

## Minutes of meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Safeguarding on Faith Communities

Monday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2023, 2.30 pm, Portcullis House

### Present:

#### Officers

Ruth Jones MP (LAB - Co-Chair)  
Lord Bishop Viv Faulkner (Lords Spiritual - Co-Chair)  
Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP (LAB - Vice-Chair)

#### Secretariat

Justin Humphreys, Thirtyone:eight (Principal Advisor to the APPG)  
Jackie Mills, Thirtyone:eight (note-taker)

#### Attendees

Jenny Armitage, Individual  
Becky Armstrong-Corbett, ex-JW Advocates Opposing Crimes Against Children  
Alan Collins, Hugh James solicitors  
Shirley Maginley, NSPCC  
William Mattiello-Kent, Porticus  
Lisa Thurston, Individual  
Peter Willson, Anglican NSP member

#### Guest Presenters

Colin Bloom, author of The Bloom Review, 'Does government 'do God?'

#### Apologies

Tim Farron MP (LD – Vice-Chair)  
Baroness Hollins (Cross-Bench Peer – Vice-Chair)  
Baroness Sherlock (LAB Peer – Vice-Chair)  
Janet Daby MP (LAB – Vice-Chair)  
Rosie Duffield MP (LAB – Vice-Chair)  
Andrew Selous (CON – Vice-Chair)

#### Introduction

Ruth opened the meeting and explained that +Viv would be a little late joining. She outlined the agenda for the meeting and attendees introduced themselves.

#### Presentation by Colin Bloom, author of *The Bloom Review - Does government 'do' God?*

Colin thanked the APPG for inviting him to return and present key findings from his review published in April 2023 – [Does government 'do God?' An independent review into how government engages with faith \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#). This review had built on work done in other reports such as [Keeping the Faith - APPG on Faith and Society](#) and [Levelling Up Our Communities-Danny Kruger.pdf](#).

Overall, the Review found that faith is a force for good, making a significant contribution in society and to the lives of those who attend, but the answer to the question of whether government 'does God' was generally was no. There is a paucity of faith literacy across different statutory agencies and although there are sensitivities to be navigated, Government needs to be more aware of the areas where harm is done, for example within Out-Of-School-Settings (OSS). The majority of child abuse takes place within families, places of education and faith communities.

The Government's formal response to the report is expected in Spring 2024 and it is hoped that most of the recommendations will be accepted, with some needing further review and others too costly to carry out.

### Discussion

Attendees raised questions around whether areas were included within the research such as Jehovah's Witnesses, male genital mutilation and Christian Nationalism.

Given that IICSA was taking place and other inquiries on FGM, hate crime, political extremism etc., the review had a limited remit. The question of clergy privilege arose, and CB said his personal view was that the fundamental values of justice, tolerance and fairness should not be trumped by anyone's perceived privilege. He cautioned the Government about those who are invited within their circles.

Mandatory reporting was discussed as a key issue and something which should be put in place. People were encouraged to take part in the current consultation [Mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

Male genital mutilation (circumcision) wasn't covered as part of this review, but CB believes it deserves a review in its own right. Alan Collins of Hugh James mentioned a podcast he had done on this - [HJ Talks About Abuse: Is Male Circumcision Lawful? Blog | Hugh James](#).

There are other settings e.g. Madrassahs and Yeshivas, where the full safeguarding picture is not being reviewed and failures to follow best practice may be occurring. It is far more likely that a young person will suffer sexual abuse than become a terrorist. The Government needs to be more courageous in tackling difficult subjects.

The CofE and the Catholic Church have made enormous strides in improving safeguarding. All other institutions need to be encouraged to catch up with this best practice.

Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs) bring together faith leaders and LEAs but their focus is mainly on religious education and so may not be the right vehicle for safeguarding. RE is now considered as a 'nice to have' rather than essential subject, which is a political decision and as a result, literacy is woefully inadequate.

### Government response to IICSA recommendations, discussion facilitated by Justin Humphreys

There were 20 recommendations in the final report, with some form of commitment given, but with insufficient detail, no timescales and no roadmap, only to mandatory reporting.

The complexity of different contexts has been used as an excuse to avoid addressing the issues and the fact that the recommendations fall between many different departments has not helped.

Is the Government kicking the can down the road? Colin believes it will require a Prime Minister to make this an important feature in their agenda to bring about change.

Ruth Jones had raised a question in the House but no tangible response has been received [Contribution by Ruth Jones \(Newport West\) \(Lab\) \(parliament.uk\)](#)

A question was asked about the progress of the private members bill on mandatory reporting and Ruth said she would look into this and respond.

Options were discussed as to how to take this forward and Ruth and +Viv will consider a strategic approach to bring to the next meeting, acknowledging that the timing is difficult to build momentum with a general election not far away. Perseverance is required!

A suggestion was made to input into the 'working together' statutory guidance [consultation](#). Justin commented that there has been a gradual reduction of inclusion of faith communities so it would be good to bring some focus back.

#### Update on Abuse in Religious Communities research – WP5

This research project, which is the only such study carried out in the UK, is being led by the University of Kent, comprising seven different work programmes, with one on the effectiveness of working relationships between faith communities and statutory safeguarding partners. The [survey](#) is open until the end of July, seeking contributions from leaders, designated safeguarding leads within faith communities and statutory partners. The preliminary analysis shows a mixed response with negatives around a lack of understanding of faith-based organisations and settings and their responsibilities towards safeguarding, lack of collaboration and information sharing, inefficient and lengthy processes and individual responses from safeguarding professionals being unhelpful. Improvements suggested are around joint training and open communication, training for statutory partners on faith settings.

It is helpful to talk about this study in terms of registration and regulation of activities, regardless of the setting.

#### Discussion on raising areas of interest at APPG meetings

A process will be created by which people will be able to submit items for discussion in advance for the group to consider. If time allows, these can be discussed at the meeting, but if not, they will be noted.

It was acknowledged that a more diverse faith group representation around the table is desirable.

#### Close and next steps

Ruth and +Viv thanked everyone for attending. Actions noted were as follows:

1. Ruth and +Viv will work on putting together a strategy for taking forward IICSA recommendations and bring forward at the next meeting.
2. Ruth will investigate the progress of the private members bill on mandatory reporting.
3. People asked to share the Abuse in Religious Settings [survey](#)
4. The next meeting will be arranged around the end of October and will include the AGM.