

16 Oct 2024

Dear Martin and colleagues,

Thank you for writing.

Both the investigation by the National Safeguarding Team and the Diocese of St Alban's, and the further independent review by Fiona Scolding KC into Mike Pilavachi and Soul Survivor have revealed appalling practices and a shocking abuse of power. These are both important pieces of work.

The purpose of the amendment that I brought to the General Synod debate in July was not to challenge much of the spirit of the Private Members' Motion, drafted in September last year when the investigation was just concluding. Rather, it was to build on some of the points made by Robert Thompson and to allow space for Fiona Scolding's findings also to be considered. I did not believe that it would be beneficial to run a second review at the same time as the first, with no guarantee that victims and survivors would be willing to participate and with the risk of duplicating the first review's work. I also believed that we needed to direct any further work to look across traditions, and not to single out the evangelical-charismatic world of church planting. This must be about promoting a healthy culture, with good governance and scrutiny, across the whole Church.

Since then, work on the Church of England's safeguarding standards has progressed, the programme of national safeguarding audits is being rolled out across all dioceses, and the work of the Response Group following the Wilkinson and Jay reviews is looking at the structures of safeguarding - operational and audit/scrutiny/complaints processes - in relation to possible independence. All these pieces of work provide new foundations for safeguarding in the Church of England and for promoting the healthy culture which I referred to above.

Having digested the Scolding review, I do believe that there is further work to be done, and I remain committed to that, as I explained in my July General Synod speech. This work is not the remit of the national safeguarding team alone, but spans ministry and training, governance, HR, and clergy conduct. The motion passed by General Synod in February endorsing further work around safeguarding independence already identifies clergy conduct and HR processes as an area in need of parallel development to any future structures for independent safeguarding. In addition, in relation to Soul Survivor, it has become clear that there is further work to be done in relation to ordination processes, clergy training and supervision, and safeguarding and governance within church plants, BMOs, and mission charities which have an Anglican focus to their work.

We are in the early stages of developing a working group to span these different parts of the Church's life and to ensure not only that all the Scolding recommendations have an adequate response, but also that areas which have not yet been fully covered are looked at robustly. Victim and survivor perspectives will be vital in this work.

Several survivors who courageously came forward in this case praised their interactions with the NST, but also acknowledged the difficulties in navigating such a complex system as the Church of England. I am committed to working with victims and survivors, and other colleagues and Synod members, to create better foundations and systems for safeguarding in the Church. I will report regularly to General Synod on that work.

NST colleagues will reply separately to your question about information sharing.

Best wishes,

Joanne