

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

Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> July at 2pm in Portcullis House and on Zoom.

### Attendees:

#### Officers

Janet Daby MP (Co-Chair)  
Lord Bishop Viv Faulkner (Co-Chair)  
Andrew Selous MP (Vice Chair)

#### Secretariat

Justin Humphreys, Thirtyone:eight (Principal Advisor to the APPG)  
Leigh McFarlane, Thirtyone:eight  
Adam Graver, Thirtyone:eight

#### In Person

Professor Gordon Lynch, University of Kent (Guest Presenter)  
Colin Bloom, Faith Engagement Advisor, DLUHC (Guest Presenter)  
Ioannis Athanasiou, Church of England, NST  
Nick Donaldson, Strengthening Faith Institutions  
Hassan Joudi, The Muslim Council of Britain  
Richard Scorer, Slater Gordon  
Alice Taylor, DLUHC  
Adam McKinnon (Parliamentary Assistant to Janet Daby)

#### Online

Will Kent, Porticus  
Harriet Crabtree, Inter Faith Network  
Yehudis Fletcher, Nahamu  
Dr Lisa Oakley, University of Chester  
Aran Richardson, Assemblies of God  
Lorna Trend, Bristol University  
Kate Little, Methodist Church  
Deborah Toni, Church of England, NST  
Dean Juster, Salvation Army  
Jerome Mcbean  
Rachel Harden, Church of England, NST

Janet welcomed everyone and introduced the first speaker.

#### Professor Gordon Lynch: Abuse in Religious Contexts research.

This research is focusing on a range of religious settings (as per Royal Commission (Australia)/IICSA) and is trying to understand commonalities and differences between faith communities and between religious and non-religious settings (e.g., deference). Possible differences that may be identified within faith contexts include: constructive approaches in responding to abuse in faith settings and to the legal context. The project is scheduled to last 2.5 years and the aim is to stimulate debate within faith communities and give survivors a voice.

There are seven work packages within the research project:

- Literature-based study of organisational structures and cultures
- Workshop-led study on intersection of abuse and interpretations of sacred texts
- Secondary analysis of records relating to abuse in new religious movements
- Comparative international study of policy/legal approaches to abuse and safeguarding in religious contexts
- Quantitative and qualitative study of engagement between statutory safeguarding professionals and safeguarding contacts in faith organisations.
- Interview-based study exploring survivor resilience
- Photo-elicitation study of survivor experiences around disclosure and non-disclosure.

The project team welcomes enquiries from anyone who is involved with the APPG.

Attendees asked a number of questions and the discussion is summarised below.

Stakeholders are gathered from Initial online contact with some individuals, via support and advocacy groups from across different faith-based organisations, and include mainstream and other faith traditions.

In terms of engagement with the research, there is a degree of self-selection and although there has been some movement within closed communities and some survivor contacts made, for example with Muslim, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jewish communities, there are still gaps which need to be addressed.

IICSA has encouraged a greater degree of communication. However, a low percentage of minority religious groups have engaged with IICSA and have much work to do to improve their safeguarding expertise. Strengthening Faith Institutions has had their funding cut by 50%, which has seriously impacted support in this area.

The voice of the child is an important issue that needs consultation, which the project team is very aware of. This research process is not a full co-production model and will not be perfect. The design of the project allows connection with survivors via gatekeepers.

Regarding connecting into BAME/ethnic minority faith groups, the original name of the research was Abuse in Religious 'Settings' and implied formal settings, e.g., Church, Mosque etc. The change of name to Abuse in Faith 'Contexts' has clarified that this is wider than formal faith structures. Consideration must be given to the definition of abuse that is to be used.

#### Colin Bloom: Faith Engagement Advisor, DLUHC

Colin asked what the APPG considers the definition of safeguarding to be and Janet asked Justin to respond. He said that we work to a relatively broad definition; it is more than just policy and procedure, but about the culture and both our preventative and responsive measures in the context of harm and abuse to both children and adults.

Colin commended the fact that the APPG exists. He referenced a report he wrote in 2019 about how government engages with faith. Questions were whether faith is good for society, if so, how does government engage better with faith settings and in places where there is harm, how can government do anything about it? 21,000 survey responses were received, and the report is ready to be published once it has undergone a legal review. It will include 20 recommendations to the government, which include the need to improve faith literacy in public services. Other areas included in the report are around religions and marriage, spiritual abuse, inter-faith and intra-faith (which is much less common with lack of understanding of the differences within denominations), safeguarding which appears many times in the report, faith-based schools and the lack of safeguarding engagement (from Ofsted and others) is also a concern. Colin commended some organisations, e.g., Church of England, Catholic Church, who have invested huge resources into safeguarding and are an example to other faiths and Christian denominations who need to do the same.

Attendees asked questions, with the responses below:

There is concern that although Colin acknowledged that many faith contexts need to invest into safeguarding, there is a lack of government funding into i.e., SFI who support organisations by providing safeguarding training to many different communities.

Colin will speak to the Minister for Faith and Nick has shared his figures – see appendix.

In terms of understanding of how different people, e.g., young people, approach faith, Colin said that the report shows that faith is good for society. The fabric of British Society is held together by faith groups. A young people's survey shows that they are more interested in spirituality than religion.

In terms of a response to the broad statements being made that faith groups (e.g., BME) have done nothing, this is not true as all groups are lacking somewhere and a request was made for Colin to reflect the nuances of this discussion in the report. Colin responded that he is very conscious of language.

#### AOB and Closing Remarks

Bishop Viv thanked both speakers for their presentations and Gordon's will be circulated to attendees.

The next meeting (to include the AGM) will be scheduled in November 2022, date to be confirmed.

Bishop Viv thanked everyone for attending and the meeting closed at 3pm.