sit within Social Care and are inspected by Ofsted to ensure that the Local Authority is meeting its safeguarding responsibilities to the most vulnerable. Ofsted do not oversee or have any responsibilities in the day to day decision making and their role is to help the organisation to raise standards and highlight concerns around areas that are poor in practice.

7. Vision

- 7.1. The Church is still very much on an improvement journey to make the Church a safer place for all. It has to accept that a cultural shift is needed. Safeguarding has to become a part of the Church's DNA and this at times will mean difficult and uncomfortable conversations are needed.