

**Times Radio, 23/06/23**

**Cathy Newman**

Now the Church of England has sacked its Board of safeguarding experts brought in to look at how it dealt with abuse in the aftermath of a damning report from the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse. They've been reports of a long running dispute between the church and those independent experts. Two of the board members claimed in April the church have refused to share data with them. And they alleged the chair of the board had a conflict of interest because she already held posts in the church. Many survivors of church abuse have reacted with dismay at the sacking of the experts. Canon Dr. Jamie Harrison is a member of the Archbishops' Council and joins me now. Good evening. Just explain for us if you could, why these members of the board have been sacked?

**Jamie Harrison**

Well, first of all, I gather just when they should have been on the programme, I'm so sorry to hear that she may have some family issues. We do wish her well. There's a very long story, in one sense. We've had a relationship with this board, which we set up in 2021. We hoped that it would become a fully independent board in quite a short time. That hasn't happen. The Independence they've had, has been in terms we think, and desired, have had in relation to their operational independence. But they've been tied, unfortunately, or fortunately to the Church of England financially, and in governance terms. And we reached a point where we felt that the movement to full independency wasn't happening at the speed and in the direction that we'd expected.

**Cathy Newman**

Well, in plain language, isn't that tantamount to saying that the Church wants to control this whole area of handling abuse claims? And that's not necessarily going to work in favour of the abuse survivors, who wanted the independent experts to have their back?

**Jamie Harrison**

Absolutely, I mean, you know, as well as I do, if not more than I do, directly, the suffering and pain are those who have been abused by the church. And that's why we want to develop a fully independent board. That's a board or an organisation that gives us that sort of fully independent scrutiny - which is free of the church financially and free of the church's governance and accountability. The current board - whilst constituted, it's got a couple more weeks to go - has not been able to do that. And that's why we want this full independency. So we aren't going to be marking our own homework; we aren't going to be those who, in a sense are controlling it. And that's what we run to

**Cathy Newman**

That just doesn't stack up with what the board members complained before they were sacked. They said that the church had encouraged them to share the church press office, the IT services and phone lines, and to use church-selected lawyers, and also that you wanted to incorporate their budget into the national safeguarding budget. So they said, you know, there were big hurdles to sort of small levels of investment, as they put it. And it just doesn't quite tally with what you've just told me.

**Jamie Harrison**

Well, I think, to be honest, there are differences of opinion here. I mean, I don't want to go too much into specifics and obviously, I don't know all the detail. I'm a lay member of the council but I've been fully involved in the decision making. We would suggest that resources were made available appropriate to their work, for instance, that the phone lines were available and other areas were available. So I think we could counter some of those comments. But if that has been the case, obviously, that's very disappointing from our end; we failed to support them if that is the case. But as I say, there may be a counter argument to it.

**Cathy Newman**

Do you accept that sacking the board is a terrible look for the church's reputation in this area of handling abuse, which has already, you know, has been years of just terrible publicity for the church?

**Jamie Harrison**

Oh, absolutely. I think you could call it a tragedy, it's certainly a mess. The Archbishops' Council is [slightly?] responsible for that, that failure, we accept that - we need to learn. But I think equally we want to move on to establish, as rapidly as we can, this fully independent board. It is not good news at the moment for victims and survivors, I accept that. But I can only say that we will move as fast as we can to get something that is really robust and fully external, not to be interfered with by the church.

**Cathy Newman**

Many survivors have lined up behind Jasvinder Sanghera whoever you say was supposed to come on the programme. Unfortunately, she has suffered a family emergency. But it does suggest, doesn't it, that abuse survivors have a complete lack of confidence in the church and how the church is handling their long standing claims of abuse.

**Jamie Harrison**

Yeah, I mean, I think you're right, this is not that confidence. I suppose we would say that we've taken decision to try and move to an even better place of confidence in the future. Because we will be, as I say, I don't want to keep repeating it, aiming for this total independency. It must be separate from the church. We haven't achieved that. If we think of what we have called the Independent Safeguarding Board phase one, we were hoping very quickly to move to phase two - which would have this level of independence, of complete independence. We are still start or we were stuck in ISB one. We must get quickly to two. And that's going to take obviously at some weeks to do. But if we don't do that we'll be an even worse place. And I think that was what made us made that decision. We didn't feel, because of the breakdown the relationship with the other board members, that we were going to achieve that in anytime soon.

**Cathy Newman**

Does that include then that new plan? Does it include removing the current chair who, as you know, the board members were concerned that she had a conflict of interest? She already holds posts within the church - that seems to undermine your desire, you say for independence for the board?

**Jamie Harrison**

Yeah, I mean, that's a fair point. I think what I would say is that Meg Munn, who's a former government minister, has been well respected in safeguarding communities, chair the independent chair of the National safeguarding panel, which works with us but as you say, is not separate, completely separate. She brings a lot of skills and what she's therefore our hope for a very short time is to make sure we keep work that's been planned going, we can't just shut the thing down. We've got various people who are expecting us to work with them on on appointing external experts to review cases. We can't just stop that work. But you're quite right. We can't let this go on for very long, you must be a very short term interim position before we move on to the next stage.

**Cathy Newman**

So she will not carry on with this new independent board?

**Jamie Harrison**

My understanding is that all the board has been put down or set down and she is there in the role of maintaining that the business as usual model- the business and business we've got. I'm not absolutely certain quite how that will work on the ground. But that's our plan. Because we can't just leave people in the lurch.

**Cathy Newman**

Canon Dr. Jamie Harrison, member of the Archbishops' Council, thank you very much for joining us.