

Independent Safeguarding Audits of Church of England

Victim and Survivor Engagement
and Support 2025

Findings and recommendations from year 2
of the Independent Safeguarding Audit
Programme of the Church of England.

*For the purposes of this report, the term 'chorister'
refers to any choir member under the age of 18.*



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Introduction

This document has been produced as a dedicated companion document to the main 2025 Annual Report. Whilst the principal report addresses the full breadth of safeguarding arrangements examined across the Church, this companion deliberately separates out the experiences, engagement and support of victims and survivors so that these themes receive the focused attention they deserve. Too often, the voices of those who have experienced harm risk being dispersed throughout wider findings. By bringing them together here, the Audit Team seeks to ensure that lived experience sits at the centre of the Church's learning. The sections that follow consolidate the recurring themes, examples of good practice, and recommendations gathered through the Audit Programme so far, regarding how Church bodies engage with,

listen to, and support victims and survivors, with the aim of strengthening a response that is consistent, trauma-informed, and survivor-centred.

Some of the findings and recommendations presented here may already have appeared within individual local Audit reports, or within the National Safeguarding Team's (NST) Audit report. This companion is intended as a holistic view which will reinforce certain points, acknowledge wider themes, and propose recommendations that in some cases restate those made previously and in others are new.

During the Audit Programme, feedback from victims and survivors was captured through surveys, confidential contact forms, written correspondence, face-to-face and virtual discussions.

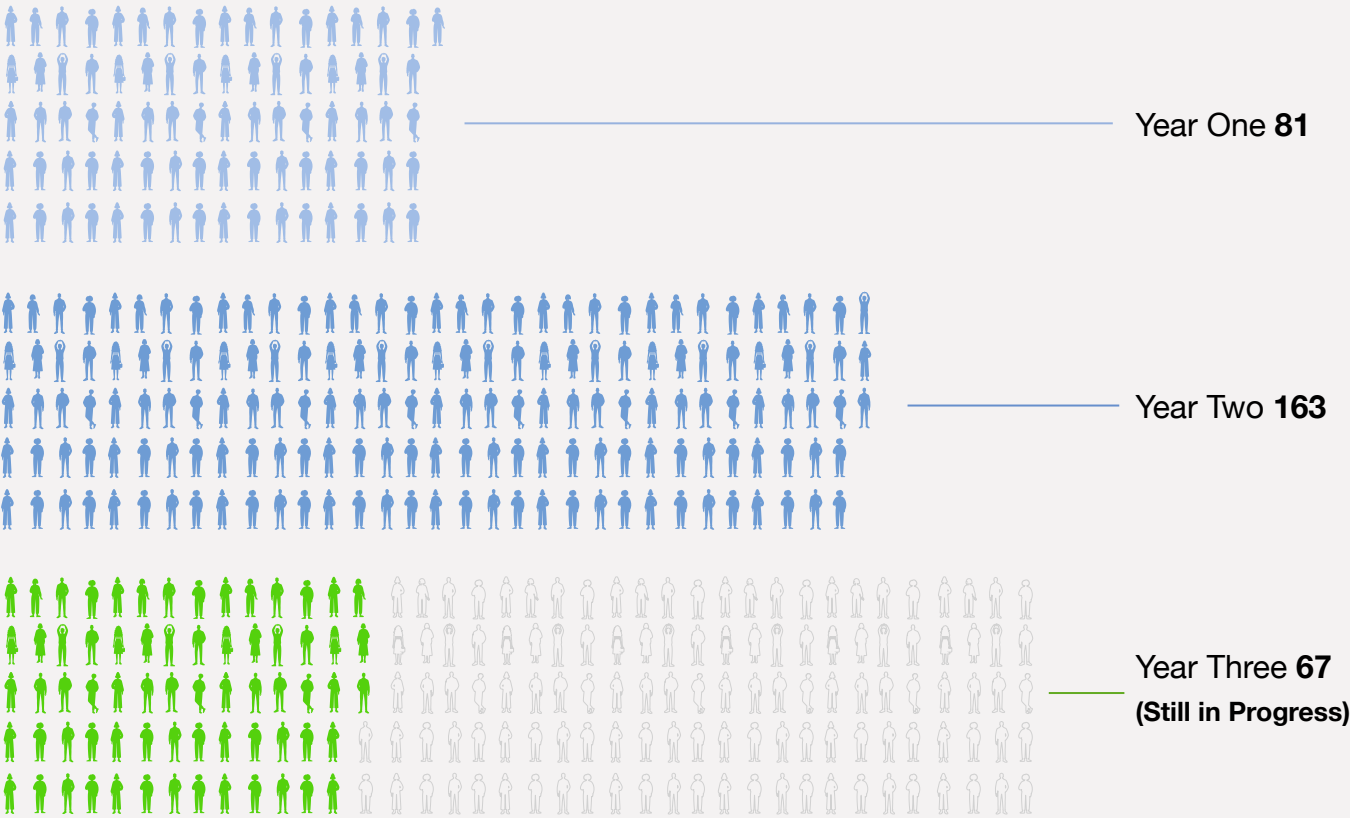
Overall, through survey responses and direct testimony, a diverse array of perspectives emerged, often coalescing into clear, recurring themes that must be addressed.

Please be aware that this document discusses themes of harm and abuse, including references to sexual, physical, domestic, financial and spiritual abuse, and to trauma, bereavement and suicide. Some readers, particularly victims and survivors, may find parts of it difficult or distressing, and it may bring up painful feelings or memories. Please read it at your own pace and pause or stop at any point. If you would like support, details of organisations that can help are set out below.

Cumulative Audit Engagements with Victim and Survivors (311)

The Independent Safeguarding Audit Programme has continued to place the voices of victims and survivors at the heart of its work. Across the first two years of the programme, individuals engaged directly with the Audits through confidential discussions, while dedicated surveys gathered insight into survivors' experiences of diocesan and cathedral safeguarding, participation and volunteering, the Interim Support Scheme, and National Safeguarding Team casework. Together, these contributions have provided a rich and diverse evidence base, ensuring that Audit findings and recommendations are informed by lived experience. Building on Year One, engagement with victims and survivors increased in Year Two, demonstrating growing confidence in the programme and strengthening the breadth of perspectives informing this report.

Cumulative Total
(Across Year 1 and 2 and Year 3 to date)
311 Victims and Survivors



Signposting to Support

In an emergency, or if someone is in immediate danger, please call 999.

Safe Spaces

Free, independent and confidential support for anyone affected by church-related abuse, delivered by First Light. You can make contact whether or not the abuse has been reported, and regardless of how long ago it happened.

Email safespaces@firstlight.org.uk

Visit www.safespacesenglandandwales.org.uk

National Domestic Abuse Helpline (run by Refuge)

Free support available 24/7 for women and children through a dedicated helpline on 0808 2000 247. An online chat helpline is also available Monday to Friday 10am-10pm and 10am-6pm on weekends.

Visit www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk/

Diocesan Safeguarding Contacts

To locate the contact details of the safeguarding team from the diocese you need to contact please visit:

Visit www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/diocesan-safeguarding-contacts

NSPCC

Contact the NSPCC's helpline for adults concerned about a child's safety or wellbeing on 0808 800 5000 (this helpline is currently available 10am-4pm Monday to Friday) or you can email help@nspcc.org.uk in confidence 24/7.

Email help@nspcc.org.uk

Visit www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/reporting-abuse/nspcc-helpline/

Samaritans

The Samaritans' adult helpline is available for whatever you are going through 24/7. Call 116 123 or, alternatively, visit your local branch in person during their opening hours.

Email jo@samaritans.org

Visit www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/

Men's Advice Line (run by Respect)

For male victims, a helpline is available on 0808 801 0327 (available Monday-Friday 10am-5pm). Webchat support is also available Monday-Friday from 9am-10am.

Visit <https://mensadviceline.org.uk/>

Engagement

Themes

While initial engagement with victims and survivors focuses on disclosure and support provision, the Church's [‘National Safeguarding Standards’](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/national-safeguarding-standards-and-quality-assurance-framework_sep23.pdf) propose the need for meaningful partnerships that prioritise survivor voices¹. Whilst the importance of this necessity is widely acknowledged, practice varies significantly among church bodies, highlighting a need for more consistent implementation strategies.

Proactive, diocese-wide listening events are not consistently held across the Church. Such events would capture a wider range of authentic voices, including victims and survivors, those who care for them, and specialist organisations, and create dedicated space for that feedback to be heard.

Victims, survivors and representatives from support organisations are increasingly present on Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panels (DSAP) and similar governance groups and initiatives. There is a wide recognition that whilst this stems from a desire for learning, there is a real risk that this can appear ‘tokenistic’. When engaged, a number of church bodies have recognised the need to develop how these arrangements work in practice and can be improved.

¹ https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/national-safeguarding-standards-and-quality-assurance-framework_sep23.pdf

The Audit Team has spoken with victims and survivors who have been engaged at a local or national level with the aim of improving the Church's response to victims and survivors. Despite some successful projects, victim and survivor participation remains a key area for improvement and further dedicated resource. Some feedback has indicated that the wellbeing of survivors during participation opportunities has not consistently been safeguarded. Engagement of this nature, especially when repeated over time, carries a real risk of vicarious trauma and emotional toll. Some have reported that they participated without the benefit of de-briefing, a named point of contact, or a dedicated space for reflection once an activity has concluded. To ensure that participation does not come at a cost to those it is intended to empower, support must be built into the design of engagement from the outset, rather than offered only once distress becomes apparent.

Further, some victims and survivors have reported that they are not always kept informed of how their contributions have influenced practice, leaving them feeling their efforts were in vain. Outcomes and achievements should consistently be fed back to those who took part.

Several church bodies have either launched or are setting up Survivor Consultation and Working Groups. The Audit Team notes that while some of these governance models successfully strengthen safeguarding, others lack the necessary foundational frameworks, such as clearly defined Terms of Reference, and others have found it difficult to fully embed trauma-informed principles in practice. These groups should maintain broad membership, comprising victims, survivors, those who care for them, and specialists from the charitable sector. Formal two-way communication links should be established with DSAPs, or equivalent bodies, for appropriate information sharing. The growing emphasis on ensuring victim and survivor voices are an integral part of governance is welcome, but these arrangements must be standardised.

Some church bodies use a diverse range of communication methods, such as YouTube channels, written statements, emails and newsletters, to raise awareness of different forms of harm and the support available. This awareness-raising is important, and public statements on high-profile cases can play a valuable role in transparency and accountability. That said, some feedback has addressed the impact such statements and communications can have when not handled sensitively. These should be placed and worded with care, so that those who encounter them unexpectedly, particularly victims and survivors, are not inadvertently distressed or re-traumatised.

Institutional trust remains a significant barrier to engagement, largely due to a perceived “protectionist tendency” where the Church is seen to prioritise its reputation over the wellbeing of individuals. This belief undermines victim and survivor confidence and is compounded by the frustrations of those who feel forced into silence while worrying that other potential victims remain at risk or unaware of ongoing investigations. Addressing these barriers requires a fundamental shift, where accountability and transparency are treated as imperative elements of both risk management and institutional learning.

To rebuild this trust, the Audit Team is of the belief that the Church should look to established legislative frameworks and guidance, such as the Care Act 2014, the Children Act 1989 and statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children. These frameworks formally impose statutory reporting duties upon Safeguarding Adults Boards and Local Safeguarding Children Partnerships to maintain transparency through annual reporting. By adopting a similar model, the Church can utilise formal reporting as a critical tool for auditing systemic themes and measuring the efficacy of safeguarding interventions. Transitioning to this high standard of public accountability would signal a genuine commitment to listening to, and learning from, victims and survivors.

Findings from the Audit Programme indicate that learning from safeguarding cases is not always consistently maximised for wider institutional learning. For example, during an international staff trip a lack of trauma-informed preparation exposed personnel to harm. This specific incident underscores the necessity for learning to be directly informed by lived experience to bridge the gap between procedures and the actual human impact of trauma. A separate case of female-on-female abuse highlighted the failure to appropriately respond to this type of safeguarding concern. Training must equip staff to recognise diverse abuse dynamics and overcome biases related to less frequently reported scenarios, to ensure survivors do not encounter disbelief or victim-blaming. Ultimately, by understanding that vulnerability is fluid and context-dependent, the Church can move beyond labels to provide a more appropriate and supportive response for all.



Positive examples of co-production to create meaningful resources with victim and survivor input were noted. For example, one diocese co-produced support leaflets with a representative from a support organisation and consulted with a victim and survivor of abuse. Another diocese saw the creation of guidance produced by its Survivors Consultative Group. This guidance covered the creation and implementation of clear care plans and communication.

The establishment of permanent forums, such as the Survivor Voice Working Group and the Survivors' Consultative Group, represents a significant step forward in engagement. Notably, one of these groups is deliberately scheduled ahead of DSAP and is facilitated by an independent chair. Building on this momentum, individual Diocesan Boards of Finance (DBFs) are advancing their own initiatives; one DBF is currently introducing a formal survivor participation framework that includes dedicated collaborative groups and projects, while another has already developed a comprehensive and directional strategy for victim and survivor engagement.

A small number of DBFs have implemented Google Forms to collect feedback in a structured way, which could enable them to evaluate the impact of engagement more effectively and to act on suggested improvements.

Similarly, a small number of cathedrals have built on the annual 'Safeguarding Sunday' event, extending it into a 'Safeguarding Season' or 'Safeguarding Week' to foster a culture of lament. This has encouraged non-recent disclosures and raised the profile of safeguarding.

Others have made effective use of visual installations and creative exhibitions to show solidarity with victims and survivors and raise awareness of abuse. Examples include hosting the Red Chair Project with Restored UK during the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, the 'Souls of our Shoes' exhibition with the Mothers' Union, the 'Angels Creative Project', and a 'Suicide Memorial Quilt' exhibition with Speak Their Name.

In some cases, the Audit Team heard from victims and survivors on how their relationship with the Church evolved from a place of mistrust to active participation in safeguarding work. These examples demonstrate the power of positive engagements and a mutual desire to improve safeguarding practice.

*Image from the [Angels Creative Project](#), Diocese of Newcastle.
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Dignity

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: National

The NST should ensure more proactive outreach to dioceses and cathedrals to strengthen victim and survivor engagement and participation.

Recommendation 2: Local and National

Church bodies should establish proactive, diocese-wide listening events to capture a wider range of authentic voices. These should be open to victims and survivors and those close to them, i.e. family members. Those leading these initiatives should ensure they reach out to the NST for support and guidance in the planning stages of these events.

Recommendation 3: National

Building on the National Survivor Participation Framework, the Church should develop guidance for the establishment and operation of survivor-led groups, such as Survivor Consultation or Working Groups. This guidance should include:

- A Guidance should mandate** that groups include a diverse range of voices, including victims, survivors, their families, and experts from specialist support organisations or charities.
- B Formal protocols** must be established to facilitate two-way information sharing between survivor groups and Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panels or other senior leadership meetings.
- C National standards** should ensure that these arrangements are built on trauma-informed principles to prevent re-traumatisation and ensure the environment is safe for meaningful participation.
- D The framework** should include mechanisms to measure the impact of survivor feedback on policy and practice, ensuring that survivor voices lead to tangible institutional improvement.

Recommendation 4: Local and National

Mechanisms should be established for victims and survivors to receive support while engaging in project work and participation activities. This should be discussed and agreed with victims and survivors, in line with the Survivor Participation Framework.

Recommendation 5: Local and National

Victims and survivors participating in project work should receive regular, timely updates on the progress of the work, information detailing how their contributions have been used, and access to final project outputs.

Recommendation 6: Local

Obtaining informed consent from all contributors should be at the forefront of all future co-production work. This practice will ensure that the final outputs align with the collective expectations of all those involved, with transparent communication throughout.

Recommendation 7: Local and National

The Church should adopt a statutory-style annual reporting approach that identifies recurring themes identified through casework and practice reviews. This transparent reporting process must provide clear, public updates on the status of completed mandatory reviews alongside themes identified through reflective work and the concrete steps taken to implement their findings. A dedicated commitment to listening to and learning from victims and survivors should be central to this work.

Recommendation 8: National

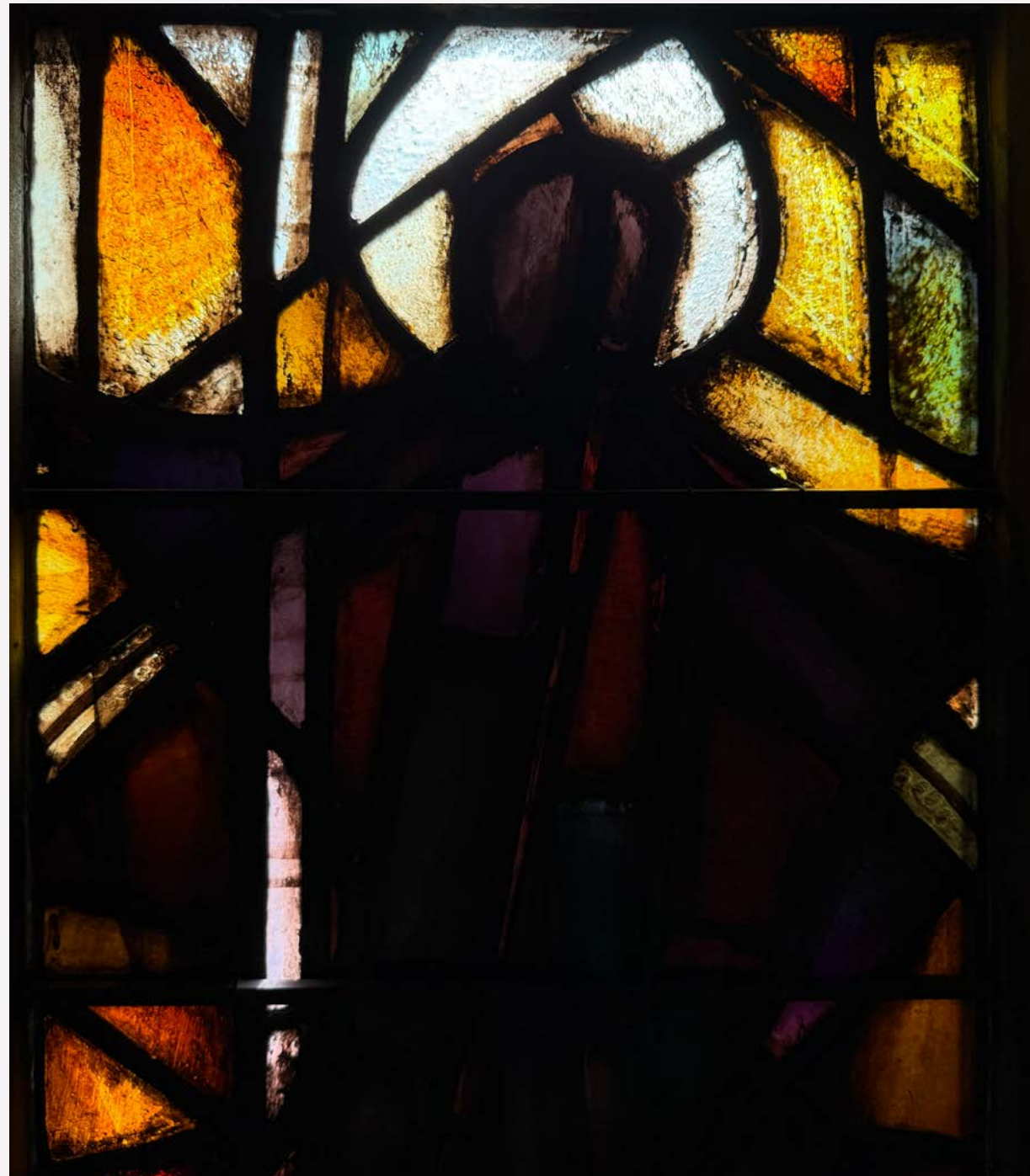
The National Safeguarding Team should produce guidance to inform how church bodies handle communications and the release of public statements, particularly those concerning high-profile cases and more complex cases, for example, in the instance of a respondent's death during investigations. This should ensure such communications are worded and placed sensitively, with consideration for victims and survivors who may encounter them unexpectedly, to avoid inadvertent distress or re-traumatisation.

Recommendation 9: National and local

The Church's training programmes should further integrate victim and survivor voices to develop understanding on how biases and failures to recognise vulnerability across different contexts can result in harm. This should include:

A Breaking down stereotypes associated with abuse dynamics, including female-on-female cases, to ensure every survivor receives a supportive and nuanced response

B Training staff to understand that vulnerability is context-dependent, requiring a comprehensive framework to identify diverse and complex abuse dynamics.



Disclosure

Themes

The publication of high-profile safeguarding reviews serves as a complex catalyst for individuals to come forward and disclose their own experiences. While these reviews historically prompt a surge in new disclosures, the public nature of headlines and findings also carries a profound risk of re-traumatisation for those impacted. Each surge adds to an existing caseload for safeguarding teams, and discussions with staff, victims and survivors have highlighted how this demand accumulates over time. This places safeguarding teams under sustained and growing pressure, and where capacity does not keep pace, the quality of care available to victims and survivors is at risk throughout the disclosure and support journey.

Supporting victims and survivors requires effective communication that includes managing expectations and providing steady, reliable support. Despite many safeguarding personnel being praised for their friendly and well-intentioned nature, victims and survivors frequently express frustration over persistent communication gaps and excessive waiting times for follow-ups. One individual whom the Audit Team engaged with described themselves as a “moving target” with evolving expectations. As such, it is vital that church bodies transition from “intuitive” communication to structured systems. Implementing scheduled communication protocols ensures that all individuals receive the regular and predictable outreach necessary to build and maintain trust, ensuring that shifting needs are reliably met through a professional framework rather than personal discretion.

This structured communication serves as the foundation for a comprehensive care plan approach that must also address the specific needs, preferences, and support exit strategies stipulated by national guidance. Audit findings to date have revealed that conversations regarding the conclusion of care are not consistently occurring, and even when survivors feel well-supported, a lack of clarity regarding the end of that care can create feelings of anxiety. To address this, a consistent approach requires that transparent discussions regarding support endpoints take place early in the process. By establishing realistic yet flexible timelines within the care plan, church bodies can provide clear goals to work toward, ensuring that transitions out of formal support are never perceived as abrupt or unexpected.

In addition, victims and survivors have expressed that sudden changes in those handling their case or supporting them, whether due to sickness or staff turnover, can be unsettling and detrimental to wellbeing. These transitions often cause lapses in communication and force individuals to recount their traumatic experiences to new personnel, which can significantly hinder personal progress. At a minimum, the Church must implement forward-planning systems, such as team-based introductions or robust handover protocols, to ensure that survivors are never forced to repeat their testimony. Adopting a structured approach to communication and advocacy could provide the necessary continuity and professional stability required to protect victim wellbeing during institutional changes.

Many DBFs and cathedrals have appropriate reporting pathways, including safeguarding contact information located on local websites, within leaflets, staff handbooks and on posters in various locations.

While the Church generally recognises the importance of trauma-informed care, with specific staff earning praise for their empathy and approach, feedback indicates that this experience is inconsistent. Some individuals noted a lack of understanding regarding trauma responses. To address these gaps and develop a culture of care, the Audit Team recommends expanded trauma-informed training for those most likely to be involved in responding to concerns or disclosures, engaging with and supporting victims of abuse or individuals presenting with vulnerabilities.

Beyond the inconsistency in trauma-informed responses highlighted above, Audit findings have uncovered a broader gap across the Church in understanding how mental health challenges, neurodivergence, and trauma intersect. A lack of specialised insight often means that trauma-induced behaviours or unique communication styles are misinterpreted.

This spectrum of experience ranges from quiet marginalisation to acute distress. At the local level, reports indicate that individuals with these additional needs frequently feel misunderstood or actively excluded rather than supported. Crucially, Audits have demonstrated that when local leadership or safeguarding teams mishandle these complex dynamics, situations can rapidly escalate, often compounding an individual's distress and causing further harm. Addressing this requires equipping both clergy and church officers with the skills and confidence to provide a person-centred, relational approach for all interactions. The Audit Team recognises and welcomes the February 2026 General Synod motion to train clergy in supporting individuals experiencing mental health challenges. Building on this, the Audit Team recommends enhancing the current core modules to equip both clergy and church officers with the skills and awareness needed to engage with and support those presenting with neurodiversity and trauma.

Complaints procedures have at times been a source of distress, which can affect victims' and survivors' confidence and trust. As these processes currently vary across dioceses, there would be value in a more consistent and transparent approach that clearly sets out when, and against whom, a complaint can be made.

The Audit Team received extensive testimony concerning the frequently distressing impact of the Clergy Discipline Measure (CDM) on victims and survivors (referred to within the CDM framework as complainants). This process was often described as biased, isolating, and opaque, leading to further trauma and feelings of shame. The Audits completed so far have revealed that, historically, the CDM has disempowered those it was meant to protect. The upcoming Clergy Conduct Measure (CCM) seeks to rectify many of the issues which stemmed from the CDM. The Audit Team emphasises the need for transparent communication to improve trust in this new measure.

By providing clear, accurate information about the process, support available and its potential outcomes, ambiguity that previously caused trauma and distrust could be substantially reduced.

The Audit Team welcomes a number of positive changes the CCM has introduced, including the removal of the 12-month reporting limit for serious misconduct, a right for complainants to seek review of cases dismissed early, a broadened ability to remove clerics from Holy Orders and a system for addressing misuse of the complaints process. The Audit Team recognises that such misuse occurs in only a very small minority of cases, that distinguishing these complaints from genuine concerns is rarely straightforward, and that any such process must be approached with care so as never to deter legitimate disclosures. That said, where complaints are pursued without proper foundation, or used to harass or undermine, the person against whom they are directed can themselves become the target of harm and abuse, in

effect becoming the one requiring support and protection. In this respect, the Audit Team welcomes the CCM's dedicated system for handling such complaints, including the power to impose restraint orders to protect clergy in the rare cases where the complaints process is misused.

The Audit Team further notes the amendment to clause 31.3 of the CCM, accepted at the February 2026 General Synod, moving tribunals to take place in public by default, mirroring the Criminal Justice System's 'open justice' principle. The development of an accompanying Code of Practice presents a valuable opportunity to develop a resource mirroring the Ministry of Justice's 'Victims' Code', providing complainants with greater transparency and a clearly defined framework to mitigate the anxiety often experienced during these sittings. The Audit Team recommends considering the introduction of dedicated support, similar to the victim support arrangements available in connection with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), to assist those navigating the CCM process.



Themes

One DBF provides staff with guidance on handling telephone calls that may involve a disclosure, focusing on the importance of empathy and building trust in those conversations.

One diocese has seen the benefit of a training programme in conjunction with Survivors Voices to further develop understanding of spiritual abuse from a survivor perspective. Learning from this initiative is cascaded to parishes to develop ‘first responses’ to those seeking help and support.

Creative projects have also proved powerful. A cathedral’s Pillars of Hope art project showcases works by victims and survivors across multiple platforms, facilitating reflective conversations and signposting

individuals to support, while participation in LOUDfence initiatives elsewhere has created a visible expression of solidarity that raises awareness, encourages reflection and facilitates disclosures.

Leadership sensitivity plays a crucial role, with one Acting Diocesan Bishop taking care to ensure the victim / survivor they were meeting felt comfortable in their presence. They adjusted their attire to avoid appearing imposing, a small consideration which had a positive impact. The individual also appreciated how quickly the meeting was arranged, stating that “they moved heaven and earth to get an appointment” in place.

Recommendations

Recommendation 10: Local

A structured approach to discussing and reviewing support timelines must be established. Church bodies should prioritise transparent, collaborative discussions that establish realistic, yet adjustable, timelines, providing survivors with clear goals and a sense of security regarding the duration of their support.

Recommendation 11: Local

To protect victim and survivor wellbeing, the Church must prioritise the implementation of robust contingency and transition systems that prevent the distress often caused by sudden changes in personnel. This should include:

- A The establishment of a “tell-us-once” protocol**, which ensures mandatory handover standards are met so that survivors are never required to repeat their testimony to new caseworkers.
- B Forward planning measures**, such as team-based introductions or the appointment of secondary contacts, should be introduced to provide seamless continuity during staff absences or turnover.
- C Providing survivors** with timely and transparent notifications regarding any personnel changes is essential to mitigate the unsettling impact of these transitions and maintain institutional trust.

Recommendation 12: Local

Those most likely to be involved in responding to concerns and disclosures, engaging with and supporting victims of abuse or individuals presenting with vulnerabilities should undertake annual Trauma-Informed Practice training to ensure knowledge remains up to date and embedded in practice. For example, this could include safeguarding officers, clergy, and chaplains.



Recommendation 13: National

The National Safeguarding Team should include the intersection of mental health, neurodivergence, and trauma into the existing core modules in its safeguarding training framework, structured pragmatically to match role responsibilities:

National & Diocesan Safeguarding Teams (Specialist Level): Must receive advanced training to adapt formal safeguarding protocols for nuanced responses, design de-escalation pathways, and provide advice on complex cases.

Clergy & Parish Safeguarding Officers (Leadership Level): Must be equipped with practical skills to recognise overlapping vulnerabilities, adapt parish-level communication, and safely manage disclosures without escalating distress.

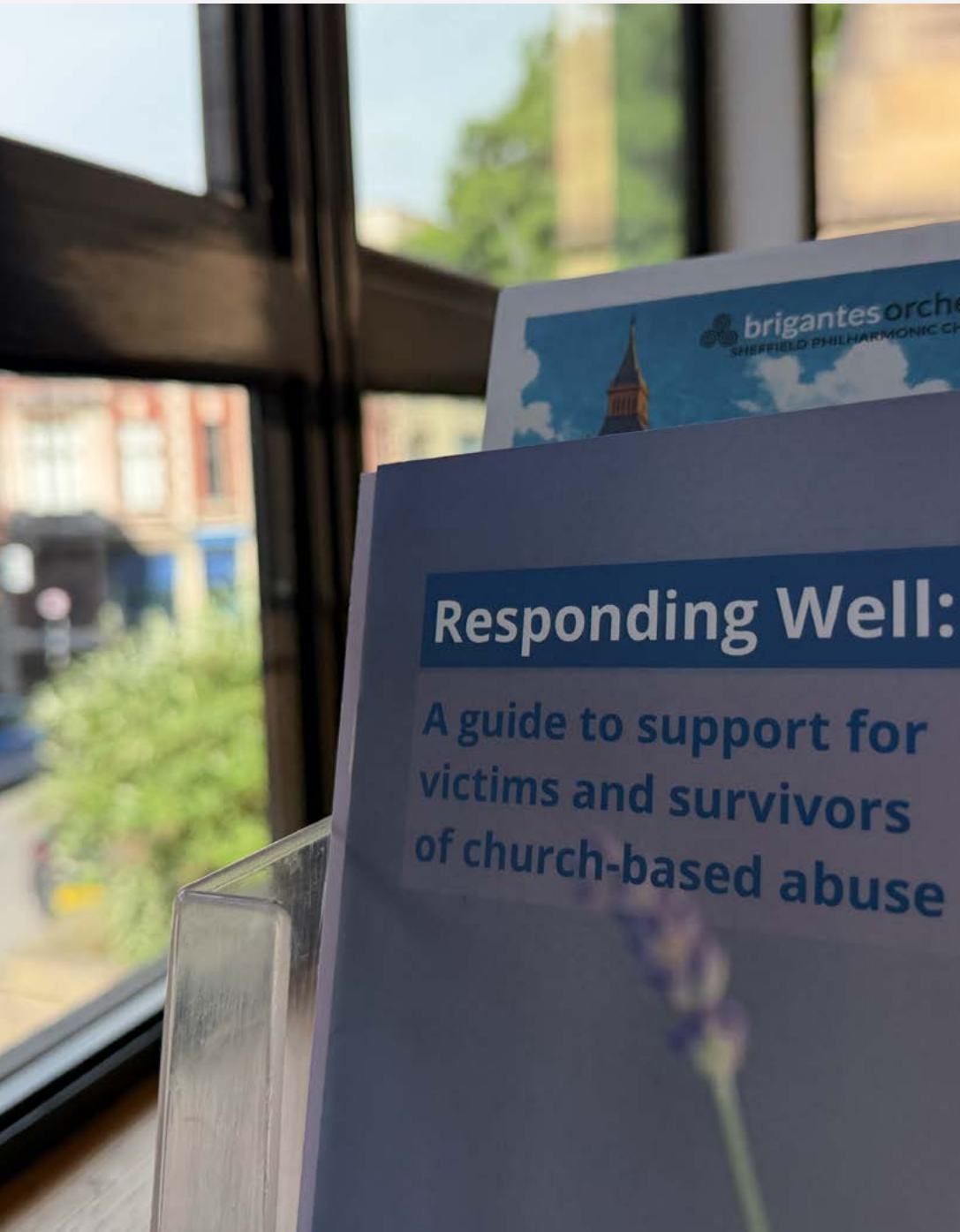
Local Pastoral Teams & Front-line Volunteers (Awareness & Engagement Level): Must receive basic, accessible guidance focused on awareness, welcoming communication styles, and safe signposting.

Recommendation 14: National

Appropriate support should be put in place for victims and survivors navigating the formal legal processes (i.e. the Clergy Conduct Measure (CCM)) of the Church. Support should include emotional support and practical guidance to reduce isolation and procedural trauma.

Recommendation 15: National

Mirroring the Ministry of Justice's 'Victims' Code,' a plain-English guide should be developed that outlines exactly what a complainant can expect while navigating the Clergy Conduct Measure, their rights at each stage, and guaranteed timelines for updates.



Support

Themes

A persistent theme across most audits is the low awareness among survivors of the House of Bishops' 'Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse' guidance. Across almost all dioceses, survey respondents were largely unaware of this guidance and the Church's responsibility to respond appropriately. This has consistently led to recommendations for better visibility and direct links to 'Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse' full guidance and explainer videos.

DBFs and cathedrals typically provide a good variety of external support options across multiple specialised areas. An emerging theme, however, is the lack of local signposting and the impact of 'digital poverty,' which prevents people from using self-referral systems. It is essential to move beyond national website links and provide specific local contact details for mental health, domestic abuse, and homelessness. Furthermore, signposts to support and resources should be regularly audited to make sure all signposts are up to date and helpful.

Through the use of Service Level Agreements (SLA) / Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with their respective DBFs, cathedrals often avail of support from their local Diocesan Safeguarding Teams (DST), to ensure victims receive professional, specialised care.

Many cathedrals maintain strong local connections by serving as a physical sanctuary and working together with local charities focusing on homelessness and mental health. Several cathedrals collaborate with local authorities and organisations to provide accommodation and outreach for rough sleepers. Additionally, many host community-focused initiatives, designed to promote social connection and aid in trauma processing for vulnerable residents.

The Church's commitment to 'Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse' includes providing care for the families and dependants of survivors. Recent Audits, however, show that this care isn't yet reaching everyone consistently. The Audit

Team recognises that a survivor's path to healing is often shared with their family. When the impact of trauma or the weight of an investigation is overlooked, it can make the healing process much harder. Support must evolve to meet the emotional, spiritual, and practical needs of the whole family.

A recurring theme in recent Audits is the persistent difficulty in filling the 'Support Person' position. While this shortage is currently being addressed at a national level, its local impact is felt. Local partnerships with specialist charities have emerged as a successful model for providing reliable, expert advocacy, alongside the national provision of Safe Spaces. These collaborative models should be an added value to local arrangements, in providing external expertise to provide the stable support and nuanced understanding required to navigate diverse abuse dynamics. While acknowledging the value of these external partners, the Audit Team emphasises the ongoing need for accessible, internal support persons to

serve as a direct liaison between the victims and survivors and the Church regarding safeguarding disclosures. This is further addressed in the NST's Audit.

Beyond locally commissioned support, several national schemes exist to assist victims and survivors, and the Audit Team found that awareness of these at a local level was mixed. The Interim Support Scheme (ISS), which provides immediate help to those whose lives have been significantly affected by the abuse and the response to it; the National Redress Scheme, which offers financial redress alongside bespoke, non-financial forms of redress; and Safe Spaces, an independent, trauma-informed advocacy and support service for anyone affected by church-related abuse. Local feedback on these schemes was also varied. The Audit Team heard positive accounts of the advocacy provided through Safe Spaces and of the support offered by the ISS, the latter described by some as a lifeline at a point of immediate need. Confidence in the

Redress Scheme, however, has, at times, been undermined, not least by a data breach affecting the scheme, and uncertainty surrounding its operation persists. Given the wider emphasis throughout this report on consistent local signposting, dioceses and cathedrals should ensure that victims and survivors are made aware of and actively signposted to existing national schemes.

A recurring concern, voiced by victims, survivors and staff, has been anxiety surrounding a potential “cliff edge” as short-term support ends while the move to longer-term redress remains unclear. This now has immediate significance. In March 2026, the NST confirmed that the ISS will close on 1 October 2026, when the National Redress Scheme becomes available (expected to launch in autumn 2026). The Church has given welcome assurances that awards in progress will be honoured, that support will taper for up to twelve months rather

than ending abruptly, that a new survivor support fund is being developed with the Archbishops’ Council to avoid any gap, and that the transition will be handled in a measured, trauma-informed way. That said, the Audit Team recognises the further twelve months cannot be guaranteed, and future awards will reflect the scheme’s shortened lifespan, so reassurance alone is unlikely to resolve the underlying anxiety. Within the limits of charity regulations, the Audit Team has advocated that those already receiving interim support continue to do so should they require it, without having to re-apply, removing an avoidable source of stress. Mirroring the earlier concern about the conclusion of local care, what victims and survivors need is an early, transparent and individually tailored conversation about how and when support will change, so that the end of one form of support is never experienced as sudden or unexpected.

While pastoral and spiritual support is widely available and valued by many victims and survivors, there is a perception held by some that provision is inconsistent. Specifically, some victims and survivors feel that some respondents have received more frequent outreach than victims. Support should be distributed fairly, addressing instances where survivors have felt overlooked while respondents were actively supported. The Audit Team also heard of a failure to provide a “balanced response” following a respondent’s death. In one specific case, institutional empathy was perceived to be skewed toward the alleged perpetrator and their family, while victims felt further isolated by a lack of public safeguarding acknowledgment.

These local inconsistencies underscore the importance of emerging national work to provide dedicated, survivor-centred spiritual care. At the time of the Independent Safeguarding Audit of the NST, scoping was underway for a National Chaplaincy for Survivors, developed with the direct involvement of those with lived experience to understand their needs and priorities for future support. As this work develops, dioceses and cathedrals should look to align their own approach to pastoral and spiritual provision with it, helping to ensure that survivors receive consistent, dedicated support rather than relying on arrangements that can, at times, feel ad hoc or unevenly weighted.

Good Practice

A small number of DBFs have partnered with independent organisations to provide independent advocates supporting individuals affected by domestic abuse and sexual abuse. These partnerships provide vital specialist support and advocacy for those who have experienced abuse.

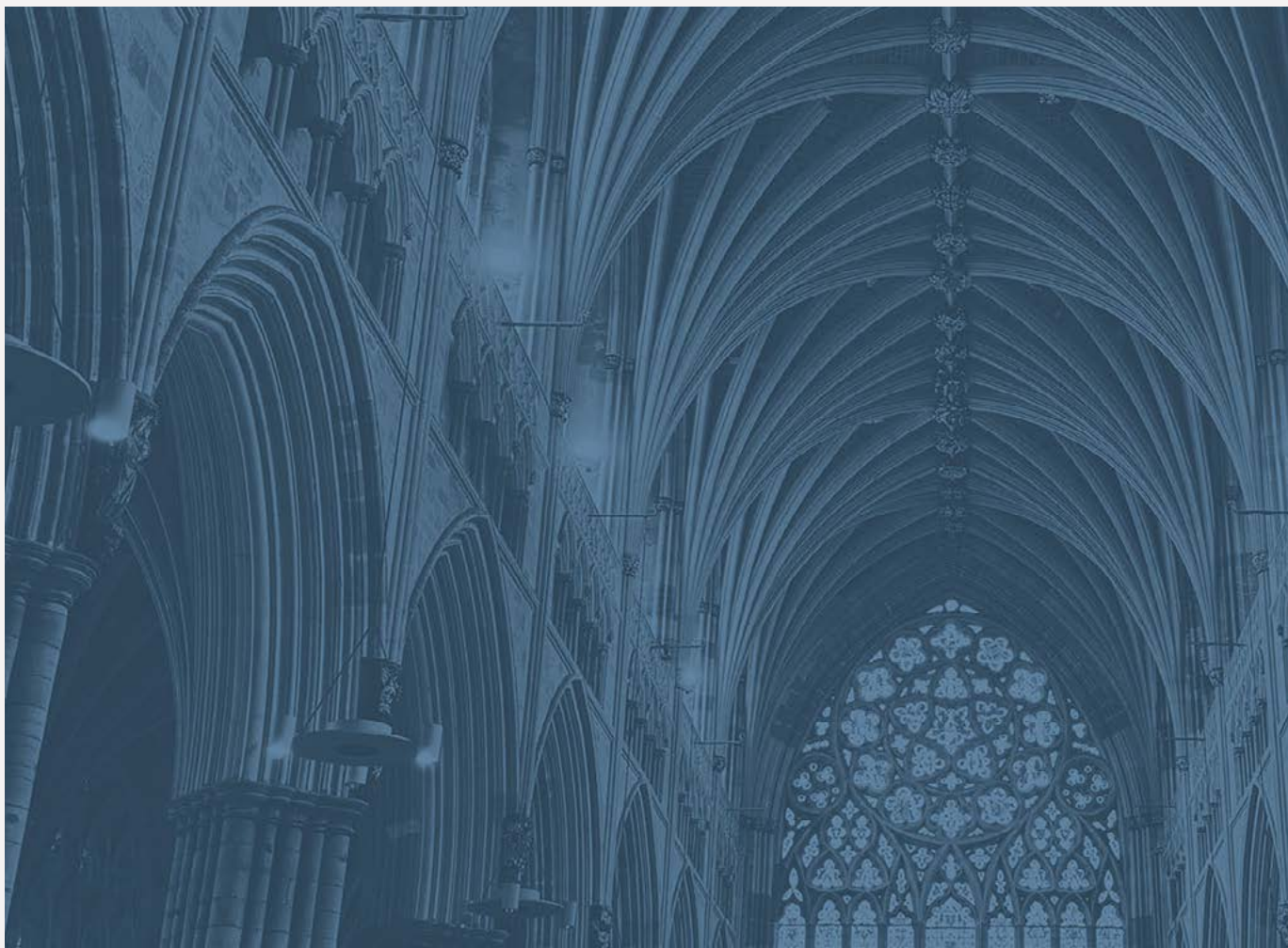
‘United in Solace and Grace’ is a collaborative effort providing ministry and support to victims and survivors of abuse and their supporters. Services are delivered by an experienced team of ministers with expertise in healing, counselling, and Trauma-Informed Practice. This innovative practice was spearheaded by a local parish priest in connection with a local Sexual Violence Support Charity. There is a commitment to continuing this work, evidenced through the development of a newly established website with service materials for replication by other churches.

A small number of church bodies offer immediate, flexible funding for therapeutic interventions tailored to individual needs, prioritising timeliness over waiting for national schemes. One diocese was recognised by a victim / survivor specifically for allowing them to choose their own therapist, promoting psychological safety and agency.

One cathedral’s wellbeing café aims to deliver holistic support to vulnerable adults and the wider community through accessible drop-ins. These social and creative activities serve as vital tools for self-expression and trauma-informed healing, strengthening the local social fabric.

A small number of senior clergy members, including bishops and deans, have offered apologies described by recipients as “humble” and “first-class.” These interactions are most effective when they demonstrate a genuine desire to learn and provide meaningful validation. Survivors particularly valued being made a priority despite an awareness of the officials’ busy schedules. As these apologies often come from institutional leaders rather than the perpetrator, their impact relies on a clear acknowledgment of the harm caused and a visible commitment to systemic improvement. A recommendation around the effectiveness of apologies has been made in the NST’s Audit report.

Some DBFs and cathedrals issue a statement of commitment to supporting victims and survivors whilst others have a Victims and Survivors Charter. These public displays should serve as an absolute minimum as a public declaration and visual pledge to providing appropriate care and support.



Recommendations

Recommendation 16: Local

There is a need for better visibility and direct links to the *'Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse'* full guidance and explainer videos. These are available on the national website for local use. Other means of increasing visibility and awareness of this guidance must be explored, to ensure greater awareness of the Church's responsibility to respond well to victims and survivors.

Recommendation 17: Local

Signposting must expand beyond national resources to include local specialist organisations, including those focused on mental health, and homelessness. To maintain accuracy and ensure appropriate application, these signposts should be audited on a regular basis.

Recommendation 18: Local and National

The Church should ensure its support consistently extends to the families of victims and survivors, addressing the secondary trauma caused by abuse and the investigative process. This should include:

- A** **A transition** to structured support that includes emotional, spiritual, and practical assistance.
- B** **Establishing** a mandatory, regular review process to adapt support as the family's needs evolve over time.
- C** **Actively** assisting families in identifying and engaging with specialist community-based services to bridge gaps in local provision.
- D** **Include** family members in official apologies when requested by the victim or survivor to acknowledge the wider impact of harm.

Recommendation 19: Local

Church bodies should ensure they consistently allocate separate, dedicated pastoral leads for victims and survivors and respondents to prevent conflicts of interest and ensure care and support is equitable.

Further Information

Read the Published Reports

Read

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Audit Schedule

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