

Briefing Paper: National Consultation (April–May 2026)

Church of England: Proposed Independent Safeguarding Authority

Newcastle Safeguarding Children Partnership (NSCP)

Date: 5th May 2026

Audience: Statutory and relevant safeguarding partners across education, local authority services, health, police, voluntary and community sector

Purpose of this briefing

This paper provides a high-level briefing on proposals to establish a new, independent national Safeguarding Authority for the Church of England. It summarises the rationale for reform, the core features of the proposed model, and highlights key implications and risks for partners and Boards.

Context and Rationale

A series of independent reviews into safeguarding within the Church of England have identified long-standing and systemic weaknesses. These include inconsistency in practice, excessive structural complexity, and concerns that safeguarding decisions have been subject to real or perceived institutional influence. Collectively, these issues have undermined confidence in safeguarding arrangements and eroded trust among victims, survivors, and the wider public.

In response, General Synod agreed in February 2026 to pursue significant structural reform. Central to this commitment is the creation of a safeguarding system that is professionally credible, clearly accountable, and demonstrably independent of Church hierarchy. The current consultation seeks views on the detailed design of a new national Safeguarding Authority intended to deliver that ambition.

The proposed Safeguarding Authority

The proposal is to establish a new Safeguarding Authority as a separate legal entity, independent of existing Church governance arrangements. It would be governed by a Board with a majority of independent members and would operate as a national centre of excellence for safeguarding across the Church of England.

The Authority would have responsibility for setting national safeguarding standards, scrutinising practice, and providing assurance, while also exercising specific operational functions where independence is essential. It would be publicly accountable, transparent in its reporting, and subject to independent oversight.

The [consultation](#) focuses on the structure, powers and independence of the Authority.

What the Authority is intended to achieve

The design is built around three core objectives.

1. The Authority is intended to secure genuine independence in safeguarding decision-making. Safeguarding professionals should be able to exercise their judgement without improper influence, particularly in sensitive areas such as casework, complaints, audits and inspections. This independence would be reinforced through protected functions, external oversight and clear reporting lines.

2. The Authority aims to drive excellence and consistency. National standards, policies and mandatory Codes of Practice would apply across the whole Church, supported by consistent training, professional supervision, digital systems and robust data analysis. The Authority would also take the lead on safeguarding cases involving senior clergy and on complex or cross-diocese cases where local handling risks inconsistency or conflict.
3. The model seeks to introduce greater clarity and accountability. Safeguarding duties for Church bodies, trustees and senior leaders would be clearly defined, and compliance would be enforceable. Audits and inspections would be routine, transparent and published, with clear expectations for action and improvement where shortcomings are identified.

Relationship with existing safeguarding arrangements

Local existing safeguarding arrangements would continue to play a central role. Diocesan and cathedral safeguarding staff would remain locally employed, and statutory safeguarding responsibilities would continue to sit with local trustees and leaders.

The Authority is not intended to replace local decision-making or leadership. It would support local safeguarding practice, scrutinise performance, and intervene where necessary to ensure consistent standards and effective risk management across the system.

Governance of the Authority would rest with an independent Board of up to eleven members, the majority of whom would not be Church officers. The Board would be legally accountable for the Authority's performance and would be required to ensure that the voices of people with lived experience of abuse inform its work.

Timescales

The consultation closes on 17 May 2026. A summary of responses and key themes will be reported to General Synod in July 2026. Subject to approval, a final model will then be agreed and implementation planning will begin.

Implications for NSCP

The proposals represent a fundamental shift towards an independent, inspectorate-style safeguarding model. They align Church safeguarding more closely with secular regulatory and assurance frameworks and mark a significant strengthening of expectations around leadership accountability, transparency and compliance.

For safeguarding partners, including statutory and multi-agency bodies, the proposals point to a stronger and more formalised approach to safeguarding assurance. Expectations around evidence, audit readiness and demonstrable leadership are likely to increase.

There will be a greater emphasis on transparency, with published findings and action plans raising the reputational stakes for organisations involved in safeguarding work with the Church. At the same time, the model provides an opportunity to engage with a more consistent and professionally supported safeguarding system.

The proposed Authority may also have wider system influence. Its inspectorate-style approach and emphasis on independence may inform or shape safeguarding assurance conversations beyond the Church context, particularly where partnership arrangements intersect.

Comparison of Proposed Safeguarding Authorities

Church of England Safeguarding Authority and National Child Protection Authority (CPA)

Area	Church of England – Safeguarding Authority	National Child Protection Authority (CPA)
Primary driver	Independent reviews identified inconsistency, lack of independence and erosion of trust in Church safeguarding	IICSA, Casey Audit and major national failures identified fragmented oversight, weak learning and repeated harm
Core purpose	Independent centre of excellence for Church safeguarding, setting standards, scrutinising practice and providing assurance	National leadership and oversight of child protection across England, identifying risks and driving system improvement
Position in system	Sits above diocesan/cathedral safeguarding but does not replace local responsibility	Sits above local authority and multi-agency child protection but does not replace frontline services
Independence model	Separate legal entity, majority-independent Board, protected professional functions	National public body independent of local self-assessment and fragmented accountability
Governance & accountability	Independent Board; survivor voice embedded; annual public reporting to General Synod and external oversight	National governance accountable to Ministers and Parliament
Key functions	National standards and Codes of Practice; audits and inspections; senior-clergy casework; enforcement	National oversight; horizon-scanning; embedding learning; driving accountability across agencies
Data & intelligence	National digital infrastructure, routine data collection and analysis	Strong emphasis on national data capability, intelligence-sharing and emerging-risk identification
Scrutiny & inspection	Routine audits, emergency inspections and published findings	Works alongside inspectorates to challenge systemic failure
Enforcement approach	Warning and compliance notices; disciplinary escalation; referral to regulators or police	Escalation of persistent or serious failures through national oversight mechanisms
Transparency	Publication of audits, inspections and annual reports	National reporting to expose patterns of harm and failure
Role of lived experience	Explicit requirement to inform governance and practice	Strong emphasis on children's voices and advocacy influencing system learning
Key risks	Risk of procedural oversight without cultural change; pressure on local capacity; unclear boundaries	Risk of adding another layer; workforce and resource constraints; data and compliance burden
Wider significance	Aligns faith safeguarding with inspectorate-style regulatory models	Signals national shift towards independent safeguarding oversight across all sectors