

# R4 Sunday programme safeguarding 250623

## **William Crawley**

is the Church of England trying to shut down scrutiny of its safeguarding practices. That's the criticism the Archbishop's Council is facing. After they disbanded the independent safeguarding board that were supposed to hold the church to account and advocate for victims and survivors of abuse. The council says working relationships with two of the board members had broken down we'll hear from one of them in a moment and speak with the Archbishop of York. But first let's speak with Jane Chevous, a survivor of clergy abuse, who represents survivors of victims while also sitting on the church's national safeguarding panel. Jane, good morning - welcome to Sunday.

## **Jane Chevous**

Thank you. Good morning.

## **William Crawley**

Can you give us first of all quick briefly, if you can your reaction to this decision to sack these independent members?

## **Jane Chevous**

I think many survivors are devastated by the news. The Independent safeguarding board represented hope for us that there would at last be some independent scrutiny of church safeguarding, and that hope has been snatched away and trampled underfoot.

## **William Crawley**

Do you trust the church?

## **Jane Chevous**

Well, I think the Archbishops' Council have demonstrated that it is dangerous to trust the church. As Bishop Julie acknowledged, this decision has made the church less accountable and demonstrated a resistance to robust external scrutiny

## **William Crawley**

One of the bishops who spoke out this week in response to the news. What's been the effect personally for you and for other survivors, as you see this decision playing out?

## **Jane Chevous**

For many of us this has made the church feel like an unsafe place again. And I know that there are many people in parishes, and diocesan safeguarding advisors, who are working hard to improve safeguarding. But what we've seen is that that doesn't always go well, and there has to be some independent scrutiny to ensure that when things do go wrong, people are held to account and there is real change. And so I think the Archbishops' Council has shown that they can't be trusted to bring such independent scrutiny in into play. What is needed now is some external intervention from the charity commissioners or the government to bring properly independent scrutiny into play as soon as possible.

## **William Crawley**

Thank you very much, Jane Chevous. As I said earlier, the Archbishops' Council say they ended the contracts of the independent board members, because working relationships between two members of the board and the council itself had broken down. Jasvinder Sanghera is one of the experts who was sacked by the church.

**Jasvinder Sanghera**

It is not true to say this has happened because of a breakdown in relationships. That is not true. We were in a process of dispute resolution seeking resolutions. And to do this is from my perspective, as survivor advocate, is irresponsible. We were at a crossroads, which is why we sat down with them and we told them - our work is being frustrated. The work of the Independent Safeguarding Board is being compromised. We are trying to work by terms of reference, which you unanimously agreed and in every point, it feels as if it's an uphill struggle. We even received seven points of how we can move forward from the General Secretary this month. And then to receive a letter at noon on the 21st of June to give notice he was an absolute shock. And at a point where the independent safeguarding board had absolute confidence of the survivor community - they've removed that. It demonstrates a lack of commitment to independent safeguarding. And for me to be told by the National safeguarding team director that the Independent Safeguarding Board is too survivor led and focused really calls into question the need for them to take a really good look at themselves and how they are going to move this agenda forward.

**William Crawley**

We're joined now by the Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell. Archbishop, good morning to you.

**Archbishop of York**

Good morning, William.

**William Crawley**

Well, this is a complete mess, isn't it?

**Archbishop of York**

Well, I want to say first of all, I entirely agree with what Jane said at the end of her interview, we must move towards proper independent scrutiny as soon as possible.

**William Crawley**

She also said it's dangerous to trust the church.

**Archbishop of York**

Well, I think there's been a huge amount of misunderstanding over what's happened this week. If I could just quickly try and set the record straight. The Church of England needs full independent safeguarding scrutiny. Ironically, until recently, the letters I tended to get, from survivors and survivor advocates was about how the ISB in its current form wasn't fully independent. And actually they had a point. Because when we set this up last year, it was always going to be a two stage process of which this was stage one. And it would lead to the fully independent scrutiny and fully independent safeguarding scrutiny in stage two,

**William Crawley**

hang on a minute. So you're telling us that you sacked the independent members, because you want to make it a more independent body?

**Archbishop of York**

Yeah. So if I could just finish, that was always a two stage process towards full independence, and because of, you know, a tragic breakdown in communication with those who are the members in stage one, an inability to take things forward with huge, huge reluctance. And after trying many, many other ways forward, the Archbishops' Council took the decision, that actually paradoxically the quickest and best way

**William Crawley**

I really apologise for this, we've only got about five minutes, I'm gonna have to interrupt quite a bit.

**Archbishop of York**

I haven't really finished explaining it.

**William Crawley**

I know, but I only have five minutes. And I've already stated your position a couple of times on the programme.

**Archbishop of York**

But well you haven't, because that my point is you didn't set explained the position, because paradoxically, the position we find ourselves in is in order to reach the full independence, you know, it breaks my heart that this has to happen. But actually, it was getting in the way of this. So we're doing a reset. We've put in place this week independent scrutiny. So it's not that independent scrutiny has stopped. It's happening in other ways, we will move swiftly towards that full independence. Yeah, it's awful what has happened but it is the only way forward.

**William Crawley**

So Archbishop, what is to say that you won't simply sack the new independent scrutiny, if you don't like what they're saying?

**Archbishop of York**

Well, because we need to move towards full independence, which we haven't yet had. When we when we get that full independence, then we'll be in a different place, we'll be in the place we need to get to.

**William Crawley**

When we when we've spoken to these in the former members of the board, they said they were working on these working relationship issues. But they also point out that the real issue for them was the appointment of an interim chair, Meg Munn, to this Independent Board within without any consultation with the independent members. And they say there's a conflict of interest around her appointment because she already sits on the National Safeguarding Panel steering group, and this independent board may well have to scrutinise the work of that group. So there's a serious question about the independence of the chair that you put in, let me just put their other points. You did not consult the independent members, when you made that appointment, and they say, at every turn their work as an independent body was frustrated by the actions of the church. One clear example of that the information sharing agreement with the National Safeguarding Team did not exist. They asked for it for

nine months - their review could not progress forward because they didn't have access to that information. They're saying it's not simply a breakdown of working relationships. This was an independent body trying to be independent, frustrated by the agencies of the church. Your response?

**Archbishop of York**

Yeah, well, you've asked me a lot of questions there. I hope you'll give me time to answer them. So first of all, the this first stage of the ISB what was still under the, working with the Archbishop's Council, they had not yet reached the full independence we hoped for. It's simply not the case that the National safeguarding panel was being scrutinised by the ISB, so there wasn't the conflicts of interest that some said. The mere fact that we're having this conversation. Sadly that will was a breakdown of communication, a breakdown of trust which left us in a position where, in order to reach the stage two full independence that I recognise is completely needed, which I'm committed to working towards. Sadly, we were not reaching it through this route. I was going to be chairing a meeting to mediate between the ISB in it's stage one and the Archbishop's Council. And the Council was served a dispute notice which was leaked to the press two hours before the meeting happened, I found out about it on Twitter. This is not the way to work together towards a common goal. So sadly, the council reached the decision it did. But what I wanted to say is, you know, I listen really carefully to what Jane said, I completely agree with her that we need to move towards proper independence. I can't say how sorry I am, that this first stage hasn't worked. And frankly, it wasn't working from the beginning. We lost the first chair very, very quickly. I realised that survivor community will be very, very troubled right now listening to all of this. And I can only say that we will be working hard towards that full independence and that work has already begun.

**William Crawley**

And survivors have been in touch with us. They're not happy. They feel that there's a breakdown in trust with the Archbishop's Council, with the leaders of the church. Jane also said this decision made the church a more unsafe place for victims, please ask the Archbishop of York - who is the trusted and independent go-to person survivors can confide in within the church? A question for you from one of our listeners.

**Archbishop of York**

Well, we still have put in place independent scrutiny of cases where there is, where there are concerns. And that will continue until we move quickly back to completing the work that unfortunately, we have not been able to complete via this route.

**William Crawley**

It is even felt as you know, Archbishop, by the by some of your own bishops at the top of the church, that the church is not has not performed well here. This isn't just a reputational issue. It may reflect an unwillingness to get to grips with problems that have been much evidenced in the church. Another example the review recently find that Lord Sentamu, your predecessor failed to act on the victims disclosure of child sex abuse, he stepped aside now been required to step aside as an honorary bishop. In the last 20 seconds or so, how are you planning to deal with those perceptions of trust breaking down?

**Archbishop of York**

Well, trust is something that has to be earned. In the end, it's not about things I say to you. It's about what we do as a church. I fully recognise that and I of course, am hugely sorry for the failings of the

past. And also the, you know, the difficulties that have emerged this week towards full independence, but all I know is that I and my colleagues are committed to a better future. We are working towards that. But I fully recognise the judgement of that will be what we do, not what we say.

**William Crawley**

Thank you very much. We're running out of time. Thank you to the Archbishop of York. That's it from us have a good weekend. Sunday was produced by Katherine Murray and Louise Clarke.