



DIOCESE IN EUROPE GENERAL SYNOD REPORT

Group of sessions held in February 2024



Church House, Westminster

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Introduction

The February Group of Sessions had a packed agenda. Having dedicated much time on *Safeguarding* and *Living in Love and Faith* during the 2023 meetings, February provided an opportunity for a number of diocesan synod motions to be debated, some on key issues such as bullying. Safeguarding and Living in Love and Faith were still on the agenda, but alongside other major topics, including racial justice, chattel slavery, land and nature, the family, and Ukraine. As your representatives on General Synod, we have collected a selection of reports here. You can also watch the recordings [here](#), or access the documents [here](#), including a record of 'business done' [here](#).

Robin Hall

Presidential Address

The Archbishop of Canterbury structured his address around the theme of 'suffering'. He referred to the psalms and their frequent mentions of suffering and 'enemies'.

Looking at the world around, as Lord Cameron said, 'all the lights are flashing red'. We live in a world of suffering, of which we are now aware. The Russian/Ukrainian war is frozen; the horror and havoc of the Levant and all going on in that area; all the places which are now forgotten, of which the Archbishop mentioned many globally, with refugees fleeing, harried, hunted, abused, children suffering. The world doesn't watch but turns its head away. He pointed out that it is often the neighboring countries, already poor themselves, who bear the brunt of people movement. Minorities are blamed, conspiracies are assumed, leaders are criticised.

Amongst it all there is intense personal suffering. He moved to talk of the suffering and poverty in the UK, broken families, and mental illness. It is the nature of life to suffer. It is tempting to say that at such a time we should put aside the issues in the Church. In 1939 George Bell wrote an article on 'what the Church should do in a time of war'. His answer was 'to be even more the church'. Psalm 56, written in a time of great danger, tells us that we must continue to live in holy obedience. The Church suffers and has enemies; people suffer and have enemies. Enemies are part of life.

Suffering and enmity have a profound impact on each one of us. The fear and suffering that comes from division make us look at other people as our enemies. We have to resist that illusion in faithful and honest community. Causes of fear that lead to a sense of enmity are well disguised, as uncertainty, unpredictability and uncontrollability of life. That is the devil's work. Enemies make us afraid. Fear makes us suffer. Fear corrodes, makes us ill.

Referring to divisions in the General Synod, the Archbishop talked about the harm of accusations. We are human and that is why we

fail, but we are also being transformed into the likeness of Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit. We need to assume the best and the most generous rather than the worst. Suffering and enemies are best faced in communities that trust across the divides, which builds our resilience and our ability to see the best in others.

The Anglican Primates meeting will look at how to remain 'in a variable geometry of unity, but also an unvarying commitment of love in Christ'. They are not perfect states, but steps along the journey. Those two phrases offer us all a way forward in holy obedience to God. Honesty, transparency, love in agreement, persistence in good change, all point unbelievers to Christ, whose spirit calls us to shine as light. Suffering and enemies drive us to God if we are wise in honest protest, passionate lament and proper assurance.

We must not leave God out of our discussions, neither put God in our pocket to do what we want. God is our refuge. We must not fear for the future of the church. Suffering is normal, but God is faithful. We are called to be his faithful people. God is greater than our fears, than our enemies or our failures. When that is our comfort and peace then in this world, at this time, we can, in all our troubles, be truly God's Church in God's World.

Mary Talbot

Safeguarding

The debates covered two main areas, the study and recommendations led and drawn up by Professor Alexis Jay into the Future of Church Safeguarding and how that might be made 'independent', and the report from Sarah Wilkinson from Blackstone Chambers on the 'Review of the Independent Safeguarding Board', which was disbanded in mid-2023.

This is a complex subject and we advise you to read the [report by Professor Jay](#), which deals with the future, and also the excellent [analysis by Sarah Wilkinson](#) on the unhappy history and mistakes made in the creation, handling and disbandment of the Independent Safeguarding Board (ISB). The reports, papers presented to General Synod and videos of the debates are all available on the Church of England website.

You can also access Bishop Robert's response to the report [here](#).

The motion before Synod was 'to thank Sarah Wilkinson and Alexis Jay for their work and request that the process set out in paragraph 12 of GS 2336 for forming a response to, and considering any necessary implementation of, their recommendations to be considered as a matter of priority.' This was passed with amendments adopting and endorsing apologies expressed by the Archbishops to survivors impacted by matters described within the Wilkinson report and acknowledging Synod's own collegiate shortcomings within the scrutiny process; and also to the former members of the ISB for stress, harm and professional embarrassment endured. The Wilkinson report gives a very detailed description and analysis of the creation, life and disbanding of the ISB, and the actions of those involved.

(Paragraph 12 of GS 2336 proposes an internal team to engage with Diocesan Safeguarding Advisers, Officers, and others to develop detailed proposals; to develop survey-style tools to gather responses at parish/chaplaincy level; to engage with other stakeholders including General Synod. Also a survivor and victims focus group to hear their views and those of their advisors, adopting best practice to create a safe space for people to contribute.)

The session opened with a recorded video in which Professor Jay explained her report and recommendations. Her remit from the Archbishops was 'how to make safeguarding in the Church of England truly independent, including the scrutiny of safeguarding.' Her recommendations are based on her overall professional experience, including chairing the IICSA reviews. Picking out key points, she said that the need for the church to act to improve safeguarding is urgent; the report identified a collapse in trust and confidence principally amongst victims and survivors, but not only by them. Problems include the variable interpretation of guidance, poor data collection, inconsistent supervision of safeguarding professionals, and inequity of funding across the dioceses. Professor Jay said, 'It is important to recognise a fundamental truth that safeguarding in the church today falls below the standards expected and set in secular organisations, which

are required to follow statutory guidance'. Professor Jay emphasised that this is not a reflection on the safeguarding professionals within the church, rather it reflects the contexts and processes within which they are expected to work. She believed that a new model of safeguarding is required, one which delivers a transfer of responsibility from the Church to two new, fully independent bodies, one delivering operational safeguarding and the other scrutiny of safeguarding. Their advice and decisions should be final and not merely advisory. They would be funded from church resources – although no recommendation was made about which funds, how much, nor how.

Safeguarding would continue to be delivered locally with safeguarding teams based in the diocese, which they know and understand. For the avoidance of doubt, Professor Jay said that she and her team received the cooperation requested and expected from the Church and were grateful for the assistance provided by all involved. Acknowledging that the Church has, over many years, tried to improve its safeguarding and governance, she nevertheless felt that the slow pace of change and the troubled relationship between the Church and victims and survivors must also be acknowledged. The current model is not compatible with the development of a trusted, high quality and accountable system for safeguarding. There is too much scope both for inconsistency, and for conflicts of interest, which undermine trust and confidence amongst victims and survivors and those subject to complaints. Professor Jay also recommended that an independent organisation oversee the establishment of the two new bodies in addition to giving recommendations about how the bodies should be financed and how their independence should be guaranteed.

Bishop Joanne Grenfell, the lead bishop on Safeguarding, acknowledged the failings in safeguarding over many years; that we had not yet gained the trust and confidence of victims and survivors, and had not sufficiently put right the wrongs we have done. She thanked both Professor Jay and Dr Wilkinson for their reports, acknowledging that, despite improvements in safeguarding in recent years, we had not always got structures or processes right, highlighted in both reports. She referenced and endorsed

Professor Jay's point that the recommendations were not a criticism of safeguarding professionals but of structures and processes. Looking to the future, she stressed that we needed to take responsibility, together, for addressing the problems; to find a balance between not rushing the process of setting up new structures based on the ISB findings but acknowledging the urgency for possible radical change; to heed the voices of those warning against outsourcing operational safeguarding. She reiterated Professor Jay's statement that safeguarding would continue to be delivered locally, with safeguarding staff based in the dioceses. Referring to the Response Group described in the paper, Bishop Joanne said the aim was to help work through the hard choices presented in responding to recommendations. Any recommendations would come back to Synod. It was urgent work but deserved thorough consideration.

The Archbishop of Canterbury followed, acknowledging the 'absence, not just low level of confidence in the Church's system'. He also expressed confidence in safeguarding professionals both in the centre and the dioceses, stating his profound commitment to setting up a system that avoided conflicts of interest, ensured independent safeguarding that cannot be blunted in its impact, which works well for victims and survivors, and which ensures that children and vulnerable adults are safe in the future. He apologised for the events with the ISB, recommending careful reading of the Wilkinson report to understand what happened. In thanking Dr Sarah Wilkinson, he said that he fully accepted her criticism of him personally, that he was in too much of a hurry to set the board up. Learning from that, 'we must move ahead as fast as is wise. 'We must get it right and it must centre on children and vulnerable adults in the future and on handling the terrible, dark legacy from the past'. He also asked members of Synod not to criticize members of staff from the floor, but if they had evidence of wrong-doing to report it.

As agreed previously at Synod, there is complete agreement to the concept of independent scrutiny of safeguarding. The debate on the main motion focused mainly on Professor Jay's recommendation to transfer responsibility for operational safeguarding from

the dioceses to an independent charity. There were those who argued that Professor Jay's recommendations should be accepted and implemented in full as speedily as possible, some referring to the need to allow sufficient time to ensure that proper governance structures and processes are in place, as recommended in the ISB Wilkinson report. Others, while acknowledging that there needed to be further improvements, expressed concern about the practicality and advisability of outsourcing responsibility for operational safeguarding, also making the point that dioceses were still in the process of implementing recommendations from the IICSA report, including independent audits.

An amendment calling for the Archbishops' Council to proceed to immediate implementation of the recommendations in the Jay Report lapsed without debate. An amendment from Clive Billenness, picking up on a point in the Jay report, recommending that an independent organisation oversee the establishment of the two independent charities, recommended instructing an independent legislative counsel to prepare a draft measure giving effect to this. This generated quite a level of debate with some arguing in favour, particularly as a means of starting the process, and others against. In a vote by Houses, it passed narrowly by three votes in the House of Laity but was defeated by both the Bishops and Clergy, and so lapsed.

In proposing a further motion, recommending accepting the Jay recommendations in full, Martin Sewell criticised the establishment including the composition of the Response Group. This was picked up by one of the speakers. Bishop Philip Mountstephen argued against, referring to his experience in chairing the Redress Board of the value of consulting with survivors above all, but also those, who are directly involved in church safeguarding. We should not sacrifice the benefits of consultation and collaboration in the interests of speed. There were further speeches both for and against. In a counted vote by houses, the amendment was lost in all three houses.

A number of other amendments were lost, but two adding apologies, the first to survivors impacted by matters described in the Wilkinson report, the second to the members of the former

ISB Board passed. It remains to be seen how any new structures that might be introduced will be implemented in the particular and unusual circumstances of the Diocese in Europe.

Mary Talbot

Living in Love and Faith

A few weeks after the November meeting of General Synod, one of the two new lead bishops – Bishop Helen of Newcastle – announced that she was standing down. Until now, the two lead bishops had been roughly balanced, ie one was more progressive on issues of equality and human sexuality, and one was more conservative. With Bishop Helen's departure, the Living in Love and Faith process is being led by Bishop Martyn of Leicester, who was the more conservative lead bishop. Since February, it has been announced that an LLF Programme Board, chaired by the Archbishop of York, will support Bishop Martyn in his role as lead bishop for LLF.

But what does this mean for LLF and what progress have we seen since November? In the short-term, it has slowed things down, which is unfortunate as some work which should have already been underway is yet to commence, for example the Pastoral Consultative Group – tasked with drafting the new Pastoral Guidance – which has still not been established.

Nevertheless, the difficult and confrontational tone which was a feature of previous LLF debates at General Synod was largely absent this time. Bishop Martyn had produced a report about progress made and next steps but, after some debate, the Synod voted to move to next business. There will be more to update in July when it is hoped that more work on the Pastoral Guidance, which will replace the 1990s document, *Issues in Human Sexuality*, will have been undertaken. In the meantime, to broaden out the process, a number of working groups are being formed to allow a wider group of Synod members to share views and ideas together as we work towards July.

Robin Hall.

The War in Ukraine and the challenge to international order

Among the debates on the final day of General Synod's, was a debate on the War in Ukraine.

The motion carried called for peace in Ukraine and urged UK political parties to support Ukraine until a "just and lasting peace is secured."

During the debate, many moving stories about supporting refugees were heard. The Archbishop of Canterbury described his feelings after visiting Ukraine twice during the war. We also heard about the time he has spent with the people of Christ Church, Kyiv. It was noted that the Church's support must be long-term, that we need to enable the voices of innocent victims are heard.

The work of the Diocese in Europe and USPG was reported extensively in the background paper and in a fringe meeting which was arranged during lunch time on Tuesday.

The Acting Bishop of Ely the Rt Revd Dagmar Winter spoke about "Pathways to Peace" programme in Ukraine. This is a Council of European Churches' initiative to bring together church leaders and other key stakeholders to prepare for a post-war work in Ukraine. The Council of European Churches was itself established in 1959 to enable Churches in Europe to enter dialogue and co-operation after the Second World War.

The Revd Tuomas Mäkipää (Europe) spoke to the Synod about his personal experience after Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine. He briefly described the work done, supported by USPG and the Diocese in Europe, among the refugees from Ukraine in Helsinki. He and some other speakers pointed out that the Synod background paper, perhaps unintentionally but nevertheless unhelpfully, suggested that Russia might have had – or still has – legitimate security concerns.

In summary, Churches have potentially an important role in contributing to lasting peace and especially in helping the afflicted. Christian communities in Ukraine, as reported by Bishop Winter, have asked for our prayers.

The motion, as amended, was carried unanimously.

The Revd Tuomas Mäkipää

Code of Conduct for PCCs

On Saturday morning a Diocesan Synod Motion regarding a proposed Code of Conduct was brought to Synod by a clergy member for Chelmsford, The Revd Dr Sara Batts-Neale. The relevant papers are GS2235A and 2335B which are available online.

It was a motion seeking "to address the imbalance of accountability in relationships where lay volunteers face no significant consequences for persistent departures from acceptable standards of behaviour."

Attention was drawn to the toxic atmospheres in Parochial Church Councils (PCCs) and that such lack of standards of behaviour would not be tolerated in the workplace and, for clergy, such a meeting is the workplace.

The difficulty of recruiting volunteers to stand as PCC members where such an atmosphere was known about was highlighted, and the effectiveness of sharing the Gospel was compromised by the time and energy spent on fallout from bad behaviour. There is, at present, no equitable standard for lay people whereas there is for clergy in the Clergy Discipline Measure.

Accountability for standards of behaviour would encourage people to step forward who have been put off by dominant individuals. Such a code of conduct would be a way of bringing grace and peace. The growth and health of the Church was often adversely affected and these factors need to be addressed.

An amendment asking that codes of conduct should be done locally was lost. Attention was drawn to the fact that little can be done locally at the moment and that intimidation and fear was often a result. PCC members often feared speaking up for fear of being victimised.

The debate highlighted particular circumstances, and discussion about the need for a moral code of conduct followed. There were questions over what such a disciplinary process would be, and further work needs to be done to ascertain whether people can be removed from a PCC through further legal

work being undertaken. What is the possibility of a PCC member being removed? We heard how the Diocese of Liverpool already has a code of conduct.

The motion seeking a review was put to the Synod, which voted by houses:

Bishops 30 for, 1 against and 1 abstention
Clergy 128 for, 23 against and 4 abstentions
Laity 105 for, 52 against and 8 abstentions.

The motion was carried in all three houses.

Fr Richard Seabrook.

Bullying by lay officers

This motion was brought to Synod by the Venerable Mark Ireland, Archdeacon of Blackburn. The relevant documents here are GS 2339A and GS 2339B.

This Private Members Motion “addresses the subject of bullying behaviour in church contexts and addresses a fundamental unfairness between the treatment of clergy and lay officers...Lay officers guilty of persistent bullying can be neither removed from office nor disqualified from future election.”

Personal stories conveyed an utter sense of dismay in this regard. The Archdeacon had been inundated with stories which clearly were accounts of bullying. Both clergy and laity were victims in this regard and examples of priests in despair, using the language of “evil” and the effect of on mental health were laid before the Synod.

Whole PCCs are affected and parishes had been blighted for years by such behaviour. Clergy have been forced to resign in some circumstances and one example was given where three successive members of the clergy had their ministry cut short in one parish because of bullying.

Attention was drawn to the belief that a code of conduct was not enough. There was a need to have something to remove people who bully. There is a current fundamental injustice that allows clergy to be removed but laity

cannot. There is a need not to kick this into the long grass.

It was highlighted that more people may come forward to engage with the various tasks of the parish if the parish bully is removed. It was important for PCCs to be trained and that we must get it right. Sadly, circumstances were such as it was the churchwardens bullying the clergy.

Examples were given in the debate of how the mental health of one vicar and his wife was adversely affected and the heavy toll it took on them. That bullies are unchallenged means they become a law unto themselves and create a hierarchy. Parishes become known as “priest breakers” because of bullying. A way is needed to remove such people from a PCC. Who wants to go to a church to experience bullying behaviour? Incredulity is often expressed that such behaviour is allowed to go on.

In a vote on the motion, a vote of the whole Synod and not by Houses, the motion passed with 273 for, 15 against and 22 abstentions.

Fr Richard Seabrook

Archbishops' Commission on Families and Households

The Archbishops' Commission on Families and Households, the third in a series following Archbishop Justin's book *Reimagining Britain*, seeks to integrate the themes of housing, care, and family. Engaging in evidence gathering, including a Call for Evidence, the Commission explored families and households in England, consulting experts and young people. Visits to various dioceses and consultations with leading organizations revealed impressive local initiatives. Access to research by the Children's Commissioner for England further enriched their findings.

The Commission acknowledged its limitations and focused on key aspects of family life. The final report, shaped by theological work, emphasizes core values identified in housing, leading to key messages and specific recommendations. Four key priorities for action and a broad motion presented to Synod underscore the importance of valuing families, supporting relationships, empowering children,

and addressing societal issues. The priorities are:

- Maximise the protective effect of family.
- Ensure that all loving relationships matter and are valued in everything we do.
- Give every child the best possible start in life.
- Tackle the societal issues which limit people's ability to flourish.

The Commission recognizes the significance of local-level initiatives and calls for practical development of recommendations for both the Church and the Government.

An amendment to the motion sought to introduce wording that underlined marriage as being the most stable and permanent environment for bringing up children – but this was lost overwhelmingly.

The motion passed with large majorities in all three Houses.

Robin Hall

The Future of Work

“A new industrial revolution is fast gathering pace”. These were the words of the Bishop of Oxford introducing a motion to Synod asking us to affirm the dignity and value of work, to endorse the five principles of fairness which should apply to work (Fair Pay, Fair Conditions, Fair Contracts, Fair Management and Fair Employee Representation) and to ask the Church's Faith and Order Commission (FAOC), chaired by our own Bishop Robert and the Mission and Public Affairs Committee (MPAC) to consider this.

The arrival of Artificial Intelligence (AI), he said, is expanding the “gig economy” and reducing the quality and value of work. The Archbishop of Canterbury subsequently moved an amendment to include support for adopting an ethical approach to AI.

According to the Secretary General of the Synod, it had been 13 years since the theological aspects of work had been considered (in a series of essays published and distributed to all then-Synod members). He suggested, however, that rather than accept this motion, because the FAOC and the MPAC were very occupied with other work, that these essays simply be updated and republished. Echoing concern about pressure on the FAOC, Bishop Robert, warned that pressures continue to grow

on the small FAOC team while central theological resources have been reduced, but was assured by the Bishop of Oxford that additional resourcing would be provided. Speakers highlighted issues such as the wider consideration of what constitutes ‘work’, including volunteer work and unpaid domestic work.

However, more than one speaker warned against the Church of England being accused of hypocrisy due to its poor record of treating its own clergy, lay workers and volunteers properly. A subsequent amendment was massively supported by Synod to encourage church bodies to implement the Minimum Living Wage and to have regard for work/life balance and dignity at work. Synod also voted to give special consideration to how the changes in the world of work will impact the work of women.

The motion was overwhelmingly approved by Synod and we will now await in due course the published guidance of the Faith and Order Commission.

Clive Billenness

Chattel slavery and the Church Commissioners

One of the realities of the Church of England being an institution that is over 1400 years old is that it carries a lot of baggage. The Church Commissioners, which is one of the National Church Institutions (“NCIs”) and functions as the endowment fund for the Church of England, has its roots in the funds of Queen Anne's Bounty (begun 1704) and the Ecclesiastical Commissioners (1835/1840).

In the 18th century Queen Anne's Bounty was heavily invested in the South Sea Company (1711-1853) which had a monopoly for many years of British trade with Spanish colonies. This, unfortunately, included purchasing slaves in Africa and selling them in South America and the Caribbean. A forensic audit done over the last two years in the archives of the Church Commissioners determined that some 10% of the church endowments are derived from chattel slavery (see the report [here](#)).

While there is no way to compensate those whose were enslaved, we do know that the traumatising effects of slavery continue to this day, as does the racism behind slavery. How

might we begin to use these unjustly derived funds to help the descendants of those enslaved? At General Synod the Church Commissioners stated their intention to establish an impact investment fund that “through impact investments and grant-making, invest in a better, fairer future that promotes human flourishing for historically marginalised and vulnerable groups, in particular communities impacted by historic African chattel enslavement, creating a fairer future for all.” The sum mentioned at Synod was £100 million, but as the Church Commissioners preside over more than £10 billion, and 10% of the funds were derived from investments in slavery, that number has, since Synod, been raised to £1 billion. It is early days yet for this new fund, but the outlines are becoming clearer.

Parallel to this is the smaller endowments controlled by the USPG (United Society Partners in the Gospel), a portion of which is also derived from slavery. One of its predecessor organisations, SPG (The Society of the Propagation of the Gospel), owned from 1710 to 1838 two properties in Barbados known as the Codrington Estate. The farms on this “plantation” were worked by slaves, with all of the evils that entails. After consultation with people and institutions in Barbados, the USPG was invited to contribute £7M on the island in four areas, in collaboration with the descendants of the enslaved: 1) community development and engagement; 2) historical research & education; 3) burial places & memorialisation, and 4) family research. This will take place over the next ten to fifteen years.

Anti-Racism Policies and Projects

General Synod, after a good and lengthy discussion, passed with no dissent (but two abstentions) a motion which called on the Church of England to:

- further embed racial justice in the life and practice of our Church,
- request that the national Church ensures crucial resources remain available including appropriate governance arrangement and funding,
- recommend that Dioceses give priority to the collection, monitoring and measuring of relevant data, and
- encourage parishes and deaneries to develop local action plans to address issues of racial injustice.

As well, the Archbishops’ Council was asked to ensure effective structures exist for monitoring actions and outcomes on racial justice.

Other aspects of confronting racism emerged in the debate. In moving the motion, Rose Hudson-Wilkin, Bishop of Dover, noted the term “woke” is misused and abused by people divorced from its origins. It emerged in Black communities as a way to refer to the need to be socially aware, and is rooted in the admonition of Christ to “Be awake.” Others noted that there are still few clerics from the “Global Majority Heritage” (“GMH”) that are in senior positions as diocesan bishops and deans, and that resistance to appointing GMH clergy to rural or otherwise monochrome parishes must be challenged.

There were many calls for the rapid implementation of the recommendations from the 2021 report *From Lament to Action* by the Archbishops’ Anti-Racism Taskforce, given how little has been done since the report was tabled.

The Revd Bruce Bryant-Scott

Questions

Questions allow members of Synod to raise any question with the relevant person or authority. These have to be submitted in advance and are published with a written reply. However, at the Synod itself, the person asking the original question is able to ask a supplementary question.

The following questions were asked by members representing the Diocese in Europe:

Question 25: Addressing the impact of the current Pastoral Guidance on clergy in same-sex relationships in Europe, **Robin Hall** asked the Bishop of Leicester whether the Pastoral Consultative Group – tasked with drafting the new Pastoral Guidance as part of Living in Love and Faith – had yet issued guidance for the situation in Europe where, in some countries, Portugal for example, a UK civil partnership has limited or no weight in law, and where clergy in same-sex relationships have to choose between a civil marriage – with the potential of losing their permission to officiate – or having no legal protections for them and their partner.

In answering, the Bishop of Leicester admitted that the Pastoral Consultative Group had still not been established. When asked what the advice would be for clergy in Europe who face this

dilemma, the Bishop apologised for the delay and, said he was committed to guidance being presented in July.

Question 153: In a question to the Chair of the House of Bishops, **Clive Billenness** asked about the termination of the NSPCC's dedicated telephone line for the victims of abuse and how that had been communicated.

The Bishop of Stepney replied, saying: "The NSPCC line was set up for the period of the Past Case Review 2 process. This specific line was closed on the 31st December 2021, two months after the PCR2 report was published. Dioceses were told about the closure of the helpline on the 30th November 2021 via the Safeguarding Newsletter and the diocesan communicators online handbook. A reminder to remove this number from Diocese and Parish websites was resent in January 2024 via the Safeguarding Newsletter.

Question 154: **Clive Billenness** asked whether guidelines had been issued about what thresholds had to be met before a safeguarding incident would be accepted as valid and acted upon by a safeguarding officer.

The Bishop of Stepney answered, "Guidelines have been published in relation to what to do and who to speak with when a person identifies potential signs of abuse or harm. The guidance on reporting to statutory authorities and the safeguarding advisor, including the steps that need to be undertaken following a safeguarding concern being raised, are detailed in the "Responding to, assessing and managing safeguarding concerns and allegations against Church Officers" policy. For more information on the definitions of safeguarding and different forms of abuse, including any statutory thresholds, these are available in the ["Safeguarding Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults"](#) House of Bishops' policy.

These documents can be found in the safeguarding e-manual which is in the safeguarding section of the Church of England website.

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All Synod papers are available online to read, as well as a record of all votes cast where the vote was taken by name and not by a simple show of hands.

You can find these at:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/about-general-synod>

Sessions of General Synod are also webcast live on the internet, and can be watched in dedicated playlists on the Church of England's YouTube Channel at:

<https://www.youtube.com/c/TheChurchofEngland/featured>

The next meeting of General Synod is scheduled to take place in July 2024.