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By Email

2nd August 2026

Dear Archbishops Sarah and Stephen

We write to you following the July General Synod meeting in York and the recent publication of the INEQE Safeguarding Group Annual Report 2025, which summarised its findings on the current status of its audit task to review and report on safeguarding across the forty-two dioceses, cathedrals, and two archbishops' palaces. This is an open letter.

The signatories of this letter are drawn from a representative sample of victims and survivors of the established church's' lengthy history of evasive responses to its safeguarding crisis, both complainants and respondents; signatories also include some who have attempted to address this grave stain on both the Christian and national life, engendering a lack of trust amongst the general public.

There remain too many who, after encountering Church of England (CofE) Safeguarding at any level, have lost trust and confidence in its institutional processes. The CofE has a longstanding problem both of abuse and of disgracefully inadequate handling of it, not least in giving it insufficient priority.

It is against this background that the INIQE report landed. Whilst noting improvements at the grassroots level of the CofE, it contains what many ordinary people in the pews and beyond will find deeply shocking. The report confirms what the signatories of this letter have learned from a variety of experiences which are shared by many other "consumers" of the culture of the institution which you nominally lead. We use the term "nominally" without disrespect.

The obstruction of justice and reform within the CofE is identified by INIQE as rising from

"a small group of influential senior officers at the diocesan level and certain individuals within the national Church. This resistance manifests in unhelpful and frustrating ways, such as a readiness to hide behind exceptionalism, canon law, tradition and procedural defensiveness." (Foreword by Jim Gamble, page 4)

These words will not have been chosen lightly. But this is not news to our signatories, and having it bluntly confirmed by an organisation chosen by the Church itself is welcome, not least because it is a counterintuitive example of the auditors "biting the hand that feeds it".

This problem of CofE establishment obstruction of justice and reform sits within a wider erosion of confidence in public life; the Post Office Horizon IT scandal, the Hillsborough Disaster cover-up, the Infected Blood scandal, and the resistance to a national inquiry into grooming gangs, are examples of a similar prioritisation of institutional interests over common decency.

We described your leadership as "nominal" out of sympathy with the widely acknowledged problem of knowing precisely "where the buck stops" within the CofE. It is precisely this diffusion of responsibility across the House of Bishops, the National Safeguarding Team, multiple dioceses, the Archbishops' Council, and the General Synod, which creates a power vacuum into which steps "a small group of influential senior officers".

Those senior officers will have names known to the authors of the INEQE Report. Such officers must be removed from influence as a matter of high priority and urgency, and they must not be replaced by like-minded subordinates.

Once again, the answer must be an independent urgent review, though we remind you that the report of Professor Jay addressed similar problems only to have its recommendations immediately questioned and diluted by just such an institutional coup orchestrated by opposed senior CofE officers.

For obvious reasons, you cannot delegate responsibility for addressing this issue internally. We understand that the Charity Commission is itself concerned at the drift and delay; it will have noted iNEQE's diagnosis of this simple but serious problem. Accordingly, we urge you to liaise with the Commission to agree the nomination and resourcing of a wholly independent reviewer so that, as leaders of the CofE, you may jointly bring forward urgent proposals to the November Synod.

The removal of those obstructing proper safeguarding reform is of no less urgency.

Yours sincerely,

Martin Sewell	Linda Billenness	Michelle Burns	Jane Chevous
Gavin Drake	Fr Alex Frost	Matthew Ineson	Neil Logan Green
Prof. Helen King	Ian Johnson	Rev Stephen Kuhrt.	David Lamming
Tina Nay	Dr Bernard Randall	Jane Rosam	Rev Simon Talbott
Fr Robert Thompson	Canon Stephen Trott	Julian Whiting	Sophie Whiting

