

Transcript of presentations by Archbishops' Council members

Archbishop of York 14:44

Good afternoon, Synod. Could I begin, first of all by thanking Jane for being with us this afternoon. Obviously for some of us it's painful to hear what she said but I do thank her for her honesty and her clarity. And it gives me an opportunity to express my own profound sadness of where we find ourselves. This is not where any of us want to be. And we intend this afternoon in the things we share, to be as undefended as we can, first of all acknowledging that we have made mistakes, and that there are things we wished had been done differently. But we are in a difficult place. And we also hope, actually quite inspired by the things Jane was saying towards the end of her presentation about how we're going to move forward. I also want to take this opportunity of thanking I can't see where they are, but I think Jasvinder and Steve and possibly Meg Munn are here. So I want to take this opportunity of thanking them for the work they have done, and for the good things that have that have happened through the ISB. You won't be surprised to hear Synod that I wish I wasn't sitting here having to having to say this. But it is important that that we the Archbishops' Council take responsibility for the decisions we've made. And you the Synod deserve to hear the story of where we've got to and why. And then of course, we will receive your questions and answer them as fairly and as honestly as we can. And we also hope that what you will hear from us is is is our determination to move forward. Though I fully understand that some will find that hard to believe, but we'll say more of that later. These are the three things we want to do in this relatively short presentation. First of all, I'm going to ask Tim, to tell the story of why we've got to where we've got to. Then I'm going to ask Alison to speak about the important issue that Jane has already raised about interim arrangements. Acknowledging that actually, in some of the announcements that were made by myself, as well as others, in the immediate aftermath of this decision, weren't as clear as they should be, in fact, may have been unintentionally a little misleading. So Alison will share about that. And then we'll move to Jamie, who will speak about what we are intending to do next. The last thing for me, though, I'll make a few final comments at the end of this short presentation before we open up for questions. But the other thing I want to emphasise is that we do take collective responsibility for this as the Archbishop's Council. Yes, yes, we we wish we weren't here. But we have proceeded all along in the knowledge that we are working with people of goodwill, and in the belief that we do all want the same thing. But we acknowledge that we have failed to get there. And the decisions that we took in getting here, were unanimous. I want you to know Synod, though I can't make you believe me. But I want you to know that the decisions we took was some of the most painful decisions I've ever had to be part of in my life and work. But we took them believing them to be the right decisions for the safeguarding of the church. Could we have communicated them better? Could things have been different in the past? Well, they're things we will discuss and they are certainly things that we have to learn from. But I do want you to know that our concern has always been for the safeguarding of the church. And now I will ask my three colleagues to give their short presentations and then we look forward to your questions. Tim.

Rev Tim Goode 19:42

Thank you very much, Archbishop Stephen and I just want to concur with everything that he has said.

19:55

My brief for this presentation is to share on behalf of the Archbishops' Council, a short history of the ISB and provide Synod with a resume of what has brought us to this moment. In late 2020, the Archbishops' Council proposed an independent safeguarding board to provide independent external oversight and scrutiny of the church's safeguarding work. The proposal put together with survivors was always to be understood in two distinct phases. Phase one, which was really a stage on route to stage two could be established quickly for ierequired no new legal entity or legislation. It offered operational independence but it fell upon the Archbishops' Council to provide its

governance. Whereas phase two, which sought to achieve full independence with full independent governance would probably involve the creation of a new body, which might require powers underpinned by legislation. And the Church Commissioners agreed to fund the ISB phase one up to December 2023. The three appointed members of the ISB, the Chair Dr. Maggie Atkinson, survivor advocate Jasvinder Sanghera and the third member Steve Reeves were individually contracted to the Archbishops' Council, and contracted then to work together. They were free to choose what aspects of church policy and practice to scrutinise and to offer what observations and recommendations they wished to share. They were also responsible for the development of the second phase of the ISB in consultation with others in the church. The Archbishops' Council had the governance responsibility for monitoring managing the expenditure of the ISB, thus ensuring the appropriate use of charity funds. In this case, the funds offered by the Church Commissioners. From the beginning, the Archbishops' Council were concerned at the lack of collegiality expressed within the ISB's working relationship and a lack of clarity about the ISB's priorities. The ISB's primary objective was to help the church improve its safeguarding practice by examining policy and practice across the whole church. But as time passed, the ISB focused more on individual cases and survivor support, both vital aspects of their work. But in doing so, neglected the primary objective, which was the scrutiny of our national safeguarding system. There were also concerns raised that initiatives were being started or proposed, without adequate planning, budget, terms of reference, preparation, or clarity of outcomes. The Archbishops' Council frustratingly found itself focusing more and more time discussing governance issues within the ISB and relations within and with the ISB in the five board meetings between September 2022 and May 2023 than it spent discussing all other vital safeguarding issues, and still without any sign of a rigorously thought through proposal for phase two. This was partly because back in August 2022, the Chair Dr. Maggie Atkinson, stepped back from her role pending investigation of alleged data breaches. In an instant, the ISB lost a third of its board. The subsequent investigation took far longer than envisaged. But towards the end of the year, the two other members of the ISB refused to meet with the chair to discuss whether or not she could resume her role, contravening their contract to work together. It took the issue of a dispute notice by Archbishops' Council to force Jasvinder and Steve to meet with the chair to see if there was any chance of rebuilding their working relationship. Dr. Maggie Atkinson subsequently resigned on the 30th of March 2023. And Meg Munn, the independent chair of the National Safeguarding Panel, was appointed acting chair until the end of 2023. A large number of survivors were very vocal in their criticism of the appointment of the acting chair. And though initially, Jasvinder and Steve issued a statement welcoming the appointment, it was brought to the council's attention that both Jasvinder and Steve were now refusing to meet with the acting chair. The Archbishops' Council therefore invited all members of the ISB to the council board meeting on the ninth of May, where they were each invited to present to the board. The ISB's working relationship was still at an impasse. And so it was agreed that members of the Archbishops' Council including Archbishop Stephen would meet with Jasvinder and Steve in early June, to seek a way through. But ahead of that meeting, Jasvinder and Steve issued the council with a dispute notice, criticising the appointment of the acting chair, briefed the press before then meeting with the Archbishops' Council's members. Despite further attempts to resolve the dispute, it was agreed by the Council that the breakdown in the relationship was now sadly beyond repair. And so on the 21st of June, the Archbishops' Council released a statement announcing that they were giving notice that the contracts of the ISB members were being terminated.

Archbishop of York 28:42

Tim, thank you very much. I'm now going to ask Alison to speak about interim arrangements.

Alison Coulter 28:52

Thank you. And my thanks to Jane in all of our discussions as an Archbishops' Council, and I think you get a flavour of how very difficult these conversations were, we talked often about the impact on survivors. And we have been concerned to ensure that those survivors who had agreed independent case reviews, that they could be confident that those reviews were being progressed.

Our understanding was that there were six of those case reviews. I understand from Jane now that there are 10 and this perhaps illustrates one of our issues or practical problems that the Council does not and nor should it know who those individuals are and we don't have access to their data. So we initially set out some practical proposals, which have been outlined in GS Misc 1341 which you have, to ask the ISB to set in place interim arrangements. We then reflected that to simply offer an option without proper consultation with survivors and their advocates would not be the right way forward. We do understand that our original plan, which had been to ask in each instance one of a small team of diocesan safeguarding advisory panel chairs, to work with each survivor to identify a reviewer from a pool of identified possibilities, that this would not be acceptable to some survivors. And we want to respect their wishes. And we do understand that we need to find an alternative that they will be content with. We are therefore just beginning conversations to work collaboratively with survivors and their advocates to find a trusted third party organisation to set up and manage this process independently, for those who prefer this option. We recognise the urgency of moving on for those who are waiting for case reviews, but also recognise the need to only move forwards in a way that has the agreement of victims and survivors waiting for reviews. And this is the work that is happening at the moment.

Archbishop of York 31:22

Thank you, Alison, at this point, perhaps could I reiterate my apology, that anything that I or others may have said in the immediate aftermath of the announcement was misleading. As Alison, I think has explained, I think we are now addressing this matter in a way that is appropriate. And thank you for sharing that, Alison. So So thirdly, I'm turning to Jamie, who will speak about what we believe needs to happen next.

32:01

Jamie Harrison

I first I need to say thank you so much, Jane. And also thank you to Jasvinder and Steve, and my deepest regrets that I'm sitting here having to make this speech. This is a speech, which inevitably will be very brief in relation to the future. And I think questions will try and help us to dig down a bit more into this. But I want to give you a very brief overview of some of the key issues, I think, which the future has to work with and deal with and sort. Picking up Jane's point about this completely independent body, however we define it and design it. So my four areas for looking at are what I call pace or speed, scope, method and independence. So firstly, about pace. We've talked about ISB one, phase one, we're now talking about ISB two or phase two. Now of course, it needs to come into being as soon as possible maximum speed, but equally, there must be the time for the full sort of consultation with victims and survivors as Jane reminded us with the NST, dioceses, cathedrals and external experts who can help us to do the designing. There's a very difficult balance between going forward as quickly as possible, but also going with great care, an extensive process of consultation slower, but not too slow. Secondly, scope of such a broad organisational structure. Now the leading safeguarding solicitor Richard Scorer recently said, the Church of England needs independent scrutiny and complaints processes in relation to safeguarding and I completely agree with him, a fully independent complaints and scrutiny process. Now complaints, which is a very broad term, would include mechanisms to gather and respond to significant complaints. The power to investigate, to have inquiries, case reviews and other matters are this in the nature, can require change on the ground, but also reflect what has happened, and why it shouldn't have happened. And what can be done about it is where we might call a quasi ombudsman function in many ways that's been part of the function so far of ISB one. But then the term scrutiny, I think, is more complicated. And the question I want to have answered by any external body is, how safe is the whole church today? And then tomorrow to ask that same question. How do I know? Can you tell me as an external body? How safe is the church today and how can we with you make it safer? So scrutiny involves surveillance, scanning, auditing, accountability, and quality assurance. But I believe it must be a whole system approach. Proactive alert, using what Baroness Onora O'Neill calls clever accountability, finding out what's on the

ground actually matters rather than what we think might matter. We must be alert to the greatest risk and find ways to do deep dives in monitoring where the risk is greatest. And we need to note that no national system in health, social care, or education gets it completely right. Whether you're talking about the Care Quality Commission, which I used to work for CQC, or OFSTED, which many of you will be familiar with, or other bodies that seek to look at systems and how they fail or don't fail. So we need to note that these regulation based systems of inspection alone have significant limitations and are extremely expensive. But that should not stop us considering it, we should not bring finance into the calculation. Thirdly, method. As noted, inspection regimes have their limitations. And I used to do them. And we've got a very large and complicated set of organisations 16,000 churches, TEIs, cathedrals, chaplaincies, and so on, dioceses, there's great breadth and complexity, however you want to know is that our systems fail safe, not as we sometimes used to call it in risk management, the Swiss cheese effect, where people fall down through all the holes, and then it's too late. And finally, this very difficult word we need to work on today, the word independence. So I agree completely with Jane, and with Richard Scorer a fully independent safeguarding complaints and scrutiny body, independent from the church financially, operationally its own legal entity, it should be completely separate, but also need its own external accountability structures to know that it itself is working properly, and equally to inform us of what's going on. Here in the Synod and in the Council, we need to know but we have not the accountability structure for that particular body. And clearly, we need good leadership from outside to help us: experts, people who have been there before, people who understand the complexity of systems and how you make them safe. And such a system must engage with culture and leadership, and organisational design, business processes, staff skills, as well as understanding complexity of each and every setting in the church. This is no easy solution. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't try and we must try to get it right to find careful design and testing, but also to avoid a burdensome bureaucratic process, based on inquiries and investigations alone. I think of the 2013 Francis report on Mid Staffs, NHS Trusts, which I had something to do with afterwards. Or, the 2001 Kennedy report on paediatric cardiology, cardiac surgery in Bristol. And yet we still see both of those areas, in recent days coming up for very serious scrutiny other parts of the NHS, which will fail badly. And when Robert Francis was asked very recently about that, he said, Yes, I can see it happening again. So Church must have a system, it must be capable of being stress tested in real time. To answer my question, how do I know how safe are churches today? And how can I make it safer?

Archbishop of York 38:13

Thank you, Jamie. And before we open up, or return to the chair for questions, can I just stress three things from what Jamie has said, or from what we've said in this presentation as we look forward? First, we have referred this to the Charity Commission as ourselves, which is an acknowledgement that we recognise things have gone wrong, and there are things to learn. So I can't remember the date we did that. But we did that very shortly after the decision, was 26th of June. Secondly, and this does relate to a following motion that may be before us tomorrow. We think there should be a review of what has happened an independent review and to report back to Synod in November. And we intend to put that in process. But thirdly, I think probably the most important learning for me personally and for us as a Council and I do believe for us as a Synod. And this is a watershed moment for us. We can't get this wrong again. We the Archbishops' Council, we the General Synod, we the Church of England, can no longer think that we can deliver these things ourselves. That I think is the key learning. Not only do we need independent oversight and scrutiny of safeguarding, we need independent help in deciding how best to do it. Which I think is what Jane was saying to us. I can't tell you how sorry I am that it's taken this long for us to see it with such clarity. But we need independent scrutiny, but we need independent help in deciding how best to do it and implementing it once it is decided. And this is this is now our determination. Thank you.