

The close parallels between the Post Office treatment of its subpostmasters and the Church of England's longstanding treatment of its own victims of abuse have been deeply discomfiting to us. The failure of Post Office Limited's governance, and particularly the inability to hold leaders meaningfully to account, also resonates with victims/survivors of the established church.

Both organisations need to change their culture, and nothing says "lessons **have been** learned" more forcefully than beginning to hold senior figures to account by the same standards as those applied to the less privileged members of an organisation.

Accordingly, this open letter (which will be shared with the media) calls for the immediate suspension and subsequent investigation of the Secretary General of the Church of England for alleged serious misconduct.

The Established Church should hold its officials to high standards and the Secretary General's own job description - to which you must have proper regard - specifically records the need for him to act in a "trustworthy" manner and to be accountable to the General Synod. The misconduct that we identify hereunder has resulted in the complete forfeiture of trust in him and the institution which he serves, across the survivor community and beyond.

The Wilkinson Report raises serious issues of competence, poor strategic vision and implementation, and multiple failures across various projects: whether we shall be able to engage with these broader aspects from the floor of Synod remains to be seen. This letter, however, focuses on a very specific area of survivor concern which we formulate here:

The Secretary General, as CEO of the Archbishops' Council (as per the Wilkinson Review) was specifically advised, by Steve Reeves of the ISB, not to take the risk of additionally traumatising people with known vulnerabilities, by having them learn in an unsupported context, via the public media, that the ISB had been abolished. This was dangerous: he was warned of the risk and asked to delay publication of the decision (but not to change the decision). He rejected that advice and chose to take the risk; it had foreseeable and foreseen consequences. He chose to prioritise his perception of the interests of Archbishops' Council and/or General Synod over the needs of the Church's survivors. His choice is now confirmed by credible professional testimony to have resulted in actual avoidable significant harm towards the vulnerable people to whom he owed a duty of care, both personally and as an institutional leader across multiple iterations of safeguarding responsibility within the Church of England.

Paragraph 579 of the Wilkinson report records the Independent Member of the ISB (Steve Reeves) emailing the Secretary General in plain terms: "*I am urging caution as powerfully as I can. The harm could be significant and the announcement is not urgent*".

That warning was undeniably clear.

What is new, however, is that evidence of the sequelae to those events now comes in the form of a report by an honorary Professor of Psychology at Nottingham Trent University. A copy of that report is enclosed and we urge you to read it immediately.

Professor David Glasgow is a clinical and forensic psychologist registered with the HCPC (the Health and Care Professions Council). His report makes clear that Steve Reeves was right to be worried and that the Secretary General was wrong to ignore a warning couched in the clearest terms. To date we have seen no acknowledgement of wrongdoing, no contrition, and no apology.

Professor Glasgow identifies significant harm caused to the Church's victims by the Secretary General's decision. Previously this was a matter of foreseeability. It is now shown to be actual, specific and unequivocal. There are likely to be other victims, outside of the limited cohort with whom Professor Glasgow engaged, who were similarly affected.

This opinion must be taken seriously for a number of reasons. Professor Glasgow's CV is appended to his report. It passes muster on any reading, but it is especially relevant because of how he came to undertake this assessment.

Professor Glasgow was recruited by the Church in 2022 to offer expert psychological advice in relation to survivor reviews but, as he explains in the report, he was never asked to undertake any work and formally resigned in June 2023. He was concerned at the consequences of the closure of the ISB upon victims; he offered *pro bono* support and has subsequently interviewed a number of the "ISB 12" cohort to produce this report upon the psychological impact on survivors of the Secretary General's decision to reject the advice he was given. Importantly, he has restricted his report to this discrete area; he has deliberately avoided reading the Wilkinson Review and wisely avoids the wider controversies arising from it.

We appreciate that losing the advice of the Secretary General may be a significant embarrassment and inconvenience to you both, and to the Archbishops' Council. We assert the importance of the principles that all persons within an institution must be held to common standards of probity, and that a principle is only a principle if one is prepared to pay a price to uphold it.

We now ask you to uphold these principles and to suspend the Secretary General immediately pending investigation of this matter. We would remind you (as Archbishop Justin asserted when suspending the former Bishop of Lincoln in 2019) that suspension is a neutral act and should not be seen as prejudging the outcome of the subsequent investigation.

Given the connections the Secretary General has with multiple persons across the institution, it is of course imperative that any person entrusted with conducting an investigation of such allegations as may arise is wholly and perceivably independent of the Church. The choice of tribunal member/s will need to be subject to robust conflict of interest checks, and the vetting of such member(s) ought to include survivor input to ensure that the due process is beyond reproach.

In the unlikely event that you are unwilling to accede to this necessary request to suspend and investigate the Secretary General, we must request a fully reasoned explanation. This issue is bound to be raised by conscientious members of General Synod at next month's group of sessions and for scrutiny purposes a comprehensive explanation for your response to this letter would appear to be imperative.