

HOUSE OF BISHOPS

**A meeting of the House of Bishops was held by zoom on 10
December 2024**

MINUTES**THE BISHOP OF WINCHESTER IN THE CHAIR****1 WELCOME, APOLOGIES, MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**

- 1.1 The CHAIR opened the meeting in prayer and with a reading from Ephesians 4, noting that this was the first meeting since the resignation of the Archbishop of Canterbury. There were issues of theology, power and history in the room. It was important that members took good care of each other..
- 1.2 Apologies have been received from the Bishops of Gloucester, Huddersfield, Portsmouth, St Edmundsbury and Ipswich and St Germans.
- 1.3 The minutes of the October meeting HB(24)M7 were approved.

2 STANDING ORDER 14

- 2.1 The CHAIR moved that the House meet as a Committee of the Whole House under Standing Order 14. Members noted that there was a case for meeting in public given the importance of the matters; but equally there was a case for a private meeting given the issues of trust and discipline. The House AGREED, by 26 votes to 7, to meet in private under Standing Order 14.

3 MAKIN REVIEW: INITIAL RESPONSE HB(24)39

- 3.1 The BISHOP OF LONDON explained that together with the Archbishop of York she had established a Response Group to coordinate the response of the Church to the events since the publication of the Makin review. The group was now meeting for an hour a week. It was hoped that the Group could conclude its work soon but it was essential to be assured that the work was being coordinated properly before it was able to do so. Each meeting considered the care of survivors, the safeguarding response process to coordinate consistency, events arising from the resignation of the Archbishop of Canterbury, communications and the risks to be managed.
- 3.2 Continuing ALEXANDER KUBEYINJE (DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL SAFEGUARDING TEAM) briefed the Council on progress with the case reviews. Dates were now being established for the stage 3 process and additional guidance was being provided; an external barrister was lined up for stage 4. It was important to be trauma-informed in the response to victims and survivors. He noted the work of Safe Spaces and asked bishops to pay attention to the care of their diocesan safeguarding staff. The BISHOP OF STEPNEY (Lead Bishop for Safeguarding) reminded the House of the importance of prioritising victims and survivors – care was available via Safe Spaces who had increased capacity to respond. She had led a webinar with

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Smyth survivors. The recommendations of the Makin review were already being examined. She was following up with South Africa and Zimbabwe their reviews. Misinformation was not trauma-informed and she encouraged members to talk to their Diocesan Safeguarding Officer if they needed additional trauma-informed training.

- 3.3 After thanking the National Safeguarding Team and diocesan staff for their response, in discussion the following points were made:
 - 3.3.1 Some of the most difficult issues arising from the resignation of the Archbishop of Canterbury related to the Anglican Communion. Contact with the Secretary General was being maintained but the Archbishop of York would not be able to continue the extent of the work the Archbishop of Canterbury had led. It would be important for bishops to support the sustaining of relationships;
 - 3.3.2 That stage 4 of the review process was undertaken by a barrister, yet Smyth himself had been a barrister and it was important there was no professional conflict of interest;
 - 3.3.3 That the lead safeguarding bishop's public statements had been helpful, but it was important to see proper coordination of communications and for bishops to know from whom they should seek advice;
 - 3.3.4 That this represented a form of existential crisis for the Church of England as it had revealed the scale of the anger in the Church. It was important for bishops to meet, and to provide the pastoral, spiritual and prophetic response, and to meet in private;
 - 3.3.5 Bishops needed to approach the task ahead with accountability and honour, and where it was not possible to take action because of the limits of the Clergy Discipline Measure to consider options for ensuring that accountability could be delivered;
 - 3.3.6 That a culture that sought resignations was not healthy and would not solve the problems; the report related to historic matters and the Church could have confidence in the current operation of safeguarding;
 - 3.3.7 That it was important for bishops to hear and care for each other and to seek to bring nuance into an often binary debate;
 - 3.3.8 That clergy feeling afraid was bad for the culture of safeguarding in the Church;
 - 3.3.9 That it was important for individuals subject to safeguarding case reviews to have an opportunity to respond to any allegations;
- 3.4 The BISHOP OF LONDON reassured the House that the Response Group was coordinating communications, advised by the national communications team, but that there were limits to the extent the Church could speak with one voice. The meeting of the House in January would provide the opportunity to discuss how to rebuild trust.
- 3.5 The ARCHBISHOP OF YORK noted that the House needed not to be

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defensive, to keep their eyes on Christ, and avoid scapegoating one particular part of the Church. It would be important to demonstrate that the Church was doing matters differently.

- 3.6 ALEXANDER KUBEYINJE reminded the House that it was important not to tackle all issues through safeguarding but to use the full range of HR tools available to bishops.
- 3.7 Summing up the CHAIR thanked staff and bishops for the work being done and asked for the House to be kept informed.
- 4 The HOUSE divided into regional groups for Lectio Divina.
- 5 FUTURE OF CHURCH SAFEGUARDING HB(24)40**
- 5.1 The BISHOP OF STEPNEY explained that she was seeking the approval of the House to take the two models for the future of Church of England safeguarding to the General Synod as the response to the Jay and Wilkinson reports. Feedback was that there were many survivors who had had a poor response from the Church; public opinion was not convinced that the Church of England had robust safeguarding procedures; there was a lack of trust and efficacy in safeguarding process.
- 5.2 There was neither a simple answer nor a consensus on what such an answer would be and the Response Group set up to advise her had no consensus. It would be important for the General Synod to choose the way forward and own the decision. The proposal for a new body to undertake safeguarding scrutiny carried much support. The proposal for a body to undertake independent operations carried less support – under both models there would be more independence of decision-making but under model 3 decision-making remained within the diocese and national decision-making was through an external body, whereas under model 4 all decision-making was through an external body. In her view it would not be possible to get to consistency and timeliness of decision-making without moving to model 4. But this would need to be supported by stronger clergy HR processes and risk assessment. But disagreeing with model 4 was not a sign of bad safeguarding.
- 5.3 Continuing, co-chair of the Response Group LESLEY-ANNE RYDER explained that the feedback she had received was that it was difficult for stakeholders to understanding the Church's safeguarding processes and this meant that trust and confidence were low. But just explaining how systems worked would not be enough – the Church needed demonstrably to change systems, structures and processes. She was concerned about self-interest and defensiveness. There was consensus on the scrutiny body, but to address local inconsistency there needed to be a single operational body. This would need good commissioning and a clear transition plan. Her experience from the healthcare sector was that such a model could work.
- 5.4 Continuing staff explained that in all scenarios safeguarding would not change

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overnight – there was a major transition and transfer to work through, which would require legislation and operational changes.

- 5.5 In discussion the following points were noted:
- 5.5.1 That the General Synod would instinctively prefer model 4 but that diocesan professionals did not think this could work in the long-term. It was important to listen to and follow the advice of professionals;
 - 5.5.2 That there was a risk in model 4 that blame would be outsourced, and therefore there was a priority to look at options between 3 and 4. It would be important to understand how contracting out accountability could be avoided;
 - 5.5.3 That much had been done to improve safeguarding in the Church and now the priority was to embed this in culture and practice rather than wholesale change;
 - 5.5.4 That there were concerns from dioceses about the legality of model 4 and the risk that Diocesan Boards of Finance would feel it was inconsistent with their duties;
 - 5.5.5 That there was a case for piloting change;
 - 5.5.6 That it would be important to think carefully how best to frame the General Synod debate;
 - 5.5.7 That there were important questions of detail that affected the feasibility – how would cross-boundary cases work; how would relationships with education work; who appointed Parish Safeguarding Officers; where were the data protection responsibilities held;
 - 5.5.8 That experience of registrars showed that it was possible to make arrangements where an independent person worked within the diocesan team work;
 - 5.5.9 That there were parallels with the work on scrutiny in the National Governance Measure;
 - 5.5.10 That it was important to test the detail including in particular what might be the role of the diocese in the recruitment and dismissal of staff embedded in the diocese but employed by an independent operational body;
 - 5.5.11 That there were different models in Wales that merited consideration and similarly consideration needed to be given to the arrangements in Europe;
 - 5.5.12 That the question of the appropriate level of professional curiosity needed to be addressed – how far, under all models, was the Bishop expected to challenge the judgments of professionals ?
- 5.6 Responding the BISHOP OF STEPNEY noted that model 4 was not the same as the option recommended by Professor Alexis Jay – and in particular it retained the role for the House on policy and on setting the culture. It did not mean outsourcing responsibility for safeguarding. Those who did not want change needed to understand the inconsistency and lack of timeliness and

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propose solutions for this. ALEXANDER MCGREGOR (CHIEF LEGAL ADVISOR) reminded the House that Diocesan Boards of Finance do not have responsibility for safeguarding – the statutory guidance says that it is the bishop that has such a duty and the duty of the DBF is to provide the resourcing to enable the discharge of these functions. It was therefore already possible for dioceses to arrange for the undertaking of safeguarding functions by a third party. Piloting such an arrangement would need legislation.

5.7 The HOUSE AGREED to take both models 3 and 4 to the General Synod.

6 LIVING IN LOVE AND FAITH HB(24)41

6.1 The BISHOP OF LEICESTER explained that in the current circumstances to pause or stop Living in Love and Faith would be bad for trust in the Church of England. The paper before the House explained that in January the House should expect to receive a draft Bishops' Statement, Code of Practice and guidance for the Prayers of Love and Faith. The work was making good progress and the House could be encouraged. One stakeholder group had fed back that it was "not what we want but we are willing to make it as good as possible". Others were not able to sign up to the emerging proposals. Staff encouraged comments and contributions and asked members not to attribute the documents in their diocesan conversations.

6.2 In discussion the following points were made:

6.2.1 That the only proper way of proceeding would be a liturgical process in the General Synod under Canon B 2;

6.2.2 That the prayers were a pastoral response to the health and wellbeing of the Church;

6.2.3 That the House needed to consider whether, in light of the earlier discussion, the Church of England was sufficiently robust to contemplate another model of delegated ministry;

6.2.4 That it ought to be possible for the House to agree around some language on covenanting;

6.2.5 That there were proposals that a third of the bishops would not be able to support and it was there was therefore a need to think of alternative plans;

6.2.6 That delegated ministry and a Code of Practice needed a statutory basis if they were to be effective;

6.2.7 That there was a risk of operating delegated episcopal ministry based on the public stance of bishops on the Prayers of Love and Faith. This could lead to a very different model of episcopacy;

6.3 Responding, the BISHOP OF LEICESTER noted that the key question would be whether the House could proceed if there were a significant number of bishops who could not sign the letter. He had listened to both sides – it would be important to understand that LGBTQI+ members in the

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Church already felt this had been a long process and were concerned that requests for further theological work were delaying tactics. The proposals would include a period of discernment over three years to test bespoke services and build trust within the Church. The Bishops' Statement would acknowledge the depth of the disagreements among bishops but say that nonetheless they would work together. There would be a recommendation that some elements of the Code should be put into legislation, and without a Code at all reminded the House that this would simply lead to inconsistency.

- 6.4 Briefing the House on the theological work the theological advisors explained the paper that had been sent, noting that it would comment principally on doctrine and leave matters of liturgy and aesthetics to others.

7 CLOSE

- 7.1 The ARCHBISHOP OF YORK thanked the three House of Clergy Global Majority Heritage participant observers – REV CHIGOR CHIKE, REV EILEEN HARROP and REV SHEMIL MATTHEW for their service to the House. Their participation was no longer necessary because the House now had more suffragan bishops of Global Majority Heritage.

- 7.2 The CHAIR closed the meeting in prayer.

SECRETARIAT

13 January 2025