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

**Expert Panel meeting**

**25 March 2025, 14.00-15.30, Room C, 1 Parliament Street**

**Present:**

**Parliament**

Ruth Jones MP, Labour (Co-Chair)

The Lord Bishop of Bristol, Viv Faull (Co-Chair)

Sam Carling MP, Labour (Officer)

Baroness Nuala O’Loan, Crossbench (House of Lords)

The Lord Bishop of Manchester, David Walker (House of Lords)

Shockat Adam MP, Independent

**Secretariat (Thirtyone:eight)**

Justin Humphreys, Chief Executive (Principal Advisor to the APPG)

Katy Jackson, Public Policy & Advocacy Manager

Peter Wright, Head of Marketing & Communications

Barbara Ball, Head of Disclosure & Training

Jill Raggett, Special Projects Manager

Jackie Mills, Executive Project Manager

**Guest Presenters - Expert panel**

Becky Armstrong-Corbett, Survivor and Psychotherapist

Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson, Crossbench, House of Lords

Dr Sarah Harvey, INFORM, Kings College London

Sukhvinder Kaur, Sikh Women’s Aid

Riaz Ravat, St Phillip’s Centre

Introduction

Ruth welcomed everyone to the APPG meeting.

Justin outlined the purpose for this meeting which was to hear from the expert panel in answering three main questions:

1. What are the key opportunities in relation to the implementation of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) recommendations?
2. What are the key challenges in relation to the implementation of the IICSA recommendations?
3. What are the key considerations that the Government needs to be aware of when drawing up the timetable and considering further detail relating to the implementation of the IICSA recommendations?

The panel’s response and discussion today will be used to develop a comprehensive briefing paper for parliamentarians as they consider next steps with regards to the implementation of the IICSA recommendations. The window of opportunity to influence is fairly small, so this needs to be followed up quickly.

Discussion

1. What are the key opportunities in relation to the implementation of the IICSA recommendations?
* Mandatory Reporting legislation should be water-tight, with no loopholes and with non-reporting being a crime, with criminal sanctions applied.
* Those who report in good faith should be protected from any repercussions.
* Public awareness is key, as per IICSA recommendations.
* Galvanise the voice of victims/survivors in the systems design journey.
* Reinvigorate inter-faith working with collaboration and sharing resources and systems.
* Authority without accountability can cause problems so checks and balances are needed within the system.
* The DBS system has been weakened and regulated activity is not fit for purpose, with changes needed to strengthen definitions and application.
* Effective Mandatory Reporting should cover suspected abuse as well as disclosed or witnessed abuse (to take account of abuse suffered by those who are non-verbal).
1. What are the key challenges in relation to the implementation of the IICSA recommendations?
* Who will have the legal obligation to report? If solely professionals, this creates a loophole.
* What will trigger the obligation? There needs to be a reasonable suspicion.
* What will be the sanctions? Solely having a DBS referral will not be sufficient to make a difference. Courts should decide on a case-by-case basis on the level of responsibility involved.
* Cost should not be a factor – there should be no price over a child’s innocence and the cost to society of child abuse is huge, needing medical/mental health support, not fulfilling potential for education/work prospects, turning to drugs/alcohol etc.
* There is a tacit assumption that all faith communities and settings want to participate in safeguarding, but high control ones do not and fly under the radar.
* We are fighting the court of public attention in a non-faith, secular society – how do our strategies and interventions involve the younger demographic?
* Definition of honour-based abuse is needed.
* Education needed around multi-agency working to include faith groups.
* Institutions are blamed and individuals get away with their actions.
* It is difficult to map different groups of religious communities. How will they be reached and will they follow the recommendations?
* Many faith communities view the State through a criminal lens and have an automatic defence mechanism.
* How are we centring victims and survivors who are not white or Christian?
* Since IICSA began there have been five million new childhood victims of sexual abuse on our watch.
* A loophole exists within the [Crime & Policing] Bill where, if abuse happens within an institution, it is the institution who decides whether to sack the abuser or make a DBS referral. Good institutions won’t need to do this, and bad ones won’t want to, so it won’t happen.

Bishop Viv thanked the panel for their contributions.

Next Steps

Explore further work around spiritually informed systems.

Thirtyone:eight to produce briefing paper on the key points from the panel discussion.

The next APPG will take place on 1 July at 2.00 pm.