

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

**18<sup>th</sup> March 2024, 15:00-17:00, in Committee Room 12**

**Present:**

<p><b>Officers</b></p> <p>Ruth Jones MP, Co-Chair          Lord Bishop Viv Faull, Co-Chair          Stephen Timms MP, Officer          Baroness Hollins, Officer</p> <p><b>Presenters</b></p> <p>Professor Alexis Jay, CBE          John O'Brien, CBE</p>	<p><b>Secretariat</b></p> <p>Justin Humphreys, Chief Executive, Thirtyone:eight (Principal Advisor to the APPG)          Leigh McFarlane, Public Policy &amp; Research Manager, Thirtyone:eight          Karen Garland, Public Policy &amp; Research Officer, Thirtyone:eight          Peter Wright, Head of Marketing &amp; Communications, Thirtyone:eight          Hayley Humphreys, Member Relationship Manager, Thirtyone:eight          Barbara Ball, Head of Training &amp; Disclosures, Thirtyone:eight</p>
<p><b>Attendees:</b></p> <p>Kathleen Hallisey, Hugh James Solicitors          Alan Collins, Hugh James Solicitors          Shaukat Warraich, Faith Associates          Sukhi Kaur, Sikh Women's Aid          Yehudis Goldsobel, Migdal Emunah          Alexander Kubeyinje, Church of England          Fay Howe, The Church in Wales          Andrew Haley, previously involved with IICSA          Nell Hardy, Artist and Creator of Responsibility Theatre          Claire Hams, University of Chester          Sharon Barr, United Reformed Church          John Viney, IICSA Core Participant          Kate Satrettin, Satrettin Counselling          Ben Gibbons, Individual          Olivia Djouadi, Individual          Shirley Maginley, NSPCC          William Mattiello-Kent, Porticus</p>	<p>Lisa Thurston, Individual          Lance Christie, Individual          Judith Davey-Cole, Methodist Safeguarding Committee          Tim Carter, Methodist Church          Rachel Stone, Baptist Union of Great Britain          Joy Cranham, Individual          Tina Pokuaah, Safeguarding Consultant &amp; Trainer          Kelly Strong, Kenyan Children's Project &amp; thirtyone:eight member          Malcolm Johnston, Lime Solicitors          Paula Timms, Kidscape          Kevin Murphy, NWG Network          Becky Armstrong-Corbett, Ex- JW Advocating Opposing Crimes Against Children          Duncan Corbett, Ex- JW Advocating Opposing Crimes Against Children          Tracy Sickel, Individual          James Mullen, Individual          Roger Jones, United Reformed Church          Jordan Alexander</p>

Jane Chevous, Survivor Voices	Colin Bloom CBE, Author of the Bloom Review
Mark Bentley, National Grid for Learning	Sanjeev Baga, Jigsaw Education Group
Rachel Harden, Church of England	

### 1. **Chair's welcome**

Ruth Jones thanked people for attending the meeting and invited everyone to introduce themselves.

### 2. **Presentation (Part 1): The Future of Church Safeguarding Report to the Church of England**

Professor Alexis Jay and John O'Brien began by outlining the remit and nature of their work in producing the report. The central focus was to determine whether independence in safeguarding could be achieved under a Church of England framework. The participant pool included clergy, volunteers, victims/survivors, and anyone who had contact with safeguarding system within last 5 years. The methodology utilised discussions, website, anonymous survey, from which 1200 responses were obtained, from an urban and rural mixed cohort. Site visits to six dioceses also took place and interviews with the six respective Bishops.

The report concluded that the Church of England needed to take action to build trust and confidence in all parties, (laity, clergy, public, and faith practitioners). Therefore, a root and branch change was needed, outsourcing church safeguarding to achieve full independence. This was recommended to address noted problems including inconsistent safeguarding practices across dioceses, lack of adherence to statutory definition of safeguarding, poor data collection and patchy funding of safeguarding nationally. Creating two separate and independent charities would produce the needed independence, as well as fulsome accountability, which is lacking under the existing model of church safeguarding.

### 3. **Questions & Answers (Part 1)**

Common themes in the submitted questions, including around spiritual abuse receiving less attention in the report. Professor Alexis Jay strongly recommended that the church adopt the statutory definition of safeguarding, rather than a contextualised definition (i.e. spiritual abuse definition). She felt the statutory definition of emotional and psychological abuse could readily accommodate spiritual abuse within it.

Another question concerned whether the new charity is to be created solely for the Church of England or whether this might be extended to other churches/charities. Professor Jay and John O'Brien felt the charitable model would add additional robust oversight and their recommendation could be of benefit for other faith communities, eventually.

#### 4. **Presentation (Part 2): The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse**

Professor Alexis Jay outlined that IICSA's focus included other faiths, beyond the Catholic and Anglican Churches.

Barriers to reporting within the faith context were presented. These include victim-blaming, purity, shame, and blame. Sex and sexuality are not discussed openly. Abuse of power by religious leaders, deference and respect. Gender disparity was also an issue, with men taking senior leadership more commonly. Mistrust of external agencies and outside scrutiny. A strong desire to keep matters internal to the faith. The concept of forgiveness can be misused, both to put pressure on victims not to report (e.g. asserted that a perpetrator is of good standing, or he has already apologised) and can justify failures of leaders to take appropriate action against the abuse. Some leaders do the right thing, but there are some who do not.

#### 5. **Questions & Answers (Part 2)**

*What is their view on those entities that do not seek to improve in their safeguarding efforts?*

They suggested this is why agreement on definitions of safeguarding is needed and that church and faith groups must commit to the statutory standards. They were not sure very much has changed since IICSA and cited the example of the ongoing occurrence of victim-blaming statements,

*Considering the widespread loopholes in faith communities, what do you think the government could do to implement universal enforcement?*

They emphasised the government needs to properly enforce the standards they have laid out. Victims and survivors should be consulted by government to assist in guiding what further measures are needed to improve safeguarding, broadly. Mandatory Reporting garnered almost universal support amongst victims and survivors, and they agreed that this was vital. They stated that government compulsion must be introduced, i.e. a criminal breach for failure to report. Mandatory Reporting needs to be considered a duty, rather than the limited government proposals that currently exist. There should be no exceptions, including the seal of confessional or anyone in positions of trust.

*What can we as a group of people do to advocate the case for Mandatory Reporting?*

They recommended that we use our collective voice and status as an APPG to campaign further on all these issues. Keep speaking with one voice.

*Is there anything you would have done differently to findings of IICSA and ensure victim and survivor voices were well represented?*

They felt they did try to extensively listen and reflect their views and experience, but they recognised that victims and survivors are still very frustrated with government delay and lack of depth to their proposed responses to IICSA.

## 6. AOB

There were no additional items raised under any other business.

## 7. Additional questions

*Colin Bloom (The Bloom Review) was present and asked to share his thoughts on registration and regulation*

His views on this remain the same since his report and he is disappointed with the lack of Government response to date. This is further complicated by the impending General Election. CB: He recommended the APPG attendees continue to mobilise themselves by writing to their MPs and using their voices and influence.

*Question concerning regulated activity. Mandatory Reporting, positions of trust - Simon Bailey in his review of the DBS recommended an overhaul of regulated activity but this has not occurred yet. Perhaps something we should raise in Parliament at some stage?*

Ruth Jones advised she has initiated a private member's bill addressing these issues. The Community and Suspended Sentences (Notification of Details) Bill. This is similar to Sarah Champion's sex offender name change, so they have the same restrictions on changing name. Part of the tightening up of the regulations.

*If the public are not aware that Mandatory Reporting doesn't exist, how are we to get the public aware of this in the UK?*

Justin Humphrey's advised that media is part of the answer. And one of IICSA's recommendations is Mandatory Reporting. We all must continue to "bang the drum".

*Why can't we utilise the press to discuss what we raise in this meeting? Although I recognise the need to be careful, we are missing an opportunity.*

Justin Humphreys explained that the APPG needs to be a safe, non-threatening space for victims and survivors, but we may be able to generate some media interest in general topics for discussion. He committed to explore how we might engage further with the media and report back to the APPG.

## 8. Close and next steps

Ruth and +Viv thanked everyone for attending.

Next meeting likely June/early July, depending on General Election date. Professor Gordon Lynch to present headlines from new research on abuse in religious communities.