

Safeguarding Policy within the Church of England:

22. The key document with regard to engagement with survivors of sexual abuse is entitled “Responding well to those who have been sexually abused”. It was issued in 2011 and adopted by the Church as the document that would determine their responses to these matters from then on. In the opinion of the reviewer, it is an excellent document which identifies key principles that should be the basis for all actions taken by the Church involving survivors of sexually abuse. For the review, this was taken as the standard against which the most recent elements of this case were assessed.
23. Examination of the practice in this case has brought into sharp relief major gaps that may not be apparent to many through a reading of the policy document. These deficits will form part of the recommendations of the review. They also have caused the reviewer to question whether the current structure for the delivery of a safeguarding service across the Church is fit for purpose.
24. Policy is created at the centre of the Church and is devolved within the diocesan structure for implementation. This process will be inevitably problematic and difficult particularly when the structure of the organisation is as complex as is the case within the Church of England.
25. If policy is introduced, there is an expectation that it will determine practice across all of the Church but currently there is no effective means of any one knowing if this is the case or not. In this regard, an excellent policy paper such as “Responding well to those who have been sexually harmed” may be described as flattering to deceive in that the reality of practice on the ground may be very different from what the policy defines. Furthermore, no one at the centre of the Church may be aware of this as there is a lack of any monitoring mechanism that gathers this information and channels it through to an overarching body such as the National Safeguarding Team.
26. This lack of authority and responsibility at the centre is viewed as an important deficit in the current structure. The lead officer within the National Safeguarding Team is termed the “National Safeguarding Advisor”. Advice may be given but lack of compliance with policy requires direction, rather than advice. Currently, the structure cannot readily provide this.
27. The Church sets out a list of key safeguarding principles which it states will underpin all of its actions with regard to reaching out to and responding to survivors of sexual abuse. Using the example of this case alone, it has failed significantly to act in accordance with many of these principles. A number of examples will be examined and recommendations will be offered for consideration.
28. In the case of B and following his initially positive engagement with Bishop D in July of 2014, he initiated legal proceedings aimed at securing compensation from the Church in respect of what had happened to him. Specifically, he sought compensation for the alleged abuse perpetrated by the Reverend A, the inappropriate sexual behaviour of Brother C, and the repeated failure of Church personnel to respond to and act on his disclosures. When this information came to the attention of Bishop D, he was instructed by the Church’s advisors, to have no further contact with B and to suspend all communication with him. This was initially accepted by Bishop D. The diocesan safeguarding advisor also received the same advice. Bishop D reported when interviewed by the reviewer that he now regrets bitterly this action. The advice to withdraw contact from B grated with him as it did with the diocesan safeguarding advisor.