

GENERAL SYNOD

Independent Safeguarding Board: recent developments

Summary

This paper sets out for the General Synod the history and facts relating to recent events with the Independent Safeguarding Board.

Background and history

1. The Independent Safeguarding Board was established to “ensure that the Church delivers on its safeguarding responsibilities and acts without fear or favour”.
2. In September 2020 the Archbishops’ Council agreed the principle of independent scrutiny of safeguarding and in December 2020 agreed to establish an Independent Safeguarding Board to achieve this. It agreed that proposals should be developed in full collaboration with survivors to be presented to the General Synod in February 2021. In the event because of Covid restrictions there was no formal group of sessions in February, and so proposals were presented to an informal meeting of Synod members on 27 February 2021.
3. The proposals were revised and plans for implementation established as reported to General Synod in July 2021 in [GS 2215](#). Interviews for the first two Board roles were held in August 2021 with panels comprising survivors and staff of the Archbishops’ Council. On 30 September 2021 Dr Maggie Atkinson and Jasvinder Sanghera were announced as Chair and Survivor Advocate respectively. On 24 January 2022 the final member, Steve Reeves was announced.
4. The ISB was formally launched in January 2022 and Synod members were updated on progress with a paper from the Chair in February 2022 ([GS 2244](#)). In July 2022 Synod received a joint paper ([GS 2263](#)) from the Chair of the ISB and from Meg Munn, independent chair of the National Safeguarding Panel. The three Board members and Meg Munn addressed Synod.
5. In early August 2022 the Chair of the ISB was asked to step back from her role following concerns about an alleged data breach. This was investigated by the Information Commissioner’s Office. Following internal procedures, including a dispute notice issued by the Council, the Council announced on 30 March 2023 that Dr Maggie Atkinson had resigned as chair and that it had agreed the appointment of Meg Munn, the independent chair of the National Safeguarding Panel, as acting chair until the end of 2023.
6. A number of survivors criticised this decision and the two other members of the Board voiced concerns in press interviews. The Archbishops’ Council invited all members of the Board to present their work to them on 9 May. On 24 May Jasvinder Sanghera and Steve Reeves sent a formal dispute notice against the Archbishops’ Council. Under the terms of the contracts the Secretary General is required to attempt to resolve the dispute within 30 days.

What is the nature of the Independent Safeguarding Board

7. The Independent Safeguarding Board is not a formal separate legal body, established either in statute or otherwise. Nor does it have any defined legal powers separate from the powers of the Archbishops’ Council. Instead, in the interests of establishing an independent scrutiny function at pace, the ISB was created under contract. The three

members of the Board of the ISB were engaged under separate contracts with the Archbishops' Council. The 1.6 full time equivalent members of staff supporting the ISB are employed by the National Church Institutions. The budget for the ISB is part of the Archbishops' Council's programme budget (as can be seen in the AC Budget paper GS 2309) , though it is now operating as a separate cost centre from the National Safeguarding Team.

8. The members of the ISB have operational independence in terms of choosing what aspects of policy and practice to scrutinise, what observations they make, and what recommendations they may make.
9. As the Archbishops' Council's auditors note in the Council's annual report and accounts GS 2308 "the explanations provided to us note that the ISB has independence of delivery but under the current arrangements the ISB continues to fall under the remit of the Council from a governance perspective. The Council therefore has responsibility for the consideration and authorisation of any expenditure, ensuring appropriate use of charitable funds". This has necessitated financial controls being in place.
10. The ISB has a separate website and members have a distinct email format and – after some delays – a separate telephone system is being installed. A data processing agreement has been put in place so that ISB members are separate data controllers for the purposes of data protection legislation (but on consistent terms). The ISB is operationally independent – its members have established its own contracts with legal and communication advisors, and they can choose how to handle cases without any reference to the Council.
11. Under the contracts the Board are required to develop proposals for a fully independent scrutiny function for safeguarding work in the Church of England. This is known as "phase 2" of the ISB's life. While there is as yet no detailed plan for phase 2, it has been generally assumed that phase 2 would involve the establishment of a legally separate body, with defined functions, funded by the Church.

What has the Archbishops' Council announced ?

12. On 21 June the Archbishops' Council took the following steps:

- It terminated the contracts of two of the members of the board, Jasvinder Sanghera and Steve Reeves. They have two weeks' notice. From 5 July they will no longer be under contract to the Archbishops' Council. The Council will honour outstanding invoices.
- It also terminated the contract of the acting Chair, Meg Munn to the same timetable.

13. However in order to provide continuity of service to survivors the Archbishops' Council will set in place interim arrangements in two phases:

- In the very immediate future, we have asked Meg Munn to provide business continuity for the remaining business of this phase of the ISB's work. For example that will include ensuring that independent case reviews are dealt with appropriately (though Meg will not be involved in any cases except where individual survivors request that), ensuring data is protected, and working with the staff to ensure that learning from phase 1 is protected;

- In order to continue to provide interim independent scrutiny it is setting in place interim provisions. Given that Independent Safeguarding Board members do not generally undertake case reviews themselves, but commission reports from independent third parties, we will continue this arrangement with a bank of Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel chairs, one of whom would review these providing they had no conflict of interest. If additional capacity is needed we will commission some of the reviewers who undertook work on the Past Cases Review 2, to undertake these reviews. We will ask a nominated survivor to act as client to commission out the reviews and to undertake quality assurance.

14. The full statement is available at [Statement from Archbishops' Council on the Independent Safeguarding Board | The Church of England.](#)

15. Furthermore the Council is engaging with victims and survivors and their representatives, alongside other independent voices, and safeguarding professionals from inside and outside the Church, to develop proposals for a genuine independent scrutiny function for consideration by the Archbishops' Council (that is, to continue the phase 2 work). We want to move forward as fast as possible, but we also recognise the need for full engagement, and for learning from the experience of the last year and a half. The Council will make time at its meetings to be part of this engagement, and in due course to discuss and agree a proposition. If full implementation were to require legislation that would take some time. But we would hope to see a shadow body, based on recommendations arising from our engagement work, to be set up as soon as possible.

16. In the statement the Archbishops have said that "Independent oversight of the Church of England's safeguarding is an urgent and indispensable first step away from the suspicion of marking our own homework. Additionally – we personally believe that we must make rapid progress towards our existing and excellent National Safeguarding Team being functionally independent in order to start to build confidence among survivors. At the local Diocesan level further thought is needed, so that Diocesan Safeguarding Officers are sure they can act independently. They are dedicated people committed to survivors and victims and deserve the trust of the Church."

What are the reasons for this action ?

17. The Archbishops' Council is committed to developing fully independent scrutiny of safeguarding within the Church of England, to ensure the Church is a safer place for all. As noted above this principle was agreed in the run-up to the publication of the report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) into the Anglican Church in England Wales in 2020.

18. It is therefore with regret that the Council has come to the reluctant conclusion that, despite extensive efforts over recent months, working relationships between two members of the Independent Safeguarding Board (ISB) and the Council have broken down. It has been widely reported that there has been a dispute between two members of the ISB and the Council. Members of the Council and our experienced safeguarding professionals have been working constructively over recent months to put the ISB on a more sustainable footing. Nevertheless, it has now become clear that that this is no longer viable with its current membership and that the dispute itself risks getting in the way of that urgent priority of moving to the next phase of establishing a new independent safeguarding body.

19. The Council has had concerns for some time about how working relations with the ISB had been developing. The Council had been working constructively with the members of the ISB seeking to resolve those matters. But a dispute notice was issued by two board members, unexpectedly, just as an important meeting as part of that process was due to take place. Some aspects of the Dispute Notice were briefed to the media before any discussion with the Council. Since then the Council has nevertheless been seeking to resolve the dispute in line with the Notice in good faith. But the two board members have been reluctant to engage with those discussions, as required under their contract. The two board members have not met with the Acting Chair of the Board since their first meeting in March.
20. The Council has therefore agreed a reset. It thanks the four members who have served the Independent Safeguarding Board – Dr Maggie Atkinson, Jasvinder Sanghera, Steve Reeves and Meg Munn – for all the work that has been done. There will be lessons for all parties to learn from the process and the Council acknowledges its part in the failure of this phase of the ISB’s work to proceed as hoped. But it is the considered judgment of the Council as a whole that it is necessary to reset the process in order to get to the destination – proper independent scrutiny of safeguarding – more swiftly.

William Nye
Secretary General
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