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“ The Church must learn how to take past disclosures seriously in the present. Until that happens it is impossible to find restoration and freedom from pain. ”

Independent Safeguarding Board

Annual Progress Report September 2021 to December 2022

Foreword

We are pleased to present the Independent Safeguarding Board's annual report for 2022-2023.

This is our first annual report in which we aim to highlight our achievements and the challenges we have faced in developing the vision of the Church of England's first independent safeguarding body. As we reflect on the period since the Board was formed, we are proud of the progress we continue to make and are ambitious for what will be achieved from the foundations we have laid.

This has been a year of two distinct parts. We began the period by starting work as directed by the ISB Terms of Reference, which included establishing the ISB's identity and ensuring that we had access to independent legal advice. In August 2022, we entered a different stage of development and challenge, as the Chair of the Board stepped aside. This meant we had to work and prioritise differently. We accelerated work to formalise our organisation and governance. We also articulated the standards we expect to maintain.

We worked hard to further develop the ISB's engagement with victims, survivors, and church bodies, and develop confidence in the Board's vision and work. We received plaudits and criticism, both of which we have welcomed, as they continue to inform and shape our goal which is to become a truly independent body.

The annual report is a testament to the dedication and hard work of our growing team, whose tireless efforts have enabled us to achieve more and increase our impact for those we serve. The ISB has been a beacon of hope for many, especially victims and survivors. We would like to thank Archbishops Council who have endorsed this vision and whose support has and continues to enable this vision to evolve.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Maggie Atkinson for her time as Chair of the ISB.

We know there is impatience on the part of those wishing to see change in the way the Church of England approaches its safeguarding duties independently. We are committed to building on our progress and meeting the challenges ahead with the same drive and commitment that have defined our work to date.

We hope that this annual report provides insights into our activities and progress. We look forward to continuing our work in the year ahead, with a clear focus on developing proposals for Phase two, our Pathway to Independence, which has been informed by our work to date.

Jasvinder Sanghera CBE
Steve Reeves MBE

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The House of Bishops approved the establishment of an independent body for additional oversight of safeguarding in October 2020. This was unanimously approved by the General Synod in November 2020 in the context of endorsing the recommendations from the IICSA report into the Anglican Church. Victims and survivors contributed significantly to the IICSA investigation and the inquiry heard their experiences for over a year before the publication of the report. The Archbishops' Council commissioned a paper into the proposal for Phase One of the ISB which included consultation with the Survivor Reference Group set up by the National Safeguarding Team. The Council endorsed the proposal and this was presented to the General Synod in February 2021. The Chair and Survivor Advocate were appointed in September 2021 and the ISB came into being in January 2022 with the recruitment of the third independent Board member.

This report aims to provide an open and transparent account of the ISB's work, challenges and our vision towards becoming a truly independent body.

Key Highlights

Since our launch in January last year, we have been focussed on delivering phase one which included these key successes:

- **Engaging with victims and survivors** of church abuse to gain their views on the ISB's current work and what our future independence should look like and completion of our [first report](#).
- **Establishing relationships** with existing Church of England safeguarding governance bodies, including exploring and reporting on their work with survivors and victims of church abuse.
- **Undertaking independent reviews** both where issues are escalated to us, and where we consider a matter requires an ISB review and report.
- **Commissioning an independent website** to develop and publicise the ISB's brand, and to further policy and practice: publicly celebrating things done well, challenging equally publicly when we deem it necessary.
- **Engaging in discussions** with and presenting challenges to General Synod, Archbishops' Council, House of Bishops, DSAs, DSAP Chairs and members.
- **Coordinating discussions** on future models of independent regulation, accountability, and governance.
- **Influenced** positive outcomes for victims and survivors, particularly the extension to therapeutic support in the Interim Support Scheme and the progression of Clergy Discipline Measure cases.
- **Appointing** a Business Manager and Communications Consultant to work solely for the ISB.
- **Support and challenge** to Safe Spaces England and Wales to ensure the procurement and tendering process for the new provider incorporated experience of supporting victims and survivors and adequate staff training.

The ISB identified

46 recommendations within the report in
16 themes

Introduction to the ISB

The ISB was formed in January 2022 as a new body focused on delivering key areas outlined in the [Terms of Reference](#). The ISB could not have developed this far without the support of the Archbishops Council and recognises the need to be sufficiently independent from those it is responsible for scrutinising. Therefore, the ISB prioritised the developing foundations, structures and governance in Phase one and this stage has further informed Phase two of the ISB.

The ISB has now developed a plan to further consult on its Path to Independence that involves the development of a clear vision for the shape and scope of safeguarding independence which are highlighted at [page 19](#) of this report.

The reliance on Church Media and Communications support was initially seen by as a pragmatic approach to controlling unnecessary costs, but quickly became an arrangement which would not engender the confidence of survivors or the public.

The provision of IT support as a shared service from the Church has resulted in concern from some survivors of church abuse and has presented operational challenges to the ISB in the delivery of its work.

The absence of a formal Information Sharing Agreement, has resulted in an inability to complete

some basic functions of the ISB role, including matters of significant public interest.

The ISB has a small team of three board members and three staff. The Chair has recently resigned from her post and an Acting Chair has been appointed by the Archbishops' Council to start in May 2023. This decision was communicated to the ISB shortly before the public announcement at the end of March. The other two board members work two days a week. The Business Manager works full time, the Communications Consultant works three days a week and the temporary administrator works full time currently. We also employ Plexus Law as our lawyers. The status of ISB members, as independent contractors, contributed in part to the absence of suitable governance arrangements in the first half of the year. Following advice from the Archbishop's Council, the Board called a Special Meeting on 23rd August to approve [Operating Principles and Standing Orders](#) (OPSO), providing a framework for its administration and stating clearly the expectation that all Board activity is conducted with the highest of standards of independence, inclusivity, and integrity.

This helps ensure that the ISB can operate effectively as an unincorporated body, rather than three separate Board members. The ISB accept that these Standing Orders should have been prioritised and approved at the inception of the ISB.

The funding and staffing expenditure for the ISB from September 2021 to December 2022.

	2021	2022	Total (to Dec 22)
Leadership and Management	£30,480	£81,225	£111,705
Other Staff costs	£52,409	£57,257	£109,666
Legal costs - of which:	£5,260	£151,546	£156,806
General Advice	£5,260	£75,007	£80,267
ChCh Review and proceedings	-	£28,622	£28,622
Complaints	-	£2,052	£2,052
Data Protection and SARs	-	£45,865	£45,865
Website + branding	-	£10,319	£10,319
IT devices + support	-	£2,384	£2,384
Expenses (incl travel + subsistence)	£47	£184	£231
Reviews	-	£92,280	£92,280
Survivor Engagement (incl Ref Grp + Report)	-	£76,390	£76,390
TOTAL	£88,196	£471,585	£559,781

Activity in Phase One



ESTABLISHED

- Legal advisors who are independent of the Church of England, with no history of providing services to the Church.
- Contact and begun to build relationships with those responsible for safeguarding at Diocese level, including Diocesan Safeguarding Advisers (DSAs), ISVAs, Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP) Chairs or their equivalents.
- A dynamic leadership model, during the absence of the ISB Chair, and formed a strong basis of collaborative working between ISB members and the Board's staff support.
- Thresholds and processes for responding to complaints about the National Safeguarding Team and commissioning reviews of cases referred to the ISB.
- A robust framework for information management and data protection, addressing the unacceptable practices brought to light by survivors of church abuse.
- An independent website and brand identity to meet our commitment to openness and transparency.

COMMENCED

- Independent reviews of complex casework undertaken by the National Safeguarding Team, and where we consider a matter requires an ISB review and report.
- Discussions on future models of independent regulation, accountability, and governance.
- The programme of co-ordinated consultation to ensure key stakeholders and independent thinkers are engaged in co-creating proposals for long term independence in Church of England safeguarding.
- The expansion of staff support to the ISB, reducing reliance on Church of England services and personnel, including the appointment of key staff and advisors.
- The ISB's work with victims and survivors of church abuse, gaining their views on current work, future independence, and completion of our report - 'Don't Panic, Be Pastoral'.

DELIVERED

- A thorough thematic review of the Church's engagement and work with survivors and victims of church abuse (see [page 10](#)).
 - Updates and progress reports to, and answered questions from, key stakeholders and governance bodies, including the Trustees of the Archbishop's Council, the House of Bishops, the National Safeguarding Steering Group and General Synod.
 - Transparent statements on the ISB's capacity to deliver its public commitments, such as the review of safeguarding concerns at Christ Church.
- (ISA) is finalised. The absence of this agreement also severely hampers the ISB's ability to provide oversight and scrutiny of systematic safeguarding issues across the church and we are doing everything to resolve this as quickly as possible.
- Proposals have been made to create a separate legal entity which will deliver the ISB's functions in the interim period, while the longer-term path to independence is developed. We now wait for feedback on these proposals.

Compliant information sharing and data protection is critical to trust and confidence. Active Board members and staff have completed GDPR training. Work has been ongoing for a considerable period by Board members, the Archbishops' Council, and legal advisors to ensure that an Information Sharing Agreement

Contact Data (since Sept 2022) after introduction of the website

Type	Total
Safeguarding Concerns	7
Case Review Requests	8
General Enquires and Concerns	7
Case Withdrawal	1
Complaints	7
TOTAL	30

Challenges of Phase One

As shown on [page 4](#), the ISB has celebrated a number of successes in its first year but has also experienced a number of challenges and multiple instances in which our independence and freedom to operate has been hampered. We do not consider that the ISB is sufficiently independent from those it is responsible for scrutinising as it is currently supported and funded by the Archbishops' Council.

The ISB Chair of the Board, Maggie Atkinson was asked to step aside from all duties in August 2022, when the ISB were informed that an allegation of a serious material breach of sensitive data was to be investigated by the Information Commissioner's Office. The Chair's duties were allocated to other Board members on an interim basis. This has resulted in an increase to the time allocated by the remaining Board members, while the overall budget is not expected to be adversely affected. The Chair has since resigned from her post.

The Board called a Special Meeting on 23rd August 2022 and approved its Operating Principles and Standing Orders (OPSO), providing a framework for its administration. The ISB expect all board activity to be conducted in a way which demonstrates independence, inclusivity, and integrity.

We fully recognise that the current position of the ISB in the Church's infrastructure is unsustainable and that the independent minds of our board members need to be supported by an independent body, the operation of which cannot be frustrated by the Church. Proposals have been made to both Archbishops in November 2022 to create a separate legal entity which will deliver the ISB's functions in the interim period, while the longer-term path to independence is developed. We will be starting a consultation period over Spring 2023 to seek feedback on these proposals.

“

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Establishing
Engaging
Appointing
Commissioning
Undertaking

Don't panic – be pastoral

“

Whether the perpetrators are alive or dead, survivors must come first...The Church has to get it right. There are no excuses for us for getting it wrong.”

Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby

The title “**Don't Panic – Be Pastoral**” is a direct quote from a survivor that succinctly encapsulates the experiences and wishes of the survivor community.

The ISB produced its first report that was informed and underpinned by victim and survivor conversations. This report has many important messages, whereby the survivor community were strongest and unified with their voices. There are 38 core recommendations, 16 that require immediate consideration and 46 secondary recommendations, grouped into specific headings. The NST and Lambeth Palace have responded to the recommendations. We are pleased that Lambeth Palace have accepted all recommendations relevant to them.

The need for Church bodies and NST to provide compassionate, therapeutic, and consistent responses was echoed from all victims and survivors. The importance of being believed was important for all victims and survivors and there

remains a clear difference in responses across the church to this request.

The ISB acknowledges the CofE has made considerable investment towards safeguarding, notably within the NST, however, few victims and survivors of this report felt the impact of such investment on improving outcomes and their lives.

The challenge for the CofE is that despite much investment the same consistent messages from the survivor community of inadequate outcomes remain prevalent.

The ISB are in the process of developing a working group to monitor the implementation of the report's recommendations. The Survivor Advocate will act as board lead for this group and support the development of an action plan.

We intend to report progress or lack of, to the Archbishops Council and publicly on the ISB website.



IDENTIFIED PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recently the survivor community collectively expressed their deep disappointment by the [safeguarding presentation to General Synod \(Feb 2023\)](#). This led the ISB to organising a meeting with members from the survivor community who openly shared their views, including how all felt deeply concerned by how they had been portrayed. The ISB report has clear recommendations that will work towards improving the relationships with both NST and survivor community and will now develop a plan to seek assurances on the following recommendations, identified as a priority for the survivor community.

Recommendation 13

Improvement of NST engagement with victims and survivors

Recommendation 7

Improved Survivor Support

Recommendation 10

Church Lawyers and Insurers

Recommendation 16

Building on Compassionate Responses

Key messages

"I keep asking you to believe me and then I feel avoidance, this causes delays and then it gets toxic, why not just acknowledge what happened without telling me you believe me."

"That jumping forward to 2022, if you randomly asked someone in the church what is, or have you heard of safeguarding that they would say yes."

"We have an institutional memory when finding the courage to disclose, sadly some, forget the child in that past who is very present at that time of disclosing."

"I just wanted an apology (2017) jump forward, now I want more because of the lack of consideration, it is retraumatizing and a further injustice."

Survivor

"When we come forward it is because we are in crisis, this does not diminish if we are reporting non-recent abuse."

"It is key for a Bishop's office to handle and communicate apologies well".

Bishop

"The Church must learn how to take past disclosures seriously in the present. Until that happens it is impossible to find restoration and freedom from pain."

"Those seeking apologies and offering support often feel like they are paddling underwater, there is often a sense of hopelessness on both parts."

DSA

"If you had asked a church warden in 2017 for help, especially about one of their own, you would have been told over my dead body."

"Helplessness for those supporting survivors can often be perceived as defensiveness."

NST

"Every encounter could be a therapeutic encounter."

DSA

"Survivors do wish to engage with NST, but I don't trust the NST, as they may let the survivor down, we need a clear pathway into NST for survivors that wish to engage."

DSA

Consistent survivor views

- Place ISB and other relevant posters on information about and resources on safeguarding in all church spaces.
- Who is looking after victims and survivors in the NST?
- Victims/survivors should not go through NST, unless there is a person-centred team to respond to them that includes survivors being available to talk to.
- Acknowledge the hurt right at the beginning and please see the child, if it was non-recent abuse, he or she is in the room with you.
- Urgently communicate openly the progress of Redress Scheme.
- Aim for practice whereby those in crisis should only ever have to give their account once. Communicate NFA rational, even a small, detailed explanation to explain the decision.
- Train all in the process of grief/shame etc.
- We need NST to understand those in crisis will turn to them, create a compassionate team with the right skills to respond and to be able to keep listening.

A case study from a survivor

In July 2022 I had cause to bring a CDM against a senior member of clergy who had reneged on actioning a recommendation made in an independent Lessons Learned Review into my case. This failure to act caused emotional trauma for me and my family. The CDM I submitted was supported by a social worker and Safe Spaces caseworker who recognised the level of distress my family and I were living with.

Lambeth Palace staff acknowledged that my CDM had been received in mid to late July and that it had been sent to the Provincial Registrar with immediate effect. The CDM code of practice states that the Registrar will send their report to the Archbishop within 28 days or if there is a delay updates and reasons why will be provided. By September I had still received no response from Lambeth Palace so I wrote asking for an update. An apology was offered by the staff and the death of the Queen given as a reason for the delay, commitments to investigate were made. As the situation deteriorated at home I became more psychologically worn down and there was still no response by the end of October.

In November I felt so emotionally unsupported that I contacted the ISB to see if they could help. I chose to contact the ISB because in the church there are very few places to turn.

I admit that my confidence had been so damaged by the process that I was not expecting anything much from the ISB but I was wrong. They wrote a challenging, well scripted letter to Lambeth Palace advocating not only for me but all survivors in the same position. The letter made it clear the behaviour of Lambeth Palace was unacceptable particularly in light of a recent report written by the ISB. Over the Christmas period the ISB wrote again to Lambeth Palace, the tone of the letter increasingly frustrated by the lack of action, and they also liaised with my solicitor in order to provide a united front. Importantly for me at such a difficult time they were kind, empathic and determined. At no point did I feel like I was being a nuisance or making a fuss about nothing, they understood and shared my frustration.

Eventually in January a letter arrived from the Provincial Registrar saying the report would be sent to the Archbishop imminently. It is almost 2 weeks since that letter arrived and I haven't heard anything. The Archbishop is allowed 28 days to decide what to do but I fear it may become another battle. If it does, I have confidence that the ISB will once again play their part in supporting me.

The church should not have to be or shamed into responding. They should do so because it abusive not to.

“
I chose to contact the ISB because in the church there are very few places to turn.”

“
The commissioning of a review is an important step and reviews themselves involve accessing sensitive documentation and interviewing people.”

Reviews

The review of safeguarding cases is an important aspect of the ISB's work. During the year we reviewed the process for considering requests for reviews, resulting in a clearer criteria and a clear focus on creating necessary change.

The ISB is not an investigative agency and is unable to become involved in live cases (those where there is an active police or church investigation, pending court cases, or active complaints being pursued through existing systems).

Several reviews are in progress, at different stages of the process. The commissioning of a review is an important step and reviews themselves involve accessing sensitive documentation and interviewing people. We are aware of the risk of traumatisation, so we must be sure that there is a prospect for valuable learning before we commission a review.

So far, the reviews in the pipeline have been requested by survivors of church abuse, which means we must take special care to ensure that people are supported throughout the process. We take this responsibility seriously.

While considering requests for reviews and conducting reviews themselves, we have identified several consistent themes:

- The absence of a relationship-based and co-ordinated approach to individual survivors, in terms of case management and subsequent redress. Survivors report overly legalistic approaches and feeling that there are missed opportunities for the Church

to treat them as individual people in need of help, which would aid them in recovering from harm they have experienced.

- The continual engagement or re-engagement with different aspects of the Church's infrastructure is deeply problematic and involves repeated traumatisation, often of people already extremely vulnerable.
- The complexity of systems and governance is a common theme, with some requests for reviews being pleas for help in navigating an unnecessarily complicated system.
- A mismatch between levels of staffing and other resource allocated by the Church to functions critical to the needs of survivors and demand. This means that however hard those working in this area work, there will still be a sense of a lack of responsiveness.

Reviews conducted by the ISB result in a report, which is shared with the referrer and those in positions of authority in the Church who need to respond to the recommendations made. We are committed to monitoring the implementation of recommendations from reviews and will hold the Church of England to account.

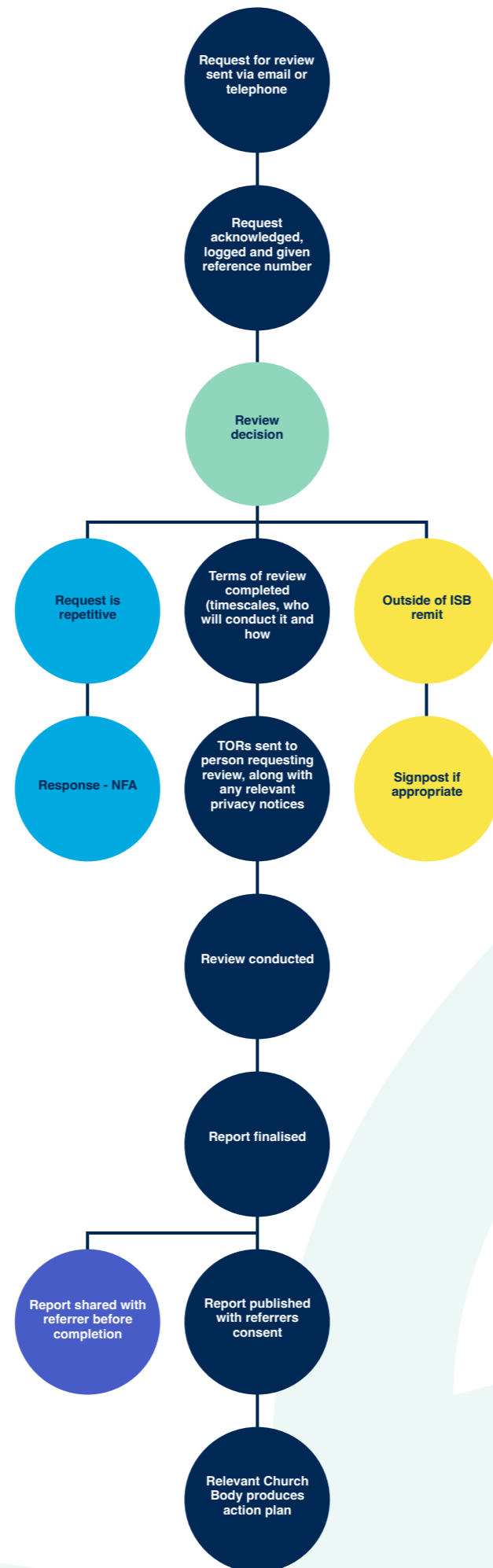
The review process

The infographic to the right clearly sets out the process followed by the ISB if a case is referred to us.

One of the remits for the ISB is to investigate complaints about the National Safeguarding Team and conduct case reviews as appropriate.

A number of potential reviews have been escalated to the ISB. Where, following thorough consideration, an ISB review is appropriate, the Board commences engagement with the referrer to establish the terms of the review. This can be a complex and detailed process but is important in ensuring that our desire for a trauma informed approach is embedded in our practice. Several reviews are at different stages of the process.

Common themes are already emerging from the cases referred to the ISB. Most critical is the absence of a co-ordinated approach to individual survivors, in terms of case management and subsequent redress. The continual engagement or re-engagement with different aspects of the Church's infrastructure is deeply problematic and involves repeated traumatising. The limits of authority created by the complex governance arrangements in place are a cause of much of this, but need to be overcome to ensure that people, some of whom are already extremely vulnerable, receive support and services commensurate with the Church's public statements.



CASE STUDY

Christ Church, Oxford

In March 2022, the Archbishop's Council and the Diocese of Oxford commissioned an independent review of the handling of safeguarding concerns at Christ Church, Oxford.

While evidence was submitted by those wishing to contribute to the review, the National Safeguarding Team were not able to provide the data it holds pending the signing of an Information Sharing Agreement. This data was crucial to a fair and balanced review.

Therefore ISB was unable to progress this review due to the absence of the National Safeguarding Team files. An Information Sharing Agreement has been requested on numerous occasions along with clear expressions of the importance for the Council to make arrangements for this to be expedited, agreed, and signed, so that this review is able to progress further. Therefore, the ISB wish to make clear the current position of the review, was not delayed due to ISB finite resources and current workload, these matters have since been resolved.

“

We would also like to apologise to all parties that have been impacted by the decision, particularly those to whom we made an undertaking to keep informed of developments.”

The ISB were later informed that the Archbishops' Council decided at their January 2023 meeting that the review should now be led by another person. We were disappointed to hear that the Council made this decision, with the full knowledge of why it has been delayed.

We would also like to apologise to all parties that have been impacted by the decision, particularly those to whom we made an undertaking to keep informed of developments. If the ISB had been consulted, we would have met our obligations.



The aim of the Board is to develop a separate legal body in cooperation with the NCIs and the wider Church community which will improve and embed a model of scrutiny of safeguarding within the Church of England.”

Future plans for the ISB

The Independent Safeguarding Board currently exists within the structure of the National Church Institutions with oversight from the Archbishops' Council. The aim of the Board is to develop a separate legal body in cooperation with the NCIs and the wider Church community which will improve and embed a model of scrutiny of safeguarding within the Church of England with the following principles:

- 1 Operational independence.
- 2 Increase the scope of the ISB's work and powers to publish reviews and impose sanctions for breaches of good safeguarding practice.
- 3 A significant increase in staff, funding, and financial independence.
- 4 Regulatory independence (with oversight from a regulated body).
- 5 Powers of access to all church files and personnel when required for ISB work.

Proposals have been presented to the two Archbishops to create an interim separate legal entity which will deliver the ISB's functions while the longer-term path to independence is developed.

We are now moving forward to further develop and consult on these proposals for Phase Two of the ISB with a wide range of stakeholder groups from Spring 2023. We intend to present the initial plans and findings from this to the General Synod in July 2023.

Contact details

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you are in need of our support. Emails are monitored during normal working hours of 9am – 5pm from Monday to Friday. We aim to respond to all enquiries as quickly as possible. If you are in immediate danger, please call the emergency services on 999.

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