



Authority Design Consultation Report

August 2026

⊕ THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

Foreword from the independent Executive Chair

Thank you to everyone who took the time to participate in this consultation exercise.

The establishment of a new safeguarding authority represents one of the most significant safeguarding reforms undertaken within the Church of England. It is therefore essential that the authority is not only operationally independent and effective but also informed by the experience, expertise and concerns of those who engage with safeguarding work every day.

The consultation provided us with valuable insights from a wide range of contributors, including individuals with a lived experience of Church-related abuse, people who attend churches up and down the country, safeguarding professionals, trustees, diocesan and cathedral stakeholders, and others with an interest in safeguarding.

The consultation was an opportunity to test the founding principles, emerging ideas, to understand concerns, and to identify where our proposals could be strengthened.

This document summarises the main themes we heard and explains how those themes are influencing the next stage of design.

We are grateful to everyone who contributed and for your continued engagement as we work together to rebuild trust and strengthen safeguarding across the Church.

Dame Christine Ryan,
Independent Executive Chair
Safeguarding Structures Reform Programme

Dame Christine Ryan



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About the consultation

The consultation invited people to share their views on the early design of a new safeguarding authority, the creation of which is central to the Synod-endorsed vision for safeguarding reform in the Church of England.

We received 342 responses to the online consultation representing a broad spectrum of individuals and Church bodies nationwide. This included overlapping perspectives from:



The online consultation form included both quantitative and qualitative questions. Whilst the data presented in this report only reflects the responses received through the consultation form, the findings have been reviewed alongside other feedback and data. Opinions expressed through the information briefings, were found to be consistent with the sentiment in the free-text responses of the consultation form.

This body of evidence is actively informing the next design stage and the development of a foundational blueprint for how the new authority could operate. This blueprint will include the functions and services the authority might perform, and how different strands of its work relate to each other.

Data methodology

Data in this report is presented using two main types of percentages:

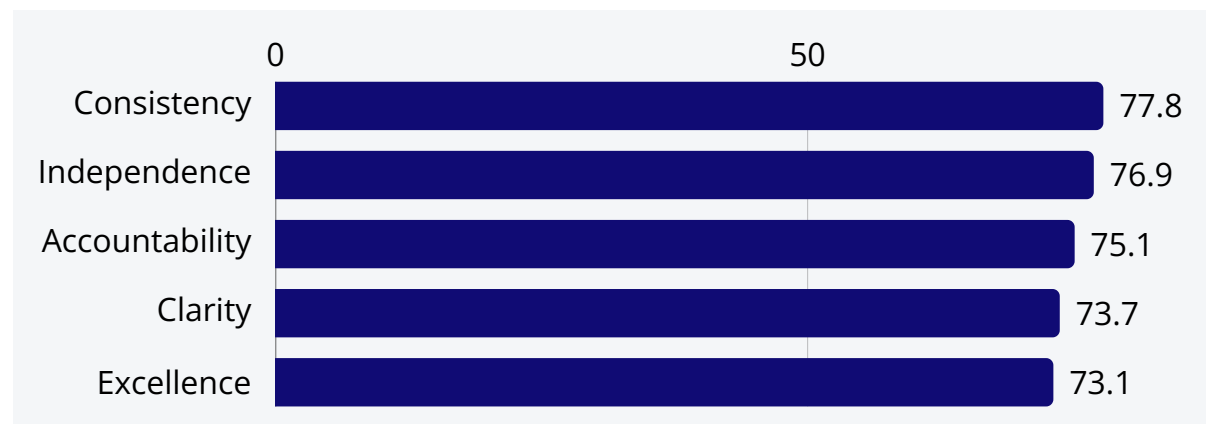
- Response percentages show the proportion of people who chose a particular response (e.g., “Somewhat agree”, “Don’t know”). This helps us see the overall level of consensus.
- Weighted response scores show how strongly different stakeholder groups feel, measured on a scale from 0% (universal strong disagreement) to 100% (universal strong agreement).

Whilst response percentages show how people responded, weighted response scores allow us to accurately compare the intensity of feeling from one group to another.

The consultation does not provide statistically representative sampling and was not intended to act as a referendum on the proposals.

The consultation headlines

The consultation findings reveal broad support for the proposals and a majority of respondents agree that the plans successfully support all five core objectives.



The percentage of respondents that agree (strongly or somewhat) with the statement that the consultation proposals promoted the core objective.

- The consultation reveals a majority agreement for greater safeguarding independence, which was viewed as the vital mechanism for rebuilding public trust.
- Consistency emerges as a major area of agreement, with respondents supportive of an approach that promotes equivalent practice at all levels of the Church, from parish to palace.
- Feedback also strongly supports robust assurance mechanisms, specifically independent scrutiny functions like audits, inspections, and emergency powers.
- Responses show a strong backing for clearer accountability, including legislation to require all Church bodies to fully participate and comply with information requests from the authority.

Consultation at a glance

The public consultation window was open for 31 days.



We held 15 separate information briefings with over 250 people.



We received 342 consultation responses from individuals and Church bodies.



Support in principle, caution in practice

Whilst there is majority agreement for the proposed reforms overall, many respondents raised important questions about how the proposals will be put into practice. Respondents expressed a variety of perspectives but there were some key gaps between different stakeholder groups. For example, safeguarding professionals and those in diocesan and cathedral roles expressed more caution in response to the proposals and raised valuable questions about how the proposals might be put into practice. However, significant differences of opinion also exist *within* each stakeholder group, demonstrating that stakeholders in one group do not hold a settled position by virtue of their role or experience.

To produce the authority's founding blueprint, the next stage of design development is seeking to clarify several areas on which respondents expressed differing viewpoints.

The following sections of this consultation report provide a transparent overview of the consultation findings across four core themes, exploring what we heard and how the programme is responding to these challenges in order to strengthen and refine the proposals.

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“The critical importance of getting right the independent safeguarding authority will simply be making a start on the journey back to the rebuilding of public trust.”

“I think my concern is that it could be a lot of paper pushing and making sure the documents are correct without any stronger safeguarding.”

“I am fully supportive of the overall direction and intent of these proposals.”

“As always, the detail matters.”

“Without enough staff in dioceses and cathedrals, the effectiveness of any national changes will be blunted at best.”

“I am just very pleased to see these proposals and to acknowledge the consistency and robust standards that they should help to create.”

“Whilst it may not satisfy everyone it is a major step forward.”

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Theme 1:

Structure, governance, and trust

What we heard

The consultation revealed a consensus that the proposals are a major and necessary step forward in rebuilding public trust.

However, this enthusiasm is qualified by reservations regarding how independence will be implemented in practice. Responses indicate that building confidence in Church safeguarding depends on the operational autonomy of safeguarding professionals, a board that is independent of the Church, and protected funding for the authority.

- A notable gap exists between stakeholder groups who believe the proposals promote independence. Weighted support falls from 79.7% amongst parish respondents to 64.7% for victims and survivors, reaching 50.0% among safeguarding professionals. Analysis of the free-text responses suggests that these groups are cautious for different reasons: some professionals are concerned about potential conflicts of interest from consolidating functions under a single body; some survivors emphasise the need for demonstrable independence to rebuild visible trust; and some parish respondents worry that the authority will not adequately understand the Church.
- Whilst respondents acknowledge that the Church Commissioners represent the only credible funding stream available to deliver reform of this ambition, a significant minority raised the point that this financial link could compromise - or be perceived to compromise - the authority's long-term independence.
- Survivors made up 11% of the 342 responses with some warning against "tokenism" or "tick-box" engagement activities. They raised important questions about how lived experience can be represented through direct influence on the authority itself.

Theme 1:

Structure, governance, and trust

How we are responding

- We are establishing a majority independent board to guarantee that the authority remains independent of Church control, ensuring operational and safeguarding decisions are led by qualified professionals.
- We are designing binding agreements to legally protect the authority's funding.
- We are designing mechanisms for embedding survivor voices into the authority's governance so the perspectives of people who have experienced Church-related abuse have direct input.
- We are progressing plans for external oversight of the authority's work through a public reporting line to a parliamentary or governmental body.

Expected to be retained

- A full, independent review of the authority's operations (including safeguarding decision-making) will be required every three years to ensure long-term public trust.
- Operations will be led by a Chief Safeguarding Officer with explicit and protected professional autonomy.

Theme 2:

Policy, consistency, and local context

What we heard

The consultation feedback reveals that a majority of respondents agree about the importance of consistency in safeguarding practice. Respondents called for stronger national leadership and greater consistency to ensure that safeguarding practice is to an equally high standard in every Church setting, from parish to palace. This is a strategic concern and requires further detailed work to ensure that any drive for national consistency is practical and workable locally. This is particularly relevant where local church safeguarding relies on the commitment and dedication of volunteers, and local resourcing is disparate.

- Some respondents warned against an overly punitive, burdensome culture, stating that an audit can already result in “weeks of work”. Some respondents expressed a very real fear that a compliance-driven “big stick” approach could trigger a “chilling effect”, making it difficult to recruit volunteers like Parish Safeguarding Officers.
- There is majority agreement (83.0%) among respondents for the new authority to lead Church-wide safeguarding policy development, alongside majority agreement (83.7%) that it should have the power to issue mandatory Codes of Practice to ensure standards have real “teeth”. Whilst the underlying principle is sound, some contributors argue that credible independence requires the authority to set rules without relying on Synodical approval. Some others caution that if the Church does not “own” its policy, it could be viewed as an external imposition, potentially hindering genuine culture change.
- On average, the agreement strength for consistency as a primary benefit of these reforms stands at 75.0%, with this sentiment being strongest amongst parishes at 83.2% and lowest amongst safeguarding professionals at 58.6%. When asked if the proposals provide the clarity required to operate effectively and bring about the consistency desired, a gap arises. Parish respondents (who made up over 61% of all responses) scored an average agreement strength of 80%, but that figure drops to an agreement strength of 55.2% amongst safeguarding professionals. This notable gap indicates that whilst there is broad support in principle, many in this professional group stated that they require greater detail and assurance for their confidence to rise.

Theme 2:

Policy, consistency, and local context

How we are responding

- We are developing detailed plans to work alongside safeguarding staff and volunteers to develop practical tools that seek to simplify daily tasks and cut administrative burden.
- The proposals will include a duty on Church bodies to comply with reasonable requests for information and cooperation with the authority. Further work is underway to create guidelines on what constitutes a "reasonable" information request, ensuring expectations on local bodies remain realistic.
- Further scheduled engagement activities aim to provide Church personnel with the opportunities to shape the reforms.
- Before establishing the authority, we will ensure there is clarity about how local trustees, regulators and the authority interact, ensuring the framework supports trustees in discharging their safeguarding responsibilities without impinging their legal accountability.

Expected to be retained

- To prevent an overwhelming implementation burden, a transition period will provide ample opportunity to test practical arrangements before new safeguarding arrangements become mandatory.
- Diocesan and Cathedral Safeguarding Officers will remain locally employed, backed by clearer professional accountability and strengthened professional support from the authority.

Theme 3:

Operations, casework, and the service delivery

What we heard

Moving from a strategic vision to a functioning practical reality requires clear operating plans. The consultation showed a strong mandate for a more professional, national approach to replace a system that some respondents described as overly complicated and dependent on varied legal interpretations. However, the feedback suggests caution regarding the exact boundaries of the authority's operational remit and the potential risk of institutional "mission creep."

- A significant minority of respondents, comprising many safeguarding professionals with technical expertise whose views carry weight, raised concerns regarding the structural design of the authority, particularly the potential risk of the organisation "marking its own homework." Bringing national policy setting, casework management, and independent scrutiny/auditing under a single body was seen as a structural risk requiring further thought.
- Whilst 82.5% of all respondents find the concept of a national telephone helpline helpful in principle, support drops significantly amongst professional safeguarding officers for whom the phone line was also intended. When measured across a weighted strength score, support from safeguarding professionals was 50.0%, with some expressing a preference for maintaining existing arrangements.
- On balance, a majority of respondents (63.7%) considered the proposed powers to be 'about right'. When those who advocated for even stronger powers (13.2%) are included, there is a clear majority (76.9%) who support the authority having meaningful enforcement functions at least as strong as those currently in the design. Regarding disciplinary action, more than 13% want the authority to possess stronger powers. Some contributors argue that for the authority to be truly credible, it must be able to "initiate proceedings directly" against Church bodies which fall short of expected standards. Conversely, around 9% of all respondents thought the authority's powers should be weaker than proposed.

Theme 3:

Operations, casework, and the service delivery

How we are responding

- We plan to establish standardised criteria to prevent "mission creep" and keep the remit clear between cases that are locally led and those which are led centrally by the new authority.
- We are developing detailed options for how the authority interacts with disciplinary processes, directly addressing feedback raised in the consultation.
- We will explore alternative structural options to ensure that the authority's functions remain appropriately separated - avoiding conflicts between functions or the perception that the authority is "marking its own homework".
- Early adopter Church bodies will begin piloting a standardised complaints process by the New Year. Testing and evaluation will play an important role before the process is made available more widely through 2027.

Expected to be retained

- A transition period will provide ample opportunity to test practical arrangements before new safeguarding arrangements become mandatory.

Theme 4:

Accountability, assurance, and legal "teeth"

What we heard

Consultation respondents were unambiguous in their feedback that the new authority must possess real "teeth" if it is to successfully rebuild trust. Without legislative underpinning requiring Church bodies to cooperate and participate, many contributors warned the new body would be rendered ineffective. However, this desire for robust enforcement is met with a concern regarding how these powers are used. The challenge for the programme team is to navigate the tension of providing an ironclad assurance to the public, regulators and others, without inadvertently creating a culture of compliance and fear that could stifle genuine learning and improvement.

- The proposal to introduce OFSTED-style grades or ratings such as "Good" or "Inadequate" for regular safeguarding audits, is the single most polarised issue in the entire consultation. Respondents were split almost exactly down the middle with 46.2% in favour and 43.6% against. Whilst victims and survivors are the stakeholder group most likely to support gradings as proposed, with an average agreement strength of 59.1%, safeguarding professionals are the most likely to oppose them, with this group registering an average agreement strength of 35.6%. Safeguarding professionals warned that the intensity of single-word labels risks creating a "tick-box" mentality focused on simply "passing an audit" rather than actively engaging in a process of reflection, ongoing learning, and improvement.
- With nearly nine out of ten respondents agreeing (89.2%), there is overwhelming support for the authority to hold the legal power to request information and mandate participation in audits from Church bodies. Furthermore, 81.3% of respondents overall support the power to publish compliance notices as a vital driver of culture change.
- An overwhelming majority of 87.7% of all respondents support the authority conducting rapid, emergency inspections when a "serious safeguarding failure" is suspected. However, when applied specifically to local parish churches, support drops to 78.1% of all respondents, with some people voicing concern about "intimidatory" inspections could affect local volunteers.
- Agreement that the proposals promote the core objective of accountability was noticeably stronger amongst parish roles, with an average agreement strength of 81.3% compared to 63.5% for diocesan and cathedral roles, and 60.1% amongst safeguarding professionals.

Theme 4:

Accountability, assurance, and legal "teeth"

How we are responding

- Given the mixed feedback on single-word ratings, the Board will consider alternatives like narrative reporting to provide a fairer, more balanced assessment of strengths and priority areas.
- We intend to clarify terms like "serious safeguarding failure" and "reasonable request," publishing clear guidance, in time, to aid clarity for all.
- Whilst compliance notices remain central to the design, we propose to look at how they can serve as constructive tools for learning and cultural growth.
- Underpinning legislation will provide every part of the Church with a clear understanding of its legal duties and how the interactions between the authority, local trustees, and regulators will function in practice.

Expected to be retained

- A full, independent review of the authority's operations (including safeguarding decision-making) will be required every three years to ensure long-term public trust.
- Operations will be led by a Chief Safeguarding Officer with explicit and protected professional autonomy.

What happens next

The consultation findings are actively informing the next design stage and development of the founding blueprint for the authority.

The programme is now in a period of intensive technical work:

- Options appraisals, directly informed by consultation feedback, are being developed throughout the summer.
- These appraisals, underpinned by clear evidence, will be presented to the Board to ensure robust, well-informed decision-making.
- These decisions will shape the design of the new safeguarding authority, detailing its governance arrangements, specific scope and powers, and mechanisms for protecting professional safeguarding functions.

The decisions reached by the Board form the strategic recommendations presented to the trustees of the Archbishops' Council, who retain overall responsibility for the programme and final approval until the new authority comes into full, independent operation.

A transition period will provide ample opportunity to test practical arrangements before new safeguarding arrangements become mandatory through legislation.

This robust and iterative approach will help ensure the new safeguarding authority comes into operation carrying public confidence and trust.

Careful transition planning

Once the final authority design is approved, the implementation and transition process can begin. In anticipation of the programme reaching this milestone, the Programme Board has agreed a set of key principles to guide the transition from the current safeguarding arrangements to the future structure:

- Safeguarding stability takes precedence over structural speed.
- No transition phase will proceed without formal Programme Board assurance.
- Frontline safeguarding capacity will not be reduced during reform.
- Independence in professional decision-making will be protected.
- Transparency and accountability will increase year-on-year until the programme is complete.
- Reform must contribute to improving safeguarding culture, not simply structural change.

Final reflection

The consultation confirmed strong support for safeguarding reform and for the creation of a more independent safeguarding system. It has also highlighted important questions about how independence, accountability, assurance and trust should operate in practice.

The consultation feedback is already influencing the next stage of design and will continue to do so as this programme of change progresses. The consultation has not simply helped us understand what people think about reform, it has provided us with a wealth of rich and detailed evidence to help us actively refine the design so that Church safeguarding has greater independence and is strong, credible and trusted.

Thank you to everyone who took part in the consultation exercise.

Contact the team

If you have any questions about the programme, you can get in touch with a member of the team at any time by emailing:

safestructures@churchofengland.org

More information about the programme can be found on the Church of England's website.



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