

Catholic Safeguarding Project

Press Release from the Catholic Safeguarding Project

Monday May 17th 2021

For immediate release:

Bishops appoint former top prosecutor to lead safeguarding agency

The Catholic bishops of England and Wales have appointed the former Chief Crown Prosecutor in the Rochdale grooming gang cases as the Chair of their new safeguarding agency.

The appointment of **Nazir Afzal** as the Chair of the Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (CSSA) will be formally announced at an online press conference on the morning of Tuesday May 18 (see below for details).

Mr Afzal has served as the Chief Crown Prosecutor for North West England and Director in London, as well as the Chief Executive of the Police and Crime Commissioners.

During a 24-year career Mr Afzal has prosecuted many of the most high profile criminal cases in the country, advised on many others, and led nationally on legal matters surrounding such topics as violence against women and girls, child sexual abuse, and honour-based violence. He was responsible for bringing sex-traffickers in the Rochdale grooming gang scandal to justice, as well as Stuart Hall, the former television presenter who in 2014 was convicted of multiple sex offences against children.

The bishops will also announce the appointment of **Stephen Ashley** as the Deputy Chair of the CSSA. Mr Ashley is a former Assistant Chief Constable who authored a Home Office report on the conduct of the police during the investigations into sex offences committed by former television personality Jimmy Savile.

The appointments of **Amanda Ellingworth**, **Wesley Cuell** and Dr **Jenny Holmes** as Non-Executive Directors will also be announced by the bishops. The Board will also be strengthened by the appointment of Bishop **Paul Mason** of the Bishopric of the Forces as the Lead Bishop for Safeguarding, and Fr **David Smolira** SJ as the Lead Religious. **Carol Lawrence**, Project Director, will also remain as a Director of the CSSA.

The appointments mean that the bishops are on track to deliver the fully-functioning safeguarding agency within the six months originally envisaged by the Catholic Safeguarding Project.

The agency is being created amid wide-ranging reforms to safeguarding structures within the Church following the recommendations in November by the Elliott Review (see below), with the aim of establishing the highest possible standards.

The agency replaces separate existing structures with a single body with greater regulatory powers across the Catholic Church of England and Wales, extending to all dioceses and associated religious bodies.

It has been established as a trading company with independence in its day-to-day operation under the responsibility of a management board and with the powers to ensure that each Church body partnered with the agency is complying with published standards.

The Chair will provide effective leadership and management to the board of the CSSA, and will have responsibility for the governance and strategic direction of the agency. Mr Afzal will work constructively with the chief executive, the board, the Catholic Church, survivor groups and wider stakeholders to ensure that its objectives are fully achieved. The Non-Executive Directors of the Board will share responsibility for ensuring the long-term success of the agency. They will have oversight of its financial and operational management, and its sustainability and will contribute to planning and implementing its future strategic direction.

*Cardinal **Vincent Nichols**, the Archbishop of Westminster and President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, said: "I am delighted to give my full support to the appointment of Mr Nazir Afzal as the first Chair of the Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency.*

"Mr Afzal brings to this role the freshness and vast experience required in order to make the establishment of the CSSA a truly significant step change in the work of Safeguarding in the Catholic Church.

"Mr Afzal has a proven reputation for being a champion of victims and survivors of abuse in many different institutions and settings. In the response of the Catholic Church, published last week, to the findings of IICSA, we stated that 'key' to the 'heartfelt change' we are seeking is 'greater listening to the voice of victims and survivors of abuse'. I have no doubt that CSSA, under Mr Afzal's chairmanship, will hold us to that undertaking.

"Mr Afzal's firm and proven conviction that public confidence is created by clear, just and well scrutinised processes will also be at the heart of the contribution he will make. His appointment is a bold and timely step. I thank all those who have worked so hard in the implementation of the Recommendations of the November 2020 Elliott Report among which is the establishment of the CSSA. The appointment of Mr Nazir Afzal is a pivotal moment in this needed development."

Nazir Afzal, the newly-appointed Chair of CSSA, said: "I'm delighted that the Catholic Church has taken what some might consider a brave and bold decision in appointing me as the first ever independent Chair of the CSSA board.

"I've spent three decades responding to harms in every community and institution. I learnt that victims have been failed by every institution who were responsible for safeguarding them. I also understood how reputation was thought more important than exposing those who abuse. Nowhere was safe. Victims were not only abused by perpetrators but then again by those who should have protected them and acted to stop it. The effects of abuse are lifelong and often undetected with victims beset by feelings of shame, guilt and fear. That had to change.

The Catholic Church has recognised the failures of the past and the need to put things right. This is what attracted me to the role. To make a difference, you have to act differently. It usually takes great courage to do so. When I helped deliver justice to thousands of victims of abuse, I realised that they were the most courageous of all."

Two members of Catholic Survivors England, who participated in the Independent Inquiry into Child Sex Abuse (IICSA), said in a joint statement: “We welcome the appointment of Nazir Afzal as Chair of the new Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency and are very encouraged by his track record with victims and survivors. A seismic shift in culture is needed within the Church’s safeguarding processes and it’s interaction with victims and survivors. We hope that Nazir and the new board will be able to make the changes which are so urgently needed.”

The Board is keen to ensure that it directly engages with victims and survivors, so that their voices are heard at the highest level in the organisation. One of the Board's early tasks will be to consider how best this can be done in an effective way.

The bishops in November accepted all the recommendations made by the Elliott Review, a “root-and-branch” examination of safeguarding in the Catholic Church, and wish to adopt them without delay.

In January, the bishops invited Mrs Lawrence, the Financial Director of the Diocese of Shrewsbury, to take up the six-month post of Project Implementation Director with immediate effect to ensure all of the improvements are fully and swiftly implemented.

Mrs Lawrence sat on the panel of the Elliott Review and was a key member of the team that devised the proposed changes.

Soon afterwards, the bishops appointed Dr Edward Morgan, a barrister and an internationally-respected expert in *The Code of Canon Law*, to oversee the establishment of a National Tribunal Service as part of wide-ranging development of safeguarding structures and processes in the Church.

The National Tribunal Service will deal principally with regulatory cases, including clergy discipline. Providing a centralised process of adjudication, it will seek to address concerns of interested parties with enhanced transparency and due process.

The establishment of the Service is part of a suite of measures which will see the transfer from existing structures and the creation of the single Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency with the power to enforce uniformly high standards of protection.

The bishops are adopting a “One Church” strategy which will place safeguarding in a comprehensive model covering religious institutions and other areas of ecclesial life as well as diocesan parishes and schools and other settings.

Father Smolira, a former Jesuit provincial, will ensure the needs of religious congregations are met as the new “standards-based” safeguarding structure is established.

The process of implementing the work of the Elliott Review will involve working closely with survivors, dioceses, Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, safeguarding coordinators, the lay faithful and others to fulfill the recommendations made in the Elliott Review.

The press conference in the company of Mr Afzal, Archbishop McMahon, Mrs Lawrence and others will take place via Zoom from 10.30am on Tuesday May 18. Journalists who wish to attend should reply RSVP by email to Simon Caldwell at simon.caldwell@stgabrielnews.co.uk by 5pm on Monday May 17. A link will be sent to you on the morning of May 18.

For further information

Please contact Simon Caldwell of St Gabriel News and Media on either 07730 526847 or at simon.caldwell@stgabrielnews.co.uk

Website: <https://www.catholicsafeguardingproject.org>

To download the Elliott Report and to Ian Elliott discuss the work of the review: <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/independent-safeguarding-review-published/>

To download the report on the Catholic Church by IICSA:
<https://www.iicsa.org.uk/investigations/investigation-into-failings-by-the-catholic-church>

To read or download the response of the Catholic bishops of England and Wales to the IICSA report: <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/statement-on-safeguarding/>

Please find attached a photograph of Mr Afzal courtesy of the Catholic Safeguarding Project.

Notes to editors

Nazir Afzal OBE – Chair

Mr Afzal was Chief Crown Prosecutor for North West England and formerly Director in London. Most recently, he was Chief Executive of the country's Police and Crime Commissioners. During 24-year career, he has prosecuted the most high profile cases in the country and advised on many others and led nationally on several legal topics including violence against women and girls, child sexual abuse, and honour-based violence. He had responsibility for more than 100,000 prosecutions each year. His prosecutions of the so-called Rochdale grooming gang and hundreds of others were ground-breaking and drove the work that has changed the landscape of child protection.

He is Chair of Hopwood Hall. He sits on the Independent Press Standards Organisation. He is National Adviser on Gender Based Violence to the Welsh Government, independent member of Oxfam's Safeguarding and Ethics Committee and trustee of Association of Safeguarding Partners. His memoirs, *The Prosecutor*, were published in 2020 and at present they are being adapted for a British multipart drama

Mr Afzal is a tutor for several leadership programmes in the public and private sector. He has made presentations to dozens of diverse organisations in this country and abroad. He has given hundreds of interviews in all forms of media. Mr Afzal gives a considerable amount of time to charitable work and is trustee and patron of several NGOs including ServiceSix, DVAssist, Jan Trust, Samantha Sykes Foundation, Karma Nirvana, Halo Project and SaveraUK and was Chair of the Prince of Wales' Mosaic Trust.. He is an Honorary Fellow of the University of Central Lancashire and Glyndwyr University, and awarded Honorary Doctorates in Law by the University of Birmingham, Manchester University and Bradford and Leicester University. He has chaired conferences in New York, Madrid, Paris, Norway and Geneva. He has assisted the Governments of Somalia, Ukraine and Pakistan on Rule of Law reform.

Mr Afzal has received many accolades. In 2005, he was awarded an OBE by the Queen for his work. He has also had the honour of being the only lawyer to ever prosecute a case before the Queen. In 2007, he was named Legal Personality of the Year by the Society of Asian Lawyers, received the UK Government's Justice Award 2007 and awarded the *Daily Mirror* "People's award" voted for by readers. Mr Afzal was also selected for the Asian Power 100 along with the Muslim Power 100 list, recognised as one of the 100 most influential leading

Muslims and Asians in the UK. He has been listed in the Pakistan Power100 which regards him as one of the 100 most influential people of Pakistani origin in the world today, and awarded the lifetime Achievement Award by the Power 100. He was Asian Media Group's Man of the Year 2012, and won the Asian Achievers Award 2014. The acclaimed BBC Film *Three Girls* was based on his case and featured Ace Bhatti playing him.

Stephen Ashley – Vice Chair

Mr Ashley retired from the police in 2013 after rising to the rank of assistant chief constable and spending the last three years of his career working for Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary. His final role was to work for the Home Secretary in producing a report on the way in which the police had dealt with allegations around Jimmy Savile. Since retiring, Mr Ashley has undertaken a series of non-executive roles including high profile mandates such as independently chairing the Rotherham local safeguarding board during the point of intense scrutiny. He continues to serve as independent chair of the local safeguarding boards at Hillingdon and Tower Hamlets. In recent years, he has united three local safeguarding boards in Lancashire to operate as one entity and for the past 18 months has acted as its independent scrutineer. In addition to these roles, he has chaired an NHS foundation and has undertaken serious case reviews. Mr Ashley has extensive experience of high-profile public cases from his police career, including his work as senior investigating officer in the murder of Reece James to his later work in Rotherham where he dealt with the Press on a regular basis.

Amanda Ellingworth - Non-executive Director

A social worker by background, Amanda Ellingworth has built up an impressive portfolio of roles and would bring relevant experience in safeguarding, governance and establishing new bodies to bear on this role. Most of her time is occupied by her roles with Great Ormond Street Hospital and Plan International, as well as roles at smaller charities and grant-making bodies. The role at Great Ormond Street Hospital, which includes chairing the Quality and Safety Committee, involves working in an environment in which safeguarding is a priority. At Plan International Amanda Ellingworth was originally recruited to the UK board before being elected to the International Board, although she is still the safeguarding lead for the UK. Amanda Ellingworth has recently relinquished her post on the board of Barnardo's where she chaired the Historical Abuse Committee and the Audit and Risk Committee.

Wesley Cuell – Non-Executive Director

Mr Cuell is a social worker by background and his final executive role was at board level at the NSPCC where he was responsible for all service provision to children and families. During this time, he was instrumental in the successful merger of Childline into the NSPCC. He holds various non-executive roles including the Chair of Parents and Children Together, and is a trustee of Papworth Trust. Mr Cuell also served for six years on the Church of England Children's Society including chairing the Risk, Audit and Compliance Committee.

Dr Jenny Holmes – Non-Executive Director

Dr Holmes is a Psychiatrist in an NHS service for adults with learning disabilities. She is also Lead for North West England in the NHS Practitioner Health Service which provides mental health care for NHS staff. Until last year, she spent 20 years as a Forensic Physician and Clinical Lead for services providing forensic expert examination and medical care for adults and children who had been sexually assaulted or abused, a joint NHS/Merseyside Police

service based at Safe Place Merseyside and at Alder Hey Children's Hospital, Liverpool. She provided expert evidence to the Courts to assist in prosecution of offenders. Dr Holmes was also Clinical Lead and a Forensic Physician for Merseyside Police Custody Team. She has had input into the training of Police and CPS lawyers who investigate and prosecute sexual offences. In non-executive work, Dr Holmes served as part of the NHS England Clinical Reference Groups overseeing the production of Commissioning Standards for Custody Healthcare and Sexual Assault Referral Centres. She is also a trustee of the Doctors' Support Network which provides peer support to doctors with mental health and substance misuse problems.

The Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency was set up at the beginning of 2021, replacing two safeguarding bodies with a single entity possessing considerably increased powers.

The CSSA is an agency of the Bishops' Conference but is separate from it and functions independently under the responsibility of a management board. It will hold a regulatory function extending to all dioceses and Religious Life Groups. It will provide advice, but crucially also monitor compliance by Church bodies with the safeguarding standards adopted by the Church. To do this, the CSSA will have its own independent audit and review function and will be empowered to undertake its role as a regulator through contractual relationships between itself and the Church bodies it serves.

Through this, the CSSA will have the powers to ensure that each Church body partnered with them, is complying with the published standards. The authority to ensure compliance, and the source of its powers, will be the contracts between the CSSA and each partner, namely, each diocese, Religious Life Groups or other church organisation that would freely enter into such an agreement with the CSSA.

The Elliott Review was commissioned in October 2019 by the bishops of England and Wales under the chairmanship of Ian Elliott, a highly-experience independent child protection professional, to critically examine of safeguarding structures and arrangements within Church. The work of the review and its recommendations were published on November 20, 2020, in the Elliott Report.

The bishops have formally accepted the recommendations laid out in the IICSA Report of November 10.

The recommendations of Elliott Report are further reaching than those of IICSA and have also been accepted by the bishops, who wish to see them implemented immediately.

Ends