

PRESS RELEASE

A New Independent Safeguarding Office is Being Formed to Hold the Church Accountable for Ongoing Safeguarding Failures and Misconduct

“The Church of England’s safeguarding work seems mostly unreliable, untruthful, unjust and unaccountable”

A new Independent Safeguarding Office (ISO) is being formed in the wake of repeated allegations of failures of safeguarding governance, policy implementation, practice and leadership in the Church of England. Initial funding has been provided by donors enabling the ISO to begin to provide critical scrutiny of apparent failures in the handling of allegations of abuse within the Church of England.

The new body aims to regulate faith bodies following the normative principles governing justice, integrity, accountability, reliability and transparency. Although initially focussed on the Church of England, the ISO plans to extend its work as soon as possible to all faith denominations in England and Wales. It will function like other self-regulatory authorities and agencies within most industries and professions. Commenting on the development of this new body a spokesperson for the ISO said:

“Many have criticised The Archbishops’ Council’s decision to close down the Independent Safeguarding Board. The Church of England does not seem to have an easily understood mechanism to provide scrutiny, accountability and any form of independent external oversight. We urgently need a regulatory agency that will act without fear or favour”.

The ISO will begin its work in the autumn.

Details:

Specifically, the ISO will:

1. Receive complaints from survivors and victims of abuse, who are frequently re-abused by church processes.
2. Receive complaints from respondents to abuse claims (whether true or false), but who are often denied due process.
3. Investigate and report on repeated failures of safeguarding process in the church, and publish its findings.
4. Develop minimum *Quality Standards* for investigating consultants and bodies, who are currently unregulated, unlicensed and unaccountable.
5. Issue public warnings about shortcomings and misconduct of church bodies, and their failures to follow good practice and guidelines.

6. Develop robust policies and practices to guard against future failings and ongoing abuse.
7. Produce a *Regulatory Code of Practice*, so that complainants, respondents and church congregations will be able to measure whether or not their faith denomination is complying with standards of good practice.
8. Not have powers to issue fines, but like other self-regulating authorities, will publish adjudications, breaches of compliance and issue public warnings.
9. Be completely and totally independent of denominational control or undue influence in order to avoid conflicts of interest and ensure optimum compliance.
10. Call church leaders to account for failings, cover-ups, continued poor practices and reluctance to adopt appropriate standards of truth and justice.

Timeline:

The Independent Safeguarding Office has been incorporated by law firm Counterculture Partnership LLP as a not for profit company on behalf of its initial board. The domain name churchsafeguarding.org is registered. Further details about the initial board and its plans will be made available in the autumn. Denominations and congregations will be invited to contribute to costs through an annual levy, as with other professions and industries. The ISO will begin its initial phase of development by focusing on malpractice in the Church of England. Over time, other denominations will be invited to participate with the ISO in making safeguarding policy and practice fair and safe for all.

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