**Minutes of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Safeguarding in Faith Communities**

**Tuesday 8th November at 2pm in Westminster Hall**

**Present:**

**Officers**

Janet Daby MP (Co-Chair)

Lord Bishop Viv Faull (Co-Chair)

Ruth Jones MP (Vice-Chair)

Stephen Timms (Vice-Chair)

Tim Farron (Vice-Chair)

**Secretariat**

Justin Humphreys, CEO, Thirtyone:eight (Principal Advisor to the APPG)

Leigh McFarlane, Public Policy & Research Manager, Thirtyone:eight

**Attendees**

Becky Armstrong-Corbett, ex-JW Advocates Opposing Crimes Against Children

Duncan Corbett, ex-JW Advocates Opposing Crimes Against Children

Mark Bentley, National Grid for Learning

Jane Chevous, Survivors Voices

Alan Collins, Hugh James solicitors

Kathleen Hallisey, Hugh James Solicitors

Lloyd Evans, JW Watch

William Kent, Porticus

Aran Richardson, Assemblies of God GB

Lisa Thurston, Individual

John Viney, ex -JW Advocates Opposing Crimes Against Children

Ed Tomlinson (Janet Daby’s Office)

1. Introduction – Bishop Viv opened the meeting.
2. AGM.

The following were appointed as Officers of the APPG:

Bishop Viv Faull (LORD SPIRITUAL) will continue as Co-Chair

Janet Daby MP (LAB) will step down as Co-Chair, but will remain as Vice-Chair

Ruth Jones MP (LAB) will be the new Co- Chair

Rosie Duffield MP (LAB) will continue as Vice-Chair

Baroness Sherlock (LAB) will continue as Vice-Chair

Baroness Hollins (CROSS BENCH) will continue as Vice-Chair

Stephen Timms MP (LAB) will continue as Vice-Chair

Andrew Selous MP (CON) will continue as Vice-Chair

Tim Farron MP (LIB-DEM) will continue as Vice-Chair

Finances:

Nothing to declare as there has been no income or expenditure for the APPG.

Bishop Viv opened the meeting. Thanks was given to Janet who is stepping down as Co-Chair (she will remain as Vice-Chair). We wish her well in her role as Chair for the APPG on Sickle Cell Anaemia. Ruth is looking forward to her new role as Co-Chair.

1. Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA): Findings and Recommendations from the Concluding Report (Justin Humphreys and Leigh McFarlane, Thirtyone:eight)

A brief overview of the key findings and recommendations from IICSA was given.

It was noted that these are recommendations only,– we can lend weight, offer support to government to bring about change. All communities across society have to contend with the possibility of abuse and we must recognise this, the victim and survivor voice is important.

The inquiry noted that the age that abuse begins in religious communities peaks between ages 8-11. A lot of work in faith communities take place in that age group, therefore there are real risks.

Participants who suggested change is needed in 4 key areas: child protection; cultural; support; acknowledgement, accountability and justice. This is a huge task at hand and the contribution of faith communities is significant. Cultural change is key, nothing else is satisfactory if the culture does not exist to create a positive framework. To what degree can we influence cultural change?

The backdrop to the IICSA recommendations that impact on faith communities come not only from the investigations that focus on faith organisations, but from other investigations such as Children Outside the UK/Child Migration; Accountability and Reparations; Residential Schools and Effective Leadership in Child Protection.

There are 101 recommendations in total, but the key recommendations focus on establishing new Child Protection Agencies; a new Cabinet-level Minister for Children; increasing public awareness on CSA; improvements to the DBS scheme; new laws on Mandatory Reporting; retention and access to records.

Next steps were suggested including, communicating with Government; communicating recommendations across faith communities; developing guidance and support to achieve best practice; working with government to address the challenges of implementing recommendations; developing mechanisms to address standards and implementation of best practice.

1. Discussion

Support of mandatory reporting was expressed from within the attendees, but it is a lottery as to how different services and regions respond so differences may be seen between areas as to how this is implemented.

Best practice – what support will be given to help organisations achieve this? If it is voluntary, this assumes that faith organisations will come forward to use these and often they won’t. An example was given whereby an organisations recent guidance was still focused on protecting the organisations reputation, and no child’s voice represented.

How mandatory is mandatory? A concern was raised about where the recommendations will be focused.

At IICSA very broad views were given in evidence. Some organisations are very keen to improve safeguarding practice, others do not believe that safeguarding issues happen within their community.

Two Bills presently going through Parliament, 1. Victims Bill. 2. Online Safety Bill. There are Select Committee at present that we may get some purchase with . Section 5 of the draft of Victims Bill gives some accountability and fits in with the accountability that we need. Can MP’s engage with this?

MP’s can ask a question on the floor of the chamber. We can write to the Ministers for both Bills and also the Shadow Ministers. Thirdly, inviting the Ministers and Shadow Ministers to an APPG meeting.

The Guardian wrote an article on IICSA report ½ million children per year abused every year – if we were to see that there would be an outrage. Social workers are now not trained on child sexual abuse. (article to be forwarded to attendees)

There is also need to engage with the Welsh Senedd too and the Wales Children’s Commissioner.

How do we counter-argue against those who say that they would rather go to hell, than break the seal of the confessional?

From the education side – massive drive in low-level reporting. How do you create a no-blame culture? What does that mean in a congregational setting?

Technology – there are lots of faith-specific things that can be done here. So much is done behind end-to-end communication etc., this needs addressed.

The trust and collaborative relationships between faith and statutory authorities. If seal of the confession is removed, will trust or lack of, impeded this. We want mandatory reporting to be one of trust, not one of fear.

The Church of England and the Catholic Church working together to address the hard questions.

Western Australia is a good example of what has been achieved in the face of resistance to mandatory reporting. If it is working in Australia, why is it working?

Peoples trust in accountability structures provided by existing regulators can be zero. Survivors have little faith in this, the majority of survivors want a completely independent reporting body – this is more important than mandatory body.

There is an economic cost of not doing something. Lack of mandatory reporting and support services is costing the country.

Assessing standards. How do we know if abuse is being covered up?

We have committed to have a spring meeting to look at some of the research that is going on. Look at good practice in other parts of the world, what is coming out through research.

Further contributions to this discussion should be forwarded to the APPG email.

The APPG would like greater representation from other faith groups. An invitation was issued for any nominations for interested parties to be sent to the APPG email.  
  
Actions Arising

Justin Humphreys to meet with the co-Chairs to discuss next steps and to draft a letter to the new Minister for Safeguarding (now Sarah Dines MP since 27.10.22) at the Home Office in support of the IICSA final recommendations and to offer support to implementation across faith communities.

AOB

No other business was raised.

Next meeting will likely be in Spring 2022, exact date to be arranged.

Bishop Viv thanked everyone and the meeting closed at 5.30pm.

Further comments via email

Some organisations are able to amass a database of known/suspected CSA offenders at their head office and there is no appetite to ensure these records are turned over to law enforcement. Given the fact that for every second this database remains beyond the reach of law enforcement more children are potentially being abused, what can the APPG do?

How can we ensure that the version of Mandatory Reporting proposed by IICSA is toughened to ensure that all abuse must be reported as a criminal matter?

There are concerns that the underlying problem with the UK’s approach to CSA is that the prison system is overburdened and there is simply not enough room to prosecute all the offenders that would likely need to be prosecuted if all of such were reported. Is the APPG able to establish if there is meaningful data to evidence this?