

Independent Safeguarding Audits of Church of England Dioceses and Cathedrals

Annual Report 2024

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Foreword

For many years, the Church and its community were profoundly let down. Individuals in positions of authority failed those who worked and worshipped within it, prioritising the institution's reputation over the well-being of its members and the wider community. They hid behind, or failed to challenge, outdated and arcane church laws – rules that baffle ordinary people who possess a simple understanding of right and wrong. Over time, insult was added to injury as the Church appeared incapable of change.

These truths make it incredibly difficult to view the contemporary Church through anything other than the lens of a deeply troubling past. Furthermore, the relentless scrutiny the Church now faces, coupled with the passage of time, means that more and more cases – far too many – continue to come to light.

However, the Church of yesterday is not the Church of today. Moral outrage and public exposure have driven significant change. This does not mean that non-recent cases will not surface – indeed, we must hope that they do. Nor does it mean that offending in a contemporary sense will cease entirely. But it does mean that, when it does occur, it is now more likely to be challenged and addressed with the victim and survivor's best interests at the forefront.

The systems in place are demonstrably better. Those on the front line of safeguarding are more aware, and the Church's blended safeguarding teams – comprised of credible safeguarding professionals with previous experience from statutory or equivalent services – are driven by a safeguarding-first philosophy that is constantly evolving and improving.

Independent scrutiny and mechanisms to hold those responsible for the safety of others to account are absolutely critical. They ensure compliance with standards and drive continuous improvement. Effective external scrutiny complements internal mechanisms and governing bodies, all of whom are accountable for their organisations.

That said, when it comes to delivering effective safeguarding practice – practice that genuinely works and makes a difference – it is most effectively delivered from within, not imposed from without.



I believe the 2024 Independent Safeguarding Audits provide compelling evidence of the Church's rapid improvement and that the alternative operational model outlined in this report offers an appropriate balance between internal operational independence and existing governance arrangements.

Crucially, the evidence indicates that its safeguarding professionals are ready, willing, and able, if properly reinforced, to deliver effective safeguarding for the most vulnerable members of their communities.



Jim Gamble QPM

Lead Auditor

INEQE Safeguarding Group



Introduction



This annual report provides an overview of the themes and good practice evidenced during the 2024 independent safeguarding audit programme. It also includes recommendations for improvement that have been designed to support and accelerate positive change. Whilst these are primarily focused on local safeguarding arrangements, some recommendations require a national response. Unless explicitly stated otherwise, these should be understood as applying to the National Safeguarding Team (NST), which serves as the central safeguarding function for the Church of England (CofE).

The Audit team strongly encourages all Diocesan Board of Finance (DBFs) and cathedrals to review the good practice highlighted in this document and apply any relevant recommendations to their individual circumstances.

About the Audits

The independent safeguarding audit programme was commissioned by the Archbishops' Council and is overseen by the NST. Led by the INEQE Safeguarding Group and working to a consistent framework, the audits test the sufficiency of safeguarding arrangements within DBFs and cathedrals and are aligned to the CofE's National Safeguarding Standards.

Scope of the Audit

In 2024, ten audits were conducted across ten DBFs¹ and nine cathedrals, each with unique histories, contexts and challenges. They involved a thorough review of documentation and survey responses, interviews with key personnel, and engagement with victims and survivors. Total activity across all the audits involved:

Over 4,000 documents being collated and analysed prior to the Audit's fieldwork.

A range of semi-structured discussion held with Church officers (staff and volunteers), external partners, victims, survivors and other stakeholders.

4,629 anonymous survey responses being received, which gathered input from key communities connected to the CofE. These were submitted by victims and survivors, children and young people as well as those worshipping or working within DBFs, the cathedrals and parishes.

59 focus groups being held.

A confidential contact form being made available via a dedicated webpage.

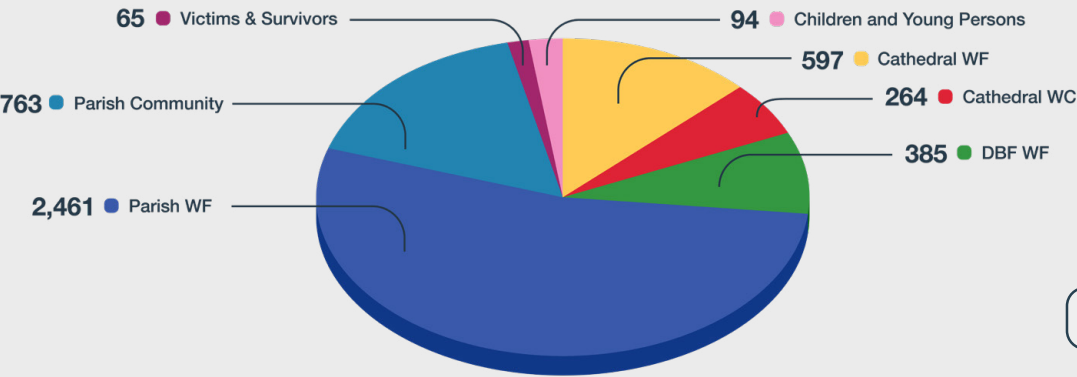
In total, the Audit spoke to 1084 people face to face.

¹ The ten diocese include Diocese of Salisbury, Diocese of Gloucester, Diocese of Bristol, Diocese of Truro, Diocese of Newcastle, Diocese of Oxford, Diocese of Worcester, Diocese of Exeter, Diocese of Chichester and Diocese of Lincoln.

² The nine cathedrals include Salisbury Cathedral, Gloucester Cathedral, Bristol Cathedral, Truro Cathedral, Newcastle Cathedral, Worcester Cathedral, Exeter Cathedral, Chichester Cathedral and Lincoln Cathedral.

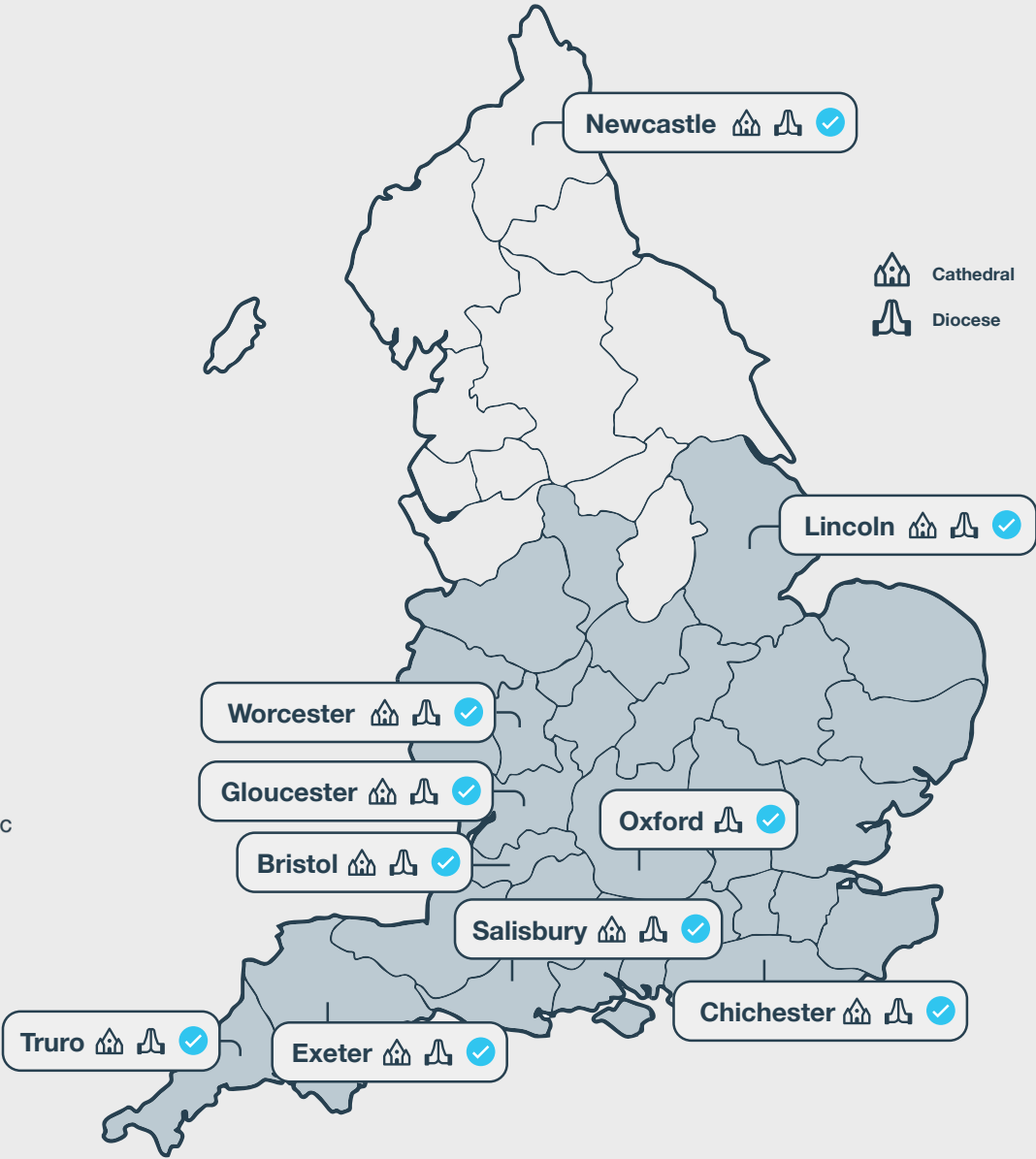
Context

The diocese areas involved in this first year of auditing represent a wide range of socioeconomic circumstances. Some are affluent, while others face challenges related to poverty, deprivation, and homelessness. These diverse communities also encompass varied cultural backgrounds, different Church traditions, and a range of experiences with multiculturalism. The nine iconic cathedrals audited, all serve as spiritual hubs and cultural landmarks, offering daily services, music, and community outreach. By understanding the unique context of each location and implementing appropriate safeguarding measures, these institutions can better ensure the safety and well-being of all who visit, worship, and work within them.



Total Survey Responses 4,629

Anonymous survey responses being received, which gathered input from key communities connected to the Church.



Approx **30,000**
page views on the Regional pages

Almost **6,000** page views
on the Church of England page



Methodology



Methodology

360° Safeguarding Audit Tool

The 360° Safeguarding Audit Tool is a series of questions modelled against the CofE's 'National Safeguarding Standards and Quality Assurance' framework. Issued to both DBFs and cathedrals, the tool is used to capture baseline evidence about policies, practice and other information relevant to the each audited body.

Online Surveys

A wide range of individual stakeholders from within the DBF, parish and cathedral communities were engaged through online surveys. These were designed as mechanisms through which the audit team could hear about the experiences and views of those involved with the Church. They were both anonymous (the Audit team was not seeking to identify individuals) and confidential (individuals were not identified in our report).

Audit Site Visits

Auditors were on the ground in each diocese area for between three and a half and a maximum of five days. Site visits typically involved the audit team conducting individual interviews, facilitating focus groups and examining written material, in both electronic and hard copy. Agreed schedules for the auditing activity were set on each occasion, with some of this work taking place prior to site visits as appropriate.

Each site visit concluded with a thorough verbal de-brief of the audit's initial and emerging findings as they related to the DBF and cathedral being reviewed.



Dedicated Safeguarding Email Inbox and Confidential Contact Form

A dedicated safeguarding email address was set up along with a confidential contact form to enable individuals willing to engage with the audit to share information. The submission of contact forms was monitored by the audit team on a routine basis, with key lines of enquiry being identified and/or follow-up discussions facilitated as necessary.

Presentation of Audit Findings

One audit report was produced per diocese area covering both the DBF and the cathedral. Reports identified good practice, alongside areas for improvement and recommendations. For a comprehensive explanation of the methodology used, please refer to the Church of England Audit webpage.

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**Independent Safeguarding
Audit Methodology**

www.ineqe.com/churchofengland/audit-methodology/

Progress

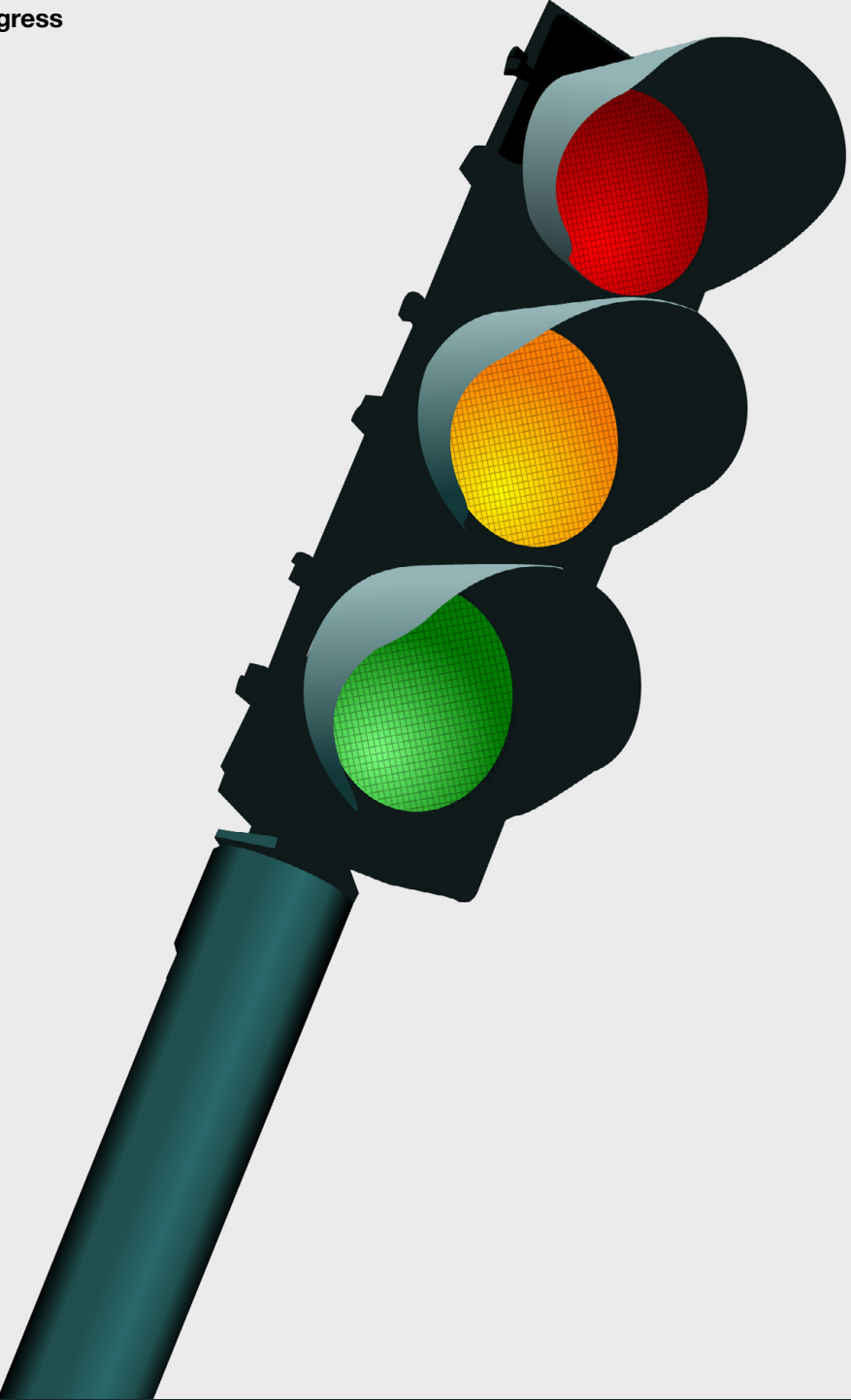
Each audit focused on evaluating the response by DBFs and cathedrals to any previous reviews they had been exposed to. These included the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) audits, the Past Cases Review 2 (PCR2) process, Lessons Learned Reviews (LLR) and other internal and external reviews.



Whilst most recommendations arising from these processes were found to have been implemented, some remain in progress. For many, this is because they depend on changes at a national level. Others remain 'open' as they are being re-visited to ensure impact is firmly evidenced, change embedded and practice effective. Overall, the audits found positive progress in response to this previous work, with there being a continuous focus by leaders and an ongoing appetite to learn and improve.

The oversight of progress in this regard is ordinarily undertaken through defined safeguarding action plans, with Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panels (DSAPs), Chapters and Diocesan Safeguarding Officers holding a central role for their oversight, scrutiny and delivery. Whilst many of these plans aim to collate all relevant safeguarding recommendations, their structure and implementation can vary.





For example, some have discrete plans for recommendations arising from specific processes (e.g., audits, reviews), whereas others integrate recommendations into broader strategies and existing plans. Some are organised by theme, and more recently, some have been aligned with the National Safeguarding Standards.

Going forward, the audit team believes that a consistent model for recording recommendations arising from audit / review processes should be implemented nationally. This could help better systematise oversight and create a unified model for how progress and impact is measured. This is likely to help the CofE more broadly with its ability to collate and aggregate intelligence about common areas of activity. Introducing an agreed methodology that defines how recommendations are prioritised, could also allow for a better line of sight on issues requiring urgent attention (both locally and nationally) and help with decision making about resource allocation.

Culture, Leadership & Capacity



Introduction

Safeguarding is now rightly the focus of considerable and tangible effort, aligning with both statutory guidance and good practice. This requires a clear safeguarding vision, driven by leaders who value and actively build the right culture. It demands an unambiguous acceptance of responsibilities and ultimate accountability, coupled with the ability to reflect, learn, and consistently lead by example.

Crucially, it means prioritising people and actively addressing any barriers that prevent them from raising concerns – empowering them to speak truth to power. Leaders must be able to make authoritative decisions, prioritising safeguarding above all else, and demonstrate a relentless drive to create environments where individuals can come together, work, worship, and truly thrive in a safe environment.

This also necessitates ensuring sufficient capacity within safeguarding teams, giving them the resources they need to effectively support and protect the entire Church community.



Culture

Themes

The independent safeguarding audits undertaken during 2024 found evidence of a significant and positive shift in safeguarding culture. Both DBFs and cathedrals have made considerable strides in shaping safer environments. That said, cathedrals appear to be improving at a slightly slower pace.

Strengths in this context can be attributed to several key factors. For example, the establishment of blended Diocesan Safeguarding Teams (DSTs) and the appointment of some Cathedral Safeguarding Advisors (CSAs) was evidenced to have accrued significant benefits. Many of those working in these roles have brought with them substantial experience, from either statutory organisations or from those with a clear nexus to safeguarding, and their expertise is very much the driving force for effective operational practice. At the 'grass roots', the dedicated work of Parish Safeguarding Officers (PSOs) and cathedral volunteers was also evidenced to be enhancing safety.

Feedback gathered through discussions, focus groups, and anonymous surveys paints a largely encouraging picture. The majority of those who were engaged by the audit teams indicated feeling safe and respected in their places of work and worship, with many expressing increased confidence in raising safeguarding concerns. This highlights an improving culture of greater transparency and more focused accountability.

However, the audits also found that some stubborn challenges remain. Despite the overall trend being positive trend, some individuals, particularly amongst senior clergy and those with long service, may, intentionally or unintentionally, perpetuate an outdated culture of deference. This can prevent some people from feeling able to challenge those in authority.

Good Practice

One DBF is actively driving cultural change at senior levels through the use of reflective sessions. These sessions focus on critical topics such as abuse of power and professional curiosity, encouraging leaders to examine their own behaviours and challenge established norms.

Another DBF has introduced a promising initiative called 'Culture Club', aimed at developing a positive safeguarding culture. This initiative stands out due to its collaborative development, involving input from various stakeholders to ensure a multi-faceted approach to the project. In summary, Culture Club employs a multi-pronged strategy that focuses on communication, training, and leadership engagement to effect positive change. Notably, it utilises storytelling to raise awareness and empathy around safeguarding issues. This approach allows individuals to connect with the human impact of safeguarding concerns on a deeper level, promoting greater understanding and encouraging proactive engagement.



Several cathedrals have implemented interactive Town Hall meetings with a dedicated focus on safeguarding culture. These meetings go beyond simply disseminating information and incorporate practical exercises that reinforce key safeguarding concepts. This approach encourages active engagement and helps to develop a deeper understanding of safeguarding responsibilities amongst participants. Furthermore, the provision of immediate and follow-up opportunities for challenge and feedback ensures that concerns are addressed promptly and transparently.



One cathedral's audit highlighted its 'HomeTech' project as a prime example of good practice. This initiative uses an innovative approach to addressing a specific need within the Church community: supporting people's practical use of technology. For instance, HomeTech has covered a range of digital skills, from making video calls using messaging apps and accessing BBC Sounds, to downloading and using local apps for services like car parking and online libraries.

This focus on digital literacy has wider benefits, including enhanced safeguarding. By improving people's ability to navigate the digital world, HomeTech empowers them to access online resources safely and responsibly. This added value extends beyond individual users, benefiting the wider community by equipping people to engage more fully in an increasingly digital society.

Audits have also revealed good practice amongst several Church bodies that regularly conduct staff surveys to test the current workplace culture and identify areas for improvement. These surveys take a holistic approach to staff wellbeing, considering factors beyond traditional workplace issues, such as the rising cost of living and mental health challenges. They actively encourage open feedback, promote transparency and empower staff to voice concerns and to actively contribute to solutions.

Critically, these surveys cover key areas such as workplace culture, workload, support systems, and safeguarding, providing valuable insights into the overall staff experience and enabling dioceses to pinpoint both strengths and areas requiring attention.



Recommendations

Church bodies seeking to improve their culture by listening to and responding well to their communities should consider good practice examples and, where possible, implement similar initiatives to help drive and focus their own improvement. To this end, the following recommendations are made:

a) To actively challenge the culture of deference, particularly amongst senior clergy, and address any negative perceptions surrounding safeguarding measures, Church bodies should promote a culture of open communication and psychological safety, where individuals feel comfortable speaking up and challenging authority.

This should include externally facilitated training for the most senior leaders, focusing on the identification and impact of hierarchical barriers. The training should incorporate personal reflection and a process where individuals create written personal development plans, outlining how they will adapt their leadership style, challenge negative behaviours in others, and enhance opportunities to break down barriers.

Complementary measures should include:

1. Creating more informal engagement opportunities with staff and volunteers (e.g., informal gatherings, open-door sessions) to promote open communication and reduce perceived hierarchical barriers.

2. The provision of mentoring opportunities to support those who may feel less confident in raising concerns or challenging those in authority.
3. Ensure that whistleblowing procedures are clearly communicated and easily accessible to all members of the Church community.

b) Promote active listening and empathy in all interactions within the Church community. This involves creating safe spaces for dialogue and discussion where individuals feel comfortable sharing their concerns and perspectives.



c) All church bodies should regularly conduct staff surveys to:

1. Test the current workplace culture and identify areas for improvement.
2. Ensure a holistic approach to staff wellbeing, considering factors beyond traditional workplace issues, such as the rising cost of living and mental health challenges.
3. Actively encourage open feedback to promote transparency and empower staff to voice concerns and contribute to solutions.
4. Focus on key areas such as workplace culture, workload, support systems, and safeguarding to provide valuable insights into the overall staff experience and enable the identification of both strengths and areas requiring attention.

d) To promote a positive safeguarding culture, Church bodies should:

1. Actively identify and disseminate examples of good practice across all dioceses and cathedrals. This can be achieved through sharing case studies, organising peer learning events, and establishing online platforms for collaboration.
2. Collaborate with other church bodies and external organisations specialising in safeguarding and cultural change to gain insights and learn from good practices.



Leadership

Themes

Notwithstanding the issues identified regarding deference, the independent audits evidenced a strong overall commitment to safeguarding from Church leaders. Many demonstrated this commitment through leading by example, taking authoritative action when required, integrating and recording safeguarding considerations within their decision-making processes and building a culture where 'safeguarding first' is prioritised.

However, the audits also highlighted a need for greater consistency. Whilst some leaders operate within coherent frameworks that reflect well-defined roles and responsibilities, others were less clear with the impact of leaders being variable and practice fragmented. Specifically, the role of leaders in supporting local safeguarding practice (such as through support visits and ensuring compliance with safeguarding training), needs better definition and integration with the functions of DSTs.

Whilst a commitment to safeguarding was evident, certain leadership styles were also found by the audit teams to hinder open communication about safeguarding. These circumstances could be complicated by negative legacies and power dynamics, hindering open communication and creating barriers to reporting concerns. These audit findings highlight the need for a developed response to promote communication styles that encourage transparency and help individuals to feel safe to raise their concerns without fear of reprisal. In this context, leadership very much sets the tone.

Good Practice

Effective leaders showed a good understanding of their respective roles, responsibilities and functions as they related to safeguarding. This was evidenced by authoritative, safeguarding-focused decision-making, active involvement in safeguarding matters, and a willingness to accept professional advice and challenge. These leaders frequently engaged (both formally and informally) with key safeguarding personnel, setting an example and building strong, safeguarding-focused working relationships. This approach proved particularly effective when combined with a clear leadership vision that embedded safeguarding in all aspects of Church life.

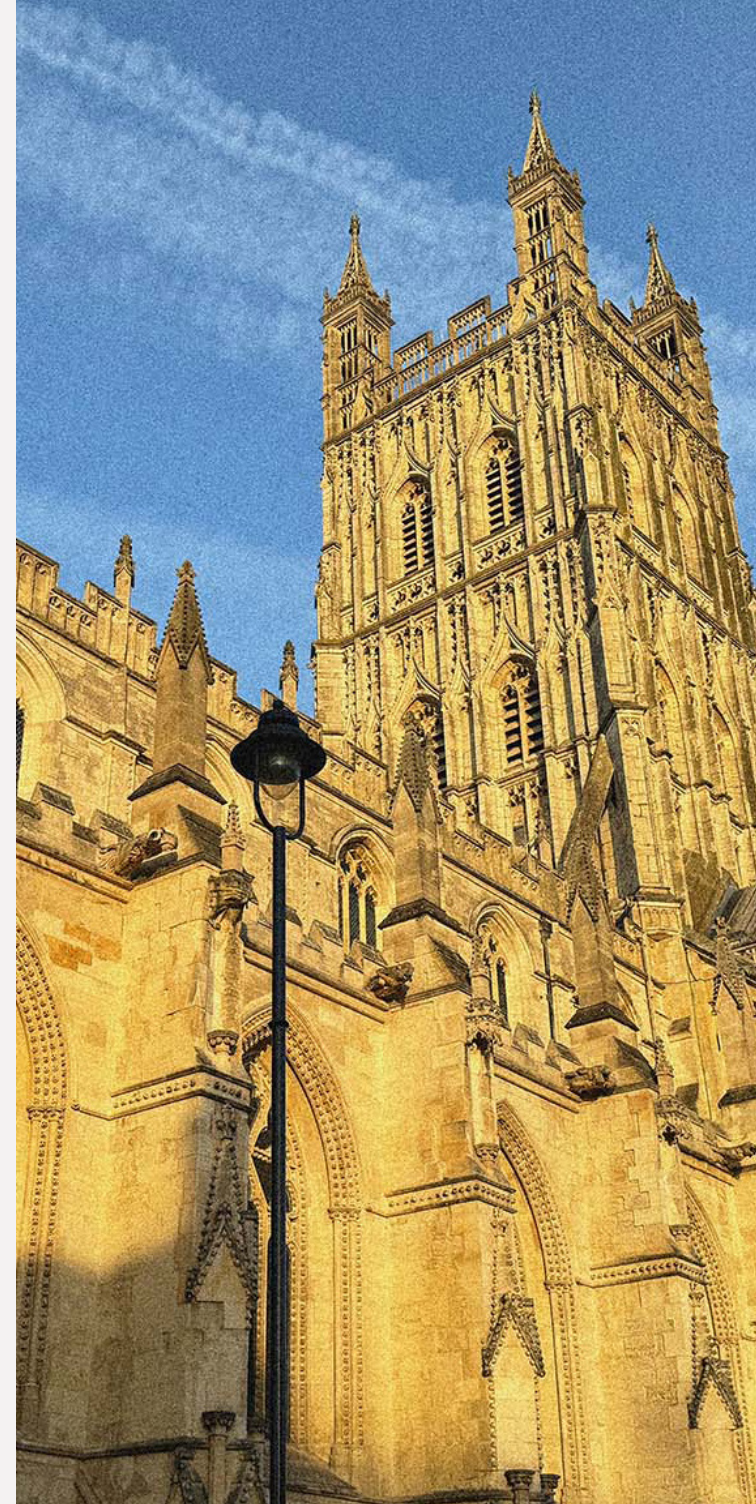
Leaders who actively sought opportunities to engage with, listen to, and practically support victims and survivors had a positive impact. Good practice included delivering unequivocal apologies (via the recipient's preferred mechanism), facilitating visits, and tailoring support to the individual needs of victims and survivors.

Senior clergy who reflected on harmful past events and their impact, and considered how their engagement could minimise re-traumatisation, demonstrated particularly thoughtful and trauma-informed approaches. For example, the audit teams found that victims and survivors appreciated considerations such as clergy attire (Church dress or less formal clothing), given the nature of some Church-based abuse.

Archdeacons demonstrating good practice proactively used various channels to identify safeguarding issues and promote good practice. These included formal and informal area meetings and visits to deaneries and parishes, where they engaged in structured safeguarding discussions.

They also played a crucial role in cascading safeguarding alerts and good practice information. The most effective approaches employed a well-planned methodology for visits, sometimes using a dedicated safeguarding template, ensuring consistent coverage and thorough exploration of key concerns. This was reinforced by using tools like the Parish Safeguarding Dashboard and pre- and debriefing sessions with the DST. This approach enhanced practice and captured valuable insights into practical parish safeguarding issues.

Finally, good practice in proactive succession planning for key leaders and safeguarding roles was evident in several areas. This forward-thinking approach ensures continuity and effective transitions, minimising disruption and maintaining a consistent focus on safeguarding.



Governance

Effective governance is essential for ensuring safeguarding arrangements are implemented effectively, and that proper oversight and scrutiny makes people safer. The governance frameworks audited were seen to comply with Charity Commission requirements and CofE expectations. Safeguarding is a regular agenda item at meetings, and there is evidence of increased commitment, professional curiosity, and safeguarding focused challenge.

Several key themes emerged from the audits in this context. These include the commitment of senior leaders, the inclusion of a range of appropriate professionals and lay members in key forums, effective risk oversight, good scrutiny processes and the intelligent use of sub-committees and the skills of DSOs.

Several areas could be strengthened These include the deeper integration of professional safeguarding expertise into decision-making

(i.e. the DSO/Director of Safeguarding should have automatic membership of key meetings); the scrutiny and analysis of safeguarding information (i.e. moving beyond passive acceptance to active analysis); governance processes (i.e. requiring more structure, including skills audits, thematic reviews of serious incident reports, and risk register reviews); and more routine consideration of DST capacity and the need to match resource against demand and ambition.

Good Practice

Many areas demonstrate a strong commitment to safeguarding through robust governance structures and effective oversight mechanisms. This includes clear lines of accountability, regular reporting, and proactive identification of risks.

Several governing and oversight bodies demonstrated a commitment to continuous improvement by regularly assessing their understanding of safeguarding and identifying any skills gaps within their membership. This self-reflection ensures that governing and oversight bodies possess the necessary expertise to provide robust challenge and advice.

Recognising the importance of diverse perspectives, some bodies have conducted audits to ensure their membership reflects the wider community. This includes actively seeking representation from local community organisations, charities, and advocates for marginalised groups. By incorporating a broader range of voices and experiences, these bodies strengthen their oversight function and ensure that safeguarding considerations are informed from differing perspectives.

The audit teams identified a noteworthy example of good practice in leadership governance. The body demonstrated a commitment to independent scrutiny and robust challenge by appointing a well-qualified independent, non-executive member to their most senior governing body, with specific responsibility for safeguarding. This appointment brings several benefits:

- **Independent Scrutiny:** The independent, non-executive provides an objective and expert perspective on safeguarding matters, free from any potential conflicts of interest.
- **Fresh Thinking and Challenge:** The independent non-executive brings new ideas and constructive challenge to safeguarding discussions and decision-making. This helps to avoid complacency and ensures that safeguarding practices are continually reviewed and improved.
- **Enhanced Governance:** The inclusion of an experienced individual strengthens the overall governance structure, ensuring that safeguarding is given due weight and consideration in all decision-making processes.

Governance and leadership bodies in DBFs and cathedrals are primarily supported by two internal scrutiny bodies; DSAPs and Cathedral Safeguarding Management Committees (CSMC) respectively. Both can play a significant role ensuring effective scrutiny and challenge. Whilst the CSMC operates under the authority of Chapter as a formal subcommittee, the DSAP is an advisory body, operating on the basis of influence alone.

CSMCs

Audits of cathedrals highlighted the valuable role of Safeguarding Management Committees (SMCs), or similar bodies in providing effective safeguarding oversight. These groups represent good practice in ensuring independent scrutiny and promoting a robust safeguarding culture. Their effectiveness stems from key features including: an independent Chair and membership, ensuring objective scrutiny and advice free from internal influence; clearly defined terms of reference, outlining roles, responsibilities, and scope; and the provision of detailed feedback to the Cathedral Chapter on safeguarding reports, enabling informed challenge, scrutiny, and strengthened accountability.

DSAP

The Audit saw good DSAPs effectively balancing strategic oversight with operational insight, benefiting from the collective scrutiny of diverse internal and external members. This structure ensured comprehensive safeguarding oversight and challenge, addressing both high-level strategy and policy development, alongside practical operational application.

Good Practice

Many DSAP Chairs facilitate strong collaboration through the securing of broad and experienced representation of internal staff, members of the worshipping community and external statutory bodies. The inclusion of independent members within some DSAPs was also seen to enhance their effectiveness.

Best practice was evidenced in those DSAPs that discharged the highest levels of professional curiosity and challenge and those who avoided solely relying on briefings led by the DSO. Additionally, DSAPs that employed a thematic deep-dive approach to examine specific safeguarding standards tended to achieve the highest levels of evidence-based reassurance.

The DSAP chairs engaged by the audit teams were of a very high calibre. They were individuals with credible, strategic-level safeguarding experience, such as former Directors of Children's and Adults' Services, Chief Police Officers, and Directors of Education.

Currently, they are remunerated inconsistently. Some receive no payment, others a small honorarium, and a few a significant daily rate. Whilst it is right that independent professionals operating in such roles are remunerated, there should be a consistent and equitable approach.





Recommendations

DSAP chairs should be paid at a daily rate in line with the remuneration of Local Safeguarding Children Partnership / Safeguarding Adult Board scrutineers and chairs.

The functions of DSAPs should be formally prescribed as scrutiny bodies, as opposed to those with an advisory capacity. In short, they should be given more ‘teeth’, with DSAP chairs providing the ‘grit of independence’ within the system. This enhanced role should include the authority of DSAPs to require information from relevant parties and to direct audit and scrutiny activity related to safeguarding. This recommendation is based on the observation that effective DSAPs already demonstrate a strong balance of strategic oversight and operational insight, leveraging the collective scrutiny of diverse internal and external members. By formalising the DSAP’s scrutiny functions and granting it the power to demand information and direct audit activity,

its ability to provide comprehensive and robust safeguarding oversight and challenge is likely to be significantly enhanced. This would build upon existing good practice, such as broad internal representation, engagement with external statutory bodies, and the inclusion of independent experts, further promoting accountability and a coordinated approach to safeguarding. Crucially, this change will empower the DSAP to move beyond relying solely on briefings and actively pursuing its own lines of enquiry.

To enhance collaboration and to ensure a cohesive approach to safeguarding, an annual meeting should be established between the Chairs (or their designated representatives) of the following groups: the Bishop’s Council (BC) (sometimes known as the Bishops’ Diocesan Council (BDC)), the DBF (and where appropriate, their Senior Leadership Team), the Bishop’s Leadership Team (BLT) (sometimes referred to as the Bishops’ Senior Management Team), the DSAP, the CSMC, and any other relevant body. **This meeting should serve to:**



- 1. Agree key safeguarding priorities:** Identifying priority areas for the upcoming year, ensuring alignment with specific oversight responsibilities, national guidance, and local needs.
- 2. Defining roles and responsibilities:** Clarifying leadership and accountability for each area of priority, avoiding duplication of effort and ensuring clear lines of responsibility.
- 3. Planning collaborative activities:** Developing a coordinated plan for addressing the chosen priorities, outlining specific actions, timelines, and resources.
- 4. Considering skills, inclusion, and diversity:** Ensuring that, collectively, these bodies reflect the communities they serve and possess the necessary skills and diverse perspectives to address a wide range of issues, leading to better-informed decision-making and improved outcomes.
- 5. Monitoring progress and addressing areas for improvement:** Tracking collective progress against agreed priorities and actions, and identifying and addressing any areas requiring improvement.
- 6. Charity Commission reporting:** Ensuring that each group has considered any issues that may engage Charity Commission requirements, promoting compliance, transparency, and accountability.
- 7. Risk register alignment:** Ensuring regular reviews and the alignment of risk registers across the different bodies, enabling a complementary approach focused on all aspects of risk linked to safeguarding issues and ensuring appropriate differentiation of risk at each level.



Leadership DST and CSAs

Themes

The audits revealed a positive picture of DSTs, characterised by well-qualified and dedicated DSAs and a commitment to continuous improvement. The adoption of blended teams, incorporating a mix of expertise and skills from those with previous credible experience in statutory and equivalent agencies and organisations. Whilst the primary challenge remains resourcing constraints, several noteworthy practices were observed:

Proactive Self-Assessment: Some DSTs have proactively undertaken Local Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) self-assessment process (Section 11 audits), demonstrating a commitment to evaluating and enhancing their safeguarding practices.

Low Threshold for Intervention: A proactive approach to safeguarding is evident in the adoption of an artificially low threshold for intervention. This ensures that potential cases are not missed and prioritises safety over workload considerations.

Active Listening and Engagement: DSAs actively engage with those involved in safeguarding roles through various initiatives, promoting collaboration and understanding. This approach ensures that safeguarding concerns are heard and addressed effectively.

The role of the DSA and the critical issues regarding capacity and the creation of a new consolidated diocese wide operational model is addressed later in the report.



Recommendations

When recruiting to roles within DSTs, including CSA positions, the following guiding principles should be followed:

1. Recruitment should aim to complement, rather than duplicate, existing team skills. For example, a team with a former child abuse investigator and probation officer might prioritise candidates with backgrounds in social care, health, or education.
2. A broader approach to recruitment should be adopted, looking beyond job titles to assess relevant experience. Whilst many statutory organisations play a role in safeguarding, not all staff within them necessarily develop the required expertise or gain direct involvement in this area. Therefore, recruitment decisions should be based on a candidate's accrued safeguarding experience, rather than solely on the organisation they belonged to.

Given their role in professional supervision and support, the NST should be involved in the recruitment of all DSOs and CSAs. This will provide an additional layer of independent insight and safeguarding expertise. If NST involvement is not possible in a particular recruitment process, a record should be made explaining why and outlining what alternative options were considered.

The Management of Clergy (Blue) Files

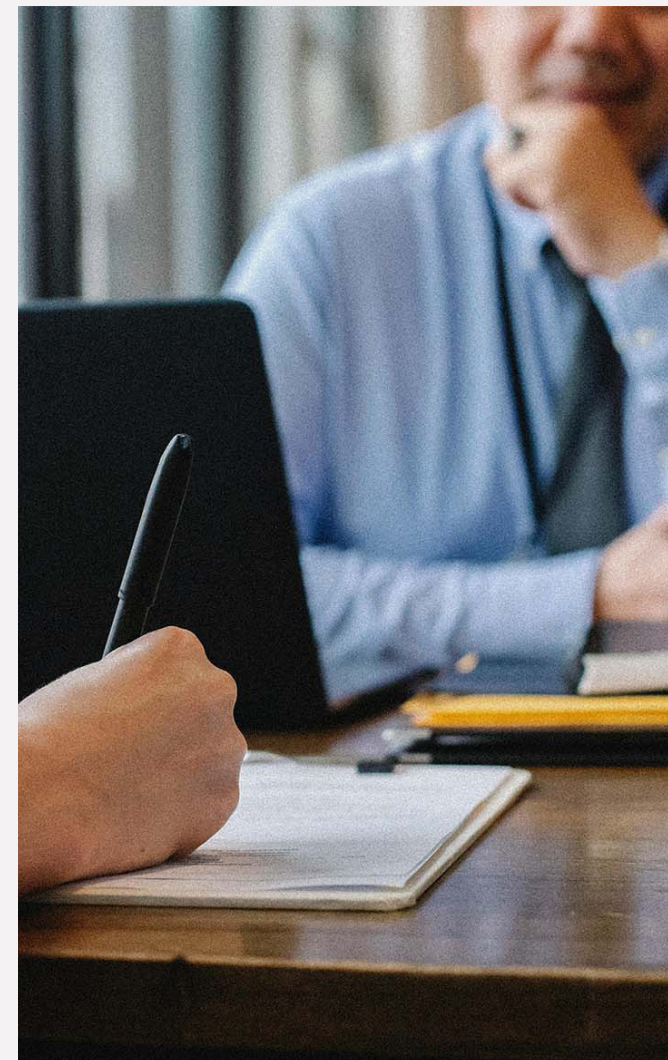
Whilst clergy files are subject to a national review and likely to be digitised at some time in the future, the current process is paper based and cumbersome.

Throughout all the audits, a range of practices were observed relating to receiving, reviewing, disseminating and storing these sensitive records. Good practice was evident in many areas, although some common improvement themes related to the disconnect between the content of Current Clergy Status Letters (CSSLs) and the information held within the files and delays in transferring records. It was also noted that most files were not stored in suitable fireproofed cabinets.

Good practice

Many areas operated robust systems with templates and prompts to ensure the efficient and consistent management of clergy files. Where practice was good, key content was easily identifiable, duplicates were removed, and access to the files was appropriately recorded.

With a few exceptions, incoming and outgoing files are reviewed by a member of the DST and the Bishop's Chaplain. This good practice ensures multiple checks and balances, facilitating a timely assessment and the identification of any immediate safeguarding requirements, such as the need for training.



Recommendation

To address the observed concerns and to ensure consistent good practice in the management of clergy files, the following recommendations are made:

1. Implement a standardised, national template and process for managing clergy files, including clear guidance on receiving, reviewing, disseminating, and storing these sensitive personnel documents. These arrangements should address the current inconsistencies in practice and ensure a uniform approach across all areas.
2. Establish a clear protocol to ensure full alignment between the content of CCSLs sent from one Bishop to another when staff move diocese. The process must verify that the information contained within clergy files is accurately mirrored in the narrative of the CCSL. This should include a process for regularly reconciling the two sets of data and addressing any discrepancies promptly.
3. Develop a clear and consistent policy regarding the urgent transfer of clergy files following the appointment of new clergy. This policy should specify a maximum timeframe for transfer and outline the responsibilities of both the sending and receiving parties.
4. Mandate the use of suitable, fireproof cabinets for the storage of all clergy files. This is essential for protecting these sensitive documents from damage or loss.
5. Formalise the good practice of dual review of incoming and outgoing files by both a member of the DST and the Bishop's Chaplain. This provides valuable checks and balances and facilitates timely assessment of any necessary safeguarding training requirements, including induction briefings.
6. Prioritise and expedite the digitisation of clergy files as part of the national review process. This will improve accessibility, reduce the reliance on cumbersome paper-based systems, and enhance security. In the interim, the standardised process (Recommendation 1) should be strictly adhered to.
7. Implement a robust system for recording access to clergy files. This should include details of who accessed the file, when, and for what purpose, ensuring appropriate confidentiality and accountability.
8. Where and when appropriate, these practices should be applied to any role that requires a clergy file (or equivalent), such as Licenced Lay Ministers LLM/ Readers and Honorary Lay Canons to cathedrals. (these are issues which will feature in our future Audit program).

CDM Process

The Audit acknowledges that the Clergy Disciplinary Measures (CDM) process is under review and welcomes this, as it considers the current system not fit for purpose.

In developing any new safeguarding measures, the CofE should consider how to expedite processes, enhance transparency, and establish a framework for decision-making based on the balance of probabilities, particularly in cases involving multiple allegations of similar offending behaviour.

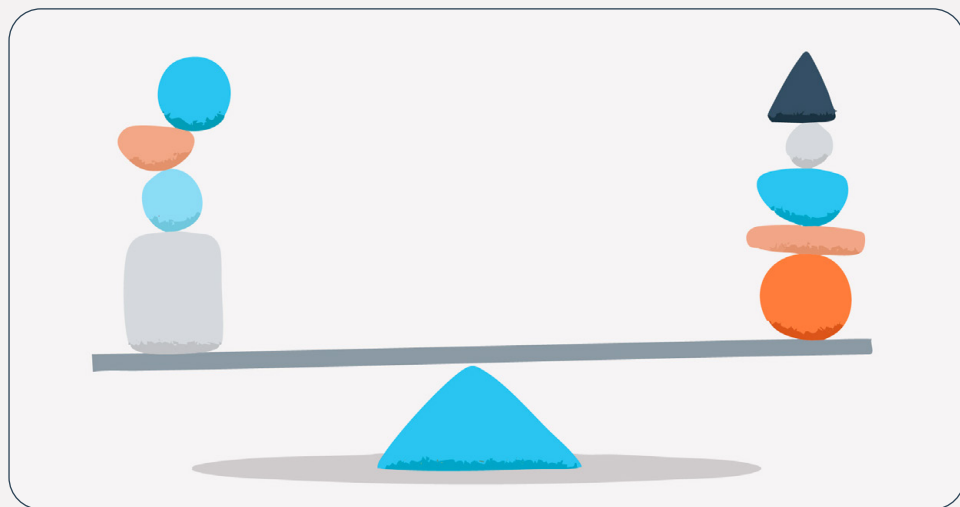
Those developing any new process should consider incorporating a 'direction of loss of confidence' provision. This would apply to persistent misconduct, even in cases where statutory agencies have not taken action.

Under such a provision, a designated Church leader could be empowered to issue a letter of no confidence, effectively removing the individual's authority to act on behalf of the Church.



Capacity

Many of the audits identified insufficient safeguarding capacity in both DBFs and cathedrals. Change in this respect is a priority and needed to ensure that DSTs have adequate time, resources, and support to effectively fulfil their responsibilities. Ultimately, without sufficient capacity, workload becomes unmanageable, the workforce becomes unstable and the ability to make people safer is hindered. The proposals set out for a different operating model seek to address this fundamental risk that is facing the CofE's overarching safeguarding arrangements.



A Different Operating Model: addressing capacity, operational independence, responsibility and accountability.

The CofE's decentralised structure, with its various self-governing bodies (e.g., Bishop's Office, DBFs, PCCs, and cathedrals), presents challenges for consistent safeguarding practice and strategic advice. The current fragmented approach to deploying safeguarding resources can create perceptions of undue influence and a lack of independence.

To address these challenges, an independent Safeguarding Directorate should be established, led by a Director of Safeguarding. In each diocese, this Directorate would consolidate all safeguarding resources and provide comprehensive support to the DBF, parishes, and cathedral. The Director would have the authority to provide expert advice and oversight, challenge senior clergy and church bodies, and escalate concerns to higher authorities, including the NST. The Directorate's remit, defined by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), would encompass the entire diocese and all its constituent bodies.

The Directorate should, at a minimum, include the Director of Safeguarding, an Operational Coordinator, two Case Officers, a Trainer, and a CSA. This consolidation of resources would address capacity and resilience issues, ensuring a uniform approach to operational safeguarding. Staff would be line managed by other safeguarding professionals, ultimately reporting to the Director.

To ensure effectiveness, the Director should be a member of and report to the Bishop's Council, Chapter, and Bishop's Staff/Senior Leadership Team. The MoU would clearly define the Director's authority and responsibility to provide safeguarding advice, support, and make authoritative decisions on all safeguarding matters. Adequate resourcing and staffing, including all professional safeguarding staff (including those at the cathedral), are essential.

This structure would provide operational independence for safeguarding within each diocese, with the Director of Safeguarding holding the powers of a DSO and acting as the ultimate safeguarding voice. It would

also clarify roles within the DST, separating strategic responsibilities from operational delivery (e.g., awareness-raising, training, and case management). The Director, as a suitably experienced and qualified professional³, would provide focused leadership, prioritising safeguarding across the diocese. They would line-manage all safeguarding staff and develop and implement a comprehensive safeguarding strategy.

Critically, the Director would be a member of the senior leadership team(s) and act as a critical friend and expert advisor on all governing and leadership bodies, including the Bishop's Council, Bishop's Staff meetings, and the Cathedral Chapter. The Director would be the ultimate authority on safeguarding matters and chair an escalation process for resolving disagreements.

Finally, this structure balances operational independence with the accountability of governing bodies and their Chairs (Bishops and Deans). While the Director has the final say on operational safeguarding matters,

they report to governing bodies whose role it is to ensure good governance and oversight, thereby ensuring that church leaders do not abdicate their trustee responsibilities.

The most common concern raised by Diocesan Secretaries has been the desire to improve safeguarding provision, hampered by a lack of financial resources. A financial audit of dioceses, conducted by BDO, highlighted the precarious financial situation that many face, presenting an extremely challenging future⁴.

The safeguarding audits have concluded that the Church can no longer deliver effective safeguarding with severely limited resources, as is currently the case in some areas. For 2025, the audit team will work with Dr. Sam Nunney of the NST to develop an evidence-based resourcing model that goes beyond simply benchmarking current provision.

³Suitable professional backgrounds for this role include strategic-level positions such as Director of Children's Services, Adults' Services, Education, or Health. Senior police officers with experience in public protection and/or child abuse are also well suited.

⁴<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/gs-misc-1384-diocesan-finance-review-july-2024-updated-today.pdf>

The Church Commissioners fund a range of roles, including, but not limited to, Suffragan Bishops, Deans, and several Residentiary Canons, as well as the entire NST. It is therefore logical that the greatest risk to the Church – failing to build safeguarding resilience – should also be funded by them. Greater consistency is key, and this must be linked to addressing the current inconsistent approach to funding and resourcing.

The Audit notes and supports this year's triennium funding bid to provide a CSA for every Cathedral, but the CSA must work within and as an integrated member of the wider safeguarding directorate.

Whilst individual dioceses may wish to fund additional posts beyond the model outlined in this report, any such additional safeguarding resources must operate to and under the professional supervision of the Director of Safeguarding.

This approach strikes a balance between the need for safeguarding to be delivered by and within the Church, through an operationally independent safeguarding directorate, and the need for each institution to fulfil its governance responsibilities.



Chorister Safeguarding

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

The following section summarises key findings on chorister safeguarding in ten Church of England cathedrals. It outlines identified themes, highlights examples of good practice, and presents recommendations to strengthen safeguarding arrangements for choristers.

For further detail, please refer to the full Chorister Safeguarding Companion Report 2024:



**Chorister Safeguarding
Companion Report 2024**

<https://ineqe.com/churchofengland/#annual-report>

Themes

Across all cathedrals, there was an evident and commendable commitment to safeguarding, underpinned by policy, procedure, and oversight. Staff demonstrated a strong desire to continually improve care for choristers through innovative and considered approaches. The audit teams identified the following key areas of both strength and weakness.

Supervision and Safeguarding

Responsibilities: Responsibility for choristers was generally well understood, with chaperoning and appropriate staff-to-chorister ratios being a notable strength.

Communication and Information Sharing:

Good communication with parents was evident in many cathedrals, with dedicated and monitored communication channels to allow for quick and transparent exchanges. The establishment of low-level concerns logs was a strong feature and arrangements for sharing information with schools were embedded in some areas.

Scheduling and Wellbeing: Many cathedrals have achieved a positive balance between a chorister's commitment to the choir and their overall wellbeing. This was often due to strong collaboration between cathedral staff and schools, as well as a 'safeguarding first' approach to scheduling, particularly during high pressure periods such as Christmas and Easter.

Physical Safety and Environment: Merging safeguarding with the historic architecture of the building proved challenging in some cathedrals, however creating a safe environment for choristers was found to be a priority for staff. In the majority of audited cathedrals, choristers used dedicated toilet facilities (or other suitable arrangements) during rehearsals and services, ensuring that staff and public access was restricted. Managing unauthorised photography was also a notable strength across all cathedrals.

Policies and Risk Management: Policies and procedures within music departments were typically well-documented and provided clear guidance for parents and staff.



Good Practice

Good practice was evidenced in transport arrangements. In one cathedral's use of taxis for choristers, although drivers are enhanced DBS checked, a decision has been made to never leave children alone in vehicles.

Tools like ChurchSuite were used in some areas to centralise attendance and information about allergies, parent contact details and other important information.

In one cathedral, when parents/carers inform staff that someone else will be collecting their child, a frequently updated password is used to ensure their identity.

Good practice was evidenced in the use of low-level concerns logs to identify and review patterns of behaviour that may cause concern. In situations where individuals were both chorister parents and staff members, appropriate consideration was given maintaining the balance between safeguarding and privacy.

Cathedrals with online safety policies for choristers demonstrated good practice. In one cathedral, the provision of online safety training for choristers, parents, and staff was particularly commendable, especially as digital devices were issued for choir use.

Another cathedral takes a novel approach to discouraging unauthorised photography by making tannoid announcements as choristers enter the building.

Recommendations

Although much good practice was seen by the audit teams, the themes identified also included areas where practice was varied or could be improved. Variations were particularly notable in the management of the chorister schedule, information sharing and recording, the use of CCTV and contextualised training for staff.

Whilst some cathedrals demonstrated exemplary approaches, it was evident that a cohesive national framework would help drive more consistent and effective practice across the board. To this end, the following recommendations are made for the NST.

Recommendation: The NST should, in collaboration with cathedral safeguarding and chorister staff, develop a set of standards or guidelines to support the safeguarding arrangements surrounding choristers. This should not adopt a ‘one size fits all’ approach, but instead outline key safeguarding principles that should form standard practice across all cathedrals.

The standards should include, but not be limited to, the following areas:

1. **Supervision & Safeguarding Responsibilities:** Addressing chaperoning, oversight, and the management of responsibilities between those involved in chorister care.
2. **Communication & Information Sharing:** Establishing clear processes for how safeguarding-related information is documented and shared.
3. **Schedule & Wellbeing:** Balancing tradition, chorister wellbeing and scheduling demands, particularly during busy periods.
4. **Physical Safety & Environment:** Implementing preventative measures to enhance choristers’ physical safety.
5. **Policies & Risk Management:** Providing templated checklists and guidance for formal procedures to manage safeguarding risks.

The following recommendations should also be incorporated into the safeguarding standards:

Some chaperones did not feel empowered to manage chorister behaviour and often relied on senior staff. A lack of clarity regarding their role, or insufficient knowledge and confidence were the most cited reasons. As key members of the supervision team, chaperones should be able to act decisively and effectively when necessary.

Recommendation: All staff working with choristers should receive behaviour management training, including strategies for supporting additional needs. This training should be developed collaboratively with local or connected schools to ensure a unified approach. Additionally, clarity regarding roles and responsibilities should extend to choristers and their parents to create a fully supported environment.

Information sharing between cathedrals and schools was generally frequent and effective in models where schools were located on site, or near the cathedral. For recruitment models with less integrated relationships, the flow of key information was inconsistent.

Recommendation: Cathedrals should ensure that the process of logging low-level concerns is routine and consistent, with regular reviews to identify patterns and share relevant information with appropriate staff and connected schools.

In a small number of cathedrals, an unhealthy culture existed surrounding scheduling and time off, creating visible undue pressure on choristers. Balancing their musical contributions with academic and social responsibilities should not be unequally distributed among cathedrals. This is particularly crucial during the most demanding times of the year.

Recommendation: The NST should develop and implement national guidelines for chorister scheduling and wellbeing. These guidelines should provide clear parameters on the number of hours children can be expected to commit to chorister duties, particularly during peak periods such as Christmas and Easter, ensuring that adequate rest periods are factored into the schedule. The guidelines should take heed of UK child employment laws⁵ (where relevant) and child performance and activities licensing in England⁶.

The audits firmly supported the installation of CCTV in enclosed areas such as the organ loft to mitigate risks of the space being misused. It is important to adopt the mindset that ‘it can happen here’, even in environments built on trust.

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/child-employment>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-performance-and-activities-licensing-legislation>

Recommendation: Cathedrals should review their use of CCTV in chorister areas to prevent and respond to inappropriate behaviour. This should include, but not be limited to, enclosed spaces such as the organ loft.

Choristers were often unaware or not provided with a contact number in case they became lost or separated from their group when on trips or events with the cathedral. In today's digital age, ensuring access to a contact number is crucial. For those without mobile devices, a physical contact number on a lanyard or similar item would enhance their safety and should be incorporated into missing child or safeguarding policies.

Recommendation: Cathedrals should include provisions for contact numbers in their policies and procedures for trips and events to mitigate risks associated with missing or lost children.

Whilst some visuals were used, an opportunity was missed to provide specific, child-friendly safeguarding messaging in key chorister areas. Although seemingly insignificant, it can be a helpful and constant reminder to a young person about how they can seek help and from whom.

Recommendation: Cathedrals should display child-friendly safeguarding signposting in key chorister areas, such as song rooms/schools, and the back of toilet doors. Where possible, this should be developed collaboratively with young people.



Prevention

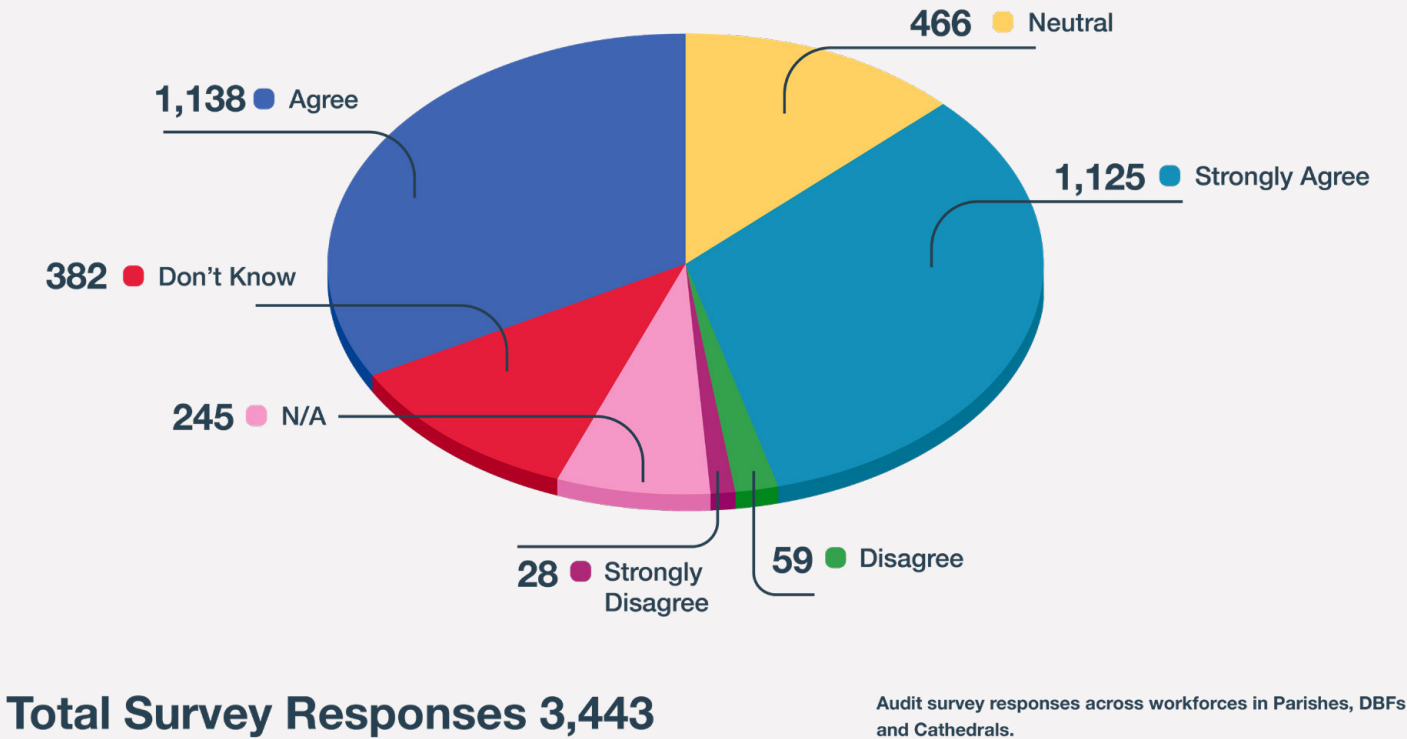
Prevention is an essential aspect of safeguarding within the Church. If effective, it can mitigate risk, stop harm from occurring in the first place and ultimately lead to better outcomes for people. Safeguarding arrangements in this respect require not just clear policies, strong guidance, and accessible handbooks that articulate the focus on prevention, but also open communication and awareness-raising. Promoting a shared understanding of risks, signs of abuse, and reporting procedures empowers everyone to build safer environments.

The good practice seen by the audit team involving prevention activity the dedication of the many volunteers who play a vital frontline role across parishes and cathedrals. Indeed, their diverse contributions are invaluable and reflect a shared commitment to fostering a safer environment for all.



Safer Recruitment

“
I have seen
improvements
with safer
recruitment
practices in
my diocese.”



Themes

The audits saw good evidence of the progress made by both DBFs and Cathedrals in implementing robust safer recruitment arrangements, with appropriate alignment to the House of Bishops' guidance on Safer Recruitment and People Management. For example, the audit team identified the routine use of confidential declarations, DBS checks and procedures for responding to concerns / risk was routine in most areas. It also saw investment in safer recruitment training for relevant personnel and a range of support resources in place to guide those working in DBFs and Cathedrals.

Positively, DBFs are active in providing good support to parishes on safer recruitment via toolkits, eligibility guides, and the Parish Dashboard.⁷ Comprehensive support is aided by videos, newsletters, FAQs, inductions, forums, and PSO engagement.

Good Practice

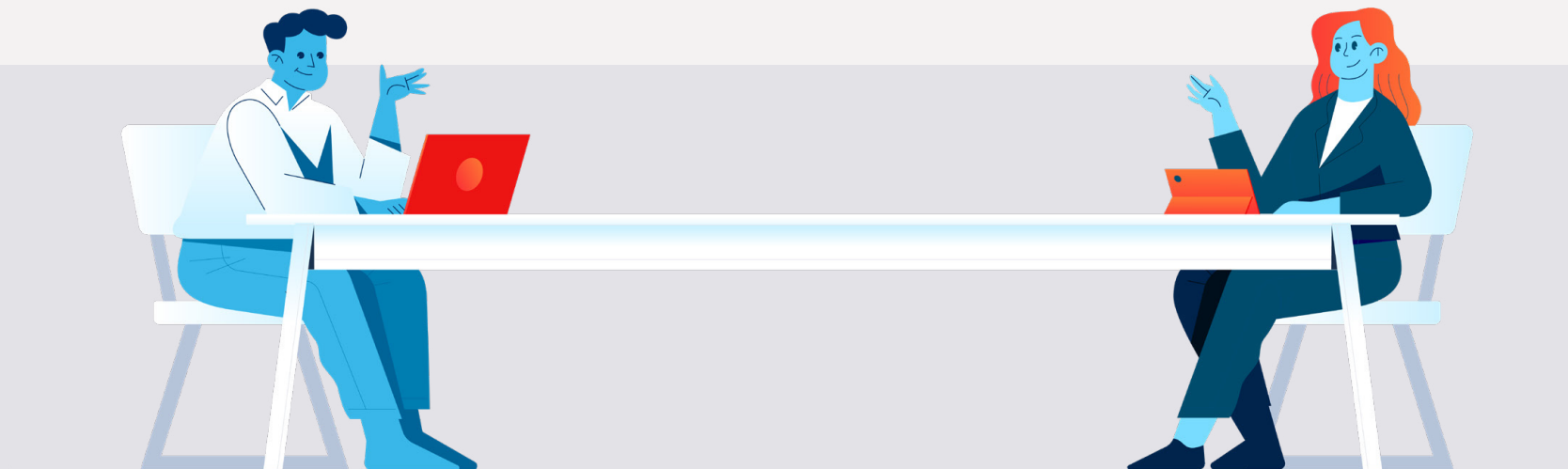


Some cathedrals adopt tools such as the Parish Safeguarding Dashboard, Safeguarding Hub, and Church Suite for staff/volunteer recruitment and management. Evidence from the audits support adapting such tools for cathedral use, even if not originally designed for them.

Delays in DBS checks/renewals, outside the diocese's control, have necessitated procedural adjustments to allow for extra processing time.

Some cathedrals and DBFs effectively communicate their safeguarding commitment during recruitment by prominently displaying clear statements on dedicated webpages, ensuring consistent messaging, reinforcing that safeguarding is a core value and avoiding confusion from varied job adverts.

⁷<https://www.safeguardingdashboards.org.uk/contact-us>
<https://www.safeguardinghubs.org.uk/contact-us>



In one DBF audit, evidence was seen of practice going beyond that outlined within the national CofE guidance. Specifically, a recently introduced policy requiring that all DBF staff (whose role does not qualify for an Enhanced DBS check) have a Basic check. This approach has been extended to all PCC members, including Churchwardens. Where parish volunteers are not eligible for an Enhanced DBS check, but occupy roles of responsibility, the DBF advises that a Basic check is recommended. Furthermore, whilst adhering to standard procedures for recruiting ex-offenders, the DBF implement additional arrangements to enhance the mitigation of risk. These include restricting individuals with sexual offence convictions from holding certain representational / public-facing roles like bell-ringing, choir participation or playing the organ.

Recommendations

Recommendation: Although many DBFs and cathedrals demonstrate good practice in safer recruitment, there remains room for improvement. Some Church bodies could strengthen communication around their commitment to safeguarding. Specifically, this includes clarifying and improving messaging within recruitment advertising and enhancing communication methods to ensure that key safeguarding messages are reinforced.

Recommendation: Furthermore, whilst DBFs have championed the Parish Dashboard, a consistent approach to quality assurance is needed across the CofE to ensure its effectiveness. This means clear guidelines for how data is entered, with regular audits to make sure this is accurate, complete and used to help identify themes, patterns and trends requiring action.



Recommendation: Notwithstanding the greater numbers of volunteers involved, the unique staff and volunteer roles within cathedrals indicates that greater clarity may be required regarding the appropriate DBS check for certain positions.

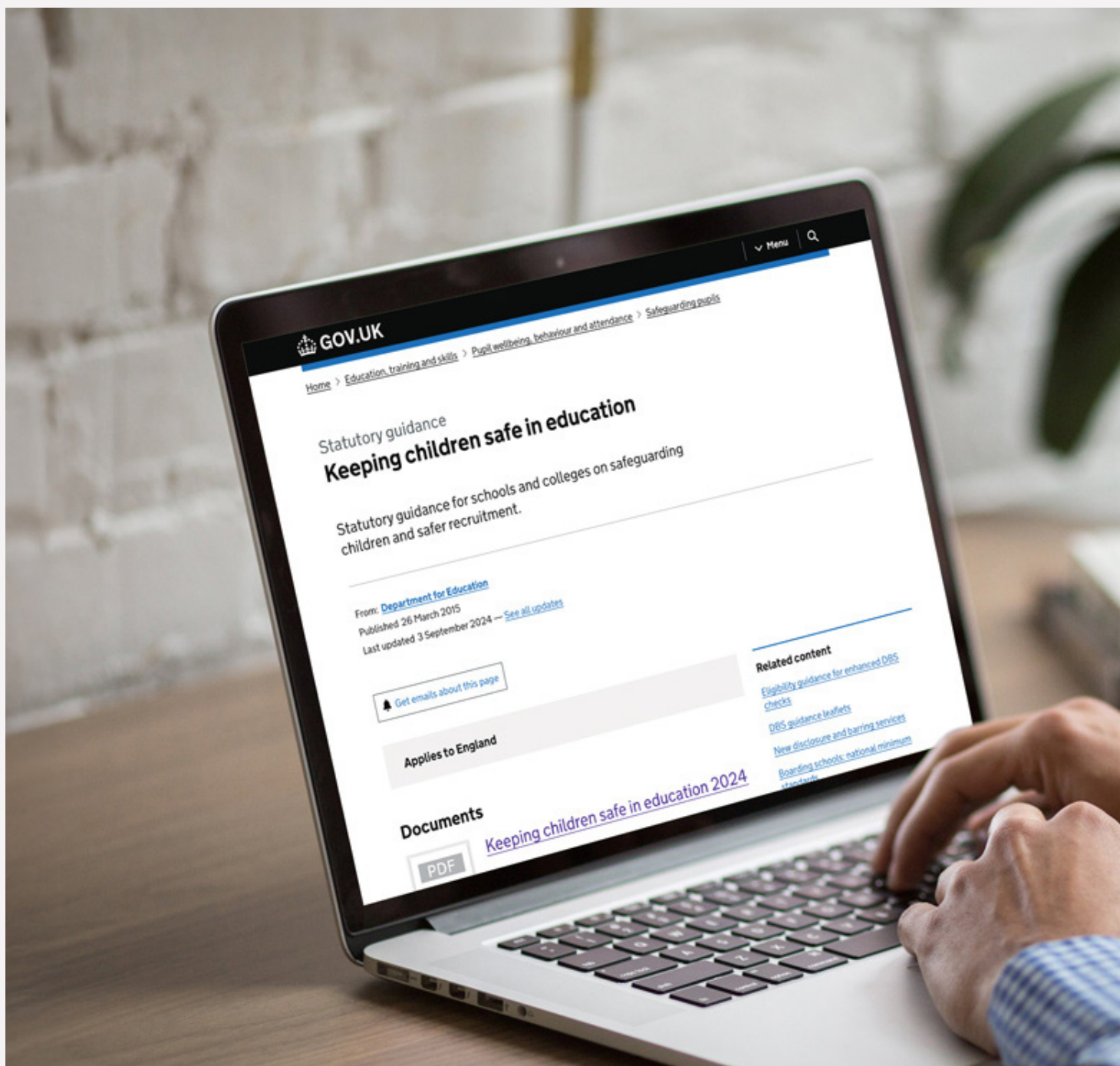
Recommendation: In line with the guidance available for schools (Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2024),⁸ recruitment processes in the Church could be equally enhanced through conducting online searches as part of 'due diligence' on shortlisted candidates. Online searches can help identify publicly available information about a candidate that might warrant further discussion during an interview. Church bodies should be transparent about this practice and inform shortlisted candidates that such searches may be conducted.

Online searches about job candidates should be conducted within a specific framework⁹, ensuring they focus solely on publicly available information relevant to safeguarding. This framework should mandate transparency, consistency, and proportionality, with candidates informed beforehand. Searches should also be limited to shortlisted candidates and conducted by a designated individual, avoiding any “fishing expeditions.” Any concerning information found online should be discussed directly with the candidate during the interview process. Importantly, relevant legislation must be adhered to throughout.

Recommendation: The national candidate portal should be used to manage individuals throughout the discernment process, tracks and flag instances where a person withdraws or pauses their candidacy in one diocese and subsequently resumes the process in a different area. The system should specifically flag these re-entries.

⁹<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2> KCSIE 2024 re Online Searches (Page 59, para 226).

⁹<https://www.naswt.org.uk/advice/in-the-classroom/children-and-young-people/safeguarding-children-and-child-protection/keeping-children-safe-in-education-england/conducting-online-searches-candidates-england.html>



Adopting and Sharing Good Practice

Prioritising the sharing of effective safeguarding practices and investing in the development of volunteers, PSOs, and safeguarding professionals is essential for creating safer environments across the Church.

Themes

Across all areas audited, good networks are in place enabling people to share their experiences and learn from one another. These networks operate at a variety of levels, from senior leadership teams, local parochial church councils (PCCs) to safeguarding teams engaging with Local Authority networks.

Good Practice

Some DBFs have offered PSO drop-in sessions, whilst others have hosted more formal, face-to-face events focusing on new and emerging themes as they relate to their role.



One cathedral has successfully implemented Town Hall meetings, providing a valuable forum for discussing anonymised case studies, sharing updates on safeguarding practices, and promoting wider learning within the cathedral community.

Recommendations

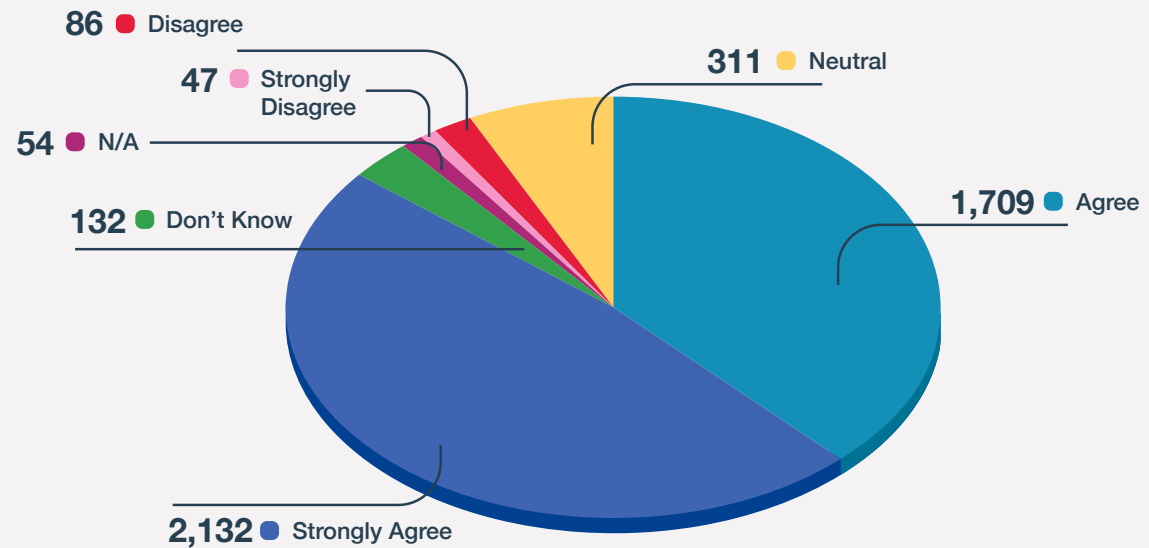
DBFs should consider how they enhance their investment in the development of Parish Safeguarding Officers (PSOs). This should focus on improving their knowledge and skills through various means, such as face-to-face diocesan events, informal drop-in sessions, and other opportunities for ongoing learning, support and development.



Awareness Raising

“

I have seen improvements with raising the levels of awareness around safeguarding”




Total Survey Responses 4,461

Audit survey responses across workforces in Parishes, DBFs and Cathedrals.

Themes

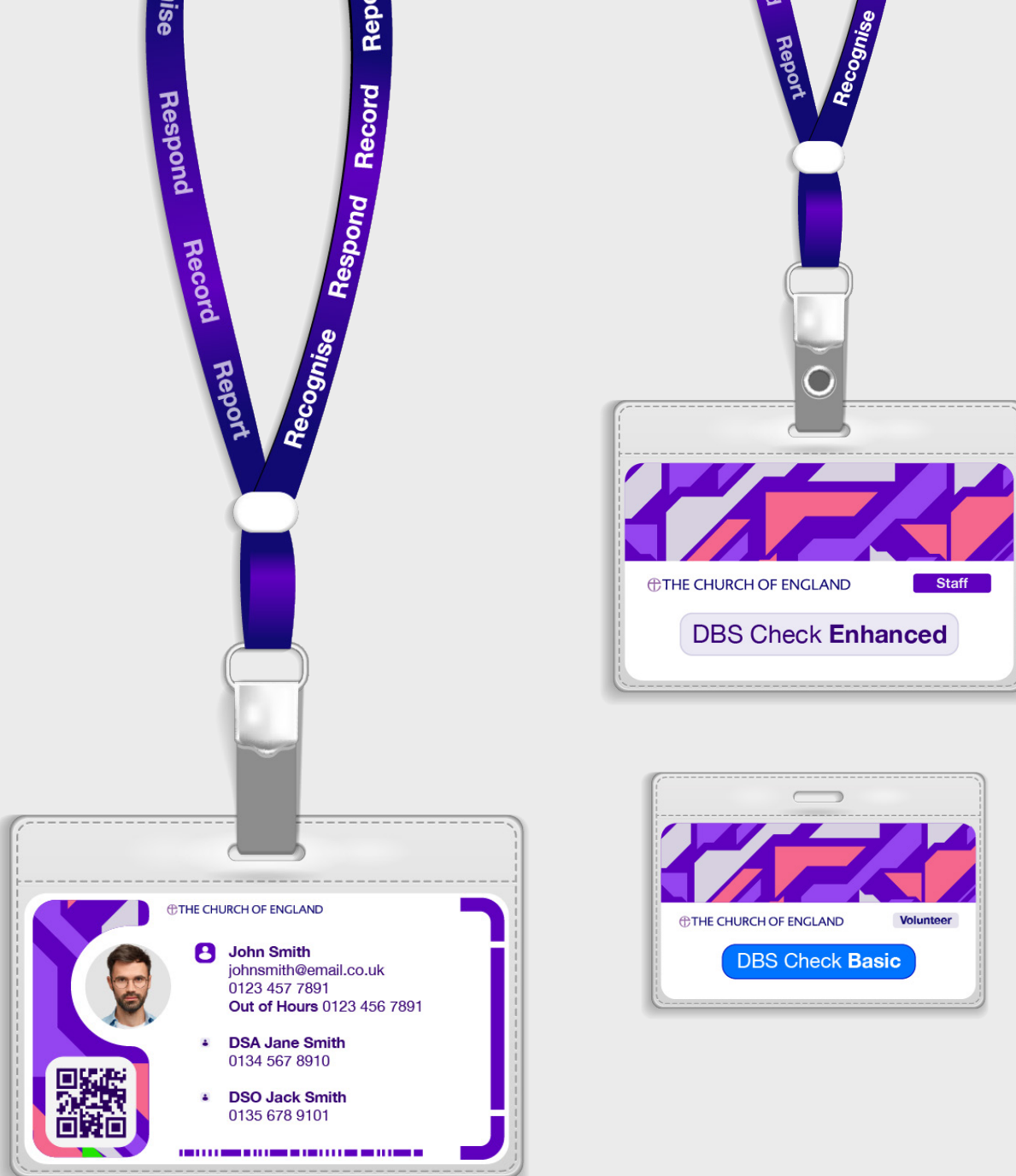
The audits saw good evidence of effective awareness raising that was amplifying key messages and helping to people to better recognise and respond to safeguarding matters. There was a range of good material and campaigns covering the themes of domestic abuse, modern slavery, child abuse, vulnerable adult abuse, and spiritual abuse. Initiatives also promoted online safety, raising awareness about financial abuse, elder abuse, stalking, harassment, neglect, and mental health issues, and supporting those affected by homelessness and substance misuse.


Many areas use a combination of approaches to raise awareness. These include annual 'Safeguarding Sundays', newsletters, posters, the use of safeguarding 'Z' cards (shared at key events), and the integration of relevant issues within sermons. Social media platforms are also used effectively to share news, stories, and resources with a wider audience.


 Building on these methods, cathedrals have also employed creative and engaging approaches to promote safeguarding, incorporating safeguarding themes as part of exhibitions, events, and sermons.

Good Practice

The audits highlighted the powerful impact of sharing lived experiences to raise awareness. Personal stories resonate with audiences, fostering deeper understanding and empathy by humanising the issue and challenging assumptions. These accounts offer authentic insights into the complexities of abuse, its diverse manifestations, and its long-term impact. Furthermore, sharing stories of survival and resilience can empower others to come forward, seek support, and advocate for change.



 One cathedral's collaborative "County Lines" project is noteworthy. Partnering with community organisations and schools, the initiative used arts to educate youth on grooming and exploitation risks. A film was produced and a school event at the Cathedral engaged 150 young people.

 The audits found evidence across a number of cathedrals novel approaches to raise awareness through physically displaying information on ID Badges and lanyards. Such approaches include:

Such approaches include:

- ID badges for staff and volunteers, visibly displaying the level of DBS check.
- Contact details for the Safeguarding Lead displayed on back of ID badges.
- Reinforcing the Four 'R's (Recognise, Respond, Record, Report) messaging on lanyards.

Recommendations

To assist in the implementation of the National Safeguarding Standards, the audits highlighted the necessity for a more robust framework to guide and coordinate safeguarding awareness-raising initiatives. This framework should provide guidance on delivering a consistent and structured approach to communicating about the different forms of abuse, including child sexual abuse, domestic abuse, and abuse of vulnerable adults

The audits identified email as an impactful method for communicating with cohorts of volunteers, specifically PSOs and those serving at cathedrals. Whilst excessive email communication is to be avoided, the integration of safeguarding messaging within a considered, regular, and systematic programme of email correspondence is recommended to enhance awareness and promote best practice.

Email offers an efficient way for cathedrals and dioceses to share vital safeguarding information, especially when resources are limited. Key updates, such as newsletters or guidance from LSCEPs and Safeguarding Adults Boards, could be easily disseminated to volunteers and staff.



To enhance communication around safeguarding, cathedrals should consider adopting a more strategic and data-driven approach. This involves measuring the effectiveness of communications, tailoring messages to the local context, and optimising the use of different platforms, including exploring podcasts. Social media channels should consistently reinforce safeguarding messages, with content tailored to each platform's audience. Finally, cathedrals should leverage national awareness days and campaigns to amplify their messages and reach to a wider audience.





Safeguarding Webpages

Themes

The audits saw many good examples of well-designed diocesan safeguarding webpages that were user-friendly, visually appealing, and easy to navigate. Websites were mobile responsive and optimised for search engines to ensure accessibility for all audiences. Clear signposting guides visitors to important information and resources. Information was organised logically, based on user needs and priority, with a clear emphasis on how to report safeguarding concerns.



Cathedrals are also doing well in creating effective safeguarding webpages. Many have clear messaging, contact information, and there is easy access to key documents. These websites too are generally mobile-friendly and have a modern design. Some have excellent search engine optimisation (SEO) and a prominent safeguarding section in their main menu. The webpages seen by the audit teams provide clear calls to action and present information in a logical format, making it easy for visitors to find what they need.

Good Practice

The following highlights the good practice seen within diocesan safeguarding webpages. This is not an exhaustive list and is a starting point for minimum requirements.

Clear and Prominent Safeguarding

Section: Ensure the safeguarding section is easily accessible from the main menu and prominently displayed on the homepage.

Report a Safeguarding Concern: Provide clear and concise information on what to do in an emergency or if someone is at immediate risk, including contact details for relevant authorities and support services. Clearly outline the reporting pathways for safeguarding concerns, including contact details for the DSO and other relevant personnel.

Support for Victims and Survivors:

Include links to local and national support services, such as helplines, victim support organisations, and specialist agencies.

Parish Safeguarding: This could include a range of materials to help parishes create safer church environments, such as guidance documents, risk assessment templates, and relevant forms and templates. It could also provide detailed information on the role of the PSO and guidance on how to effectively utilise the Safeguarding Parish Dashboards and Parish Safeguarding Hubs.

Safer Recruitment & DBS Checks: This would provide comprehensive support for safer recruitment practices in parishes. It could include links to national CofE guidance, templates for key recruitment documents (e.g., role descriptions, application forms), and a DBS eligibility checker and associated procedures.

Types of Abuse: Include information on different types of abuse, including physical, emotional, sexual, and spiritual abuse, to raise awareness and understanding.

Safeguarding Training: Including what safeguarding training is and who it is for, how to access to the national safeguarding learning pathways, access to other diocese-specific training. To ensure accessibility and support for all, this section could include a prompt acknowledging that safeguarding training content can be distressing. It could then encourage those who may struggle with online access or the material itself to reach out to their PSO or the safeguarding team for support or alternative options.

Policies, Procedures & Guidance: Provide easy access to key safeguarding policies and documents, such as the House of Bishops' guidance and the audited bodies own safeguarding procedures.

Safeguarding Governance & Oversight:

This could provide access to external audits, national safeguarding standards, complaints and whistleblowing procedures, strategies and annual reports.

Safeguarding Webpage features:

- Option to subscribe to Safeguarding Newsletter
- Commitment to Safeguarding Statement
- Safeguarding Contacts
- Resource Library
- Use analytics to track website usage and identify areas for improvement.
- Use of different formats for sharing info (e.g. video explainers, testimonials, co-produced resources.)

Recommendations

The CofE, in conjunction with the NST, should review the good practice identified through the audits and determine the most effective way to develop them further, communicate these findings, and share them with all dioceses to ensure consistent and high-quality online safeguarding webpages.



Appropriate Boundaries

Themes

Many audits found good practice with Church bodies providing information on appropriate boundaries. Such information was ordinarily maintained in up-to-date safeguarding handbooks for staff and volunteers, which included clear signposting to relevant policies.



Recognising the unique and influential roles within the cathedral, some have implemented separate codes of conduct, which provide good, contextual standards for staff and volunteers to understand and maintain appropriate boundaries.



Good Practice



An audit of one cathedral found that their Eucharistic services include a rubric, reminding worshippers to be mindful and respectful of personal boundaries when exchanging the Peace.

It is positive to see the implementation of Digital Safeguarding Policies that address the risks associated with digital engagement, particularly lone working in a digital context.

One audited body demonstrated good practice by holding an “Enacting Appropriate Boundaries” workshop.

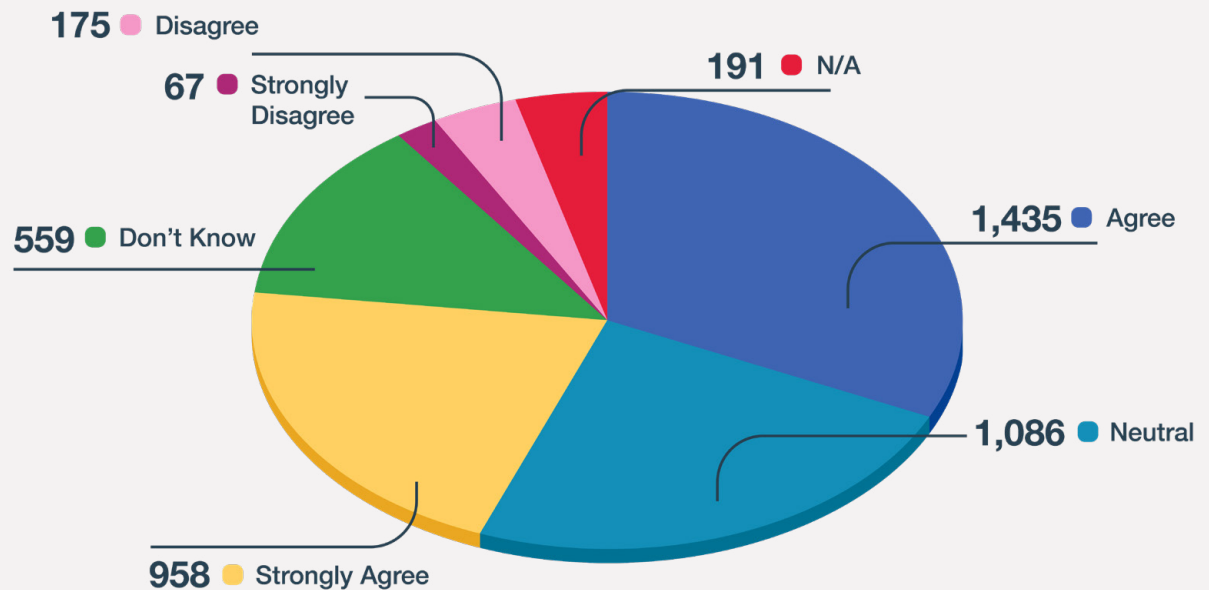
Recommendations

Safeguarding in youth ministry requires careful consideration of boundaries on social media. The NST should consider developing comprehensive Safeguarding Policies specifically addressing digital spaces and provide training for all personnel involved in youth ministry to ensure they are equipped to navigate the complexities of digital safeguarding.

Voices of Children and Young People

“

I have seen improvements with the views of children and adults being heard.”



Total Survey Responses 4,471

Audit survey responses across workforces in Parishes, DBFs and Cathedrals.

Themes

Meaningful, participatory spaces for engaging with children and young people exist across various settings, including youth groups, cathedral education programs, and family services. Further efforts to actively listen to young people were seen by the audit teams through surveys, focus groups and established youth councils or forums.



Whilst the opportunity for engaging children and young people in the cathedral context is somewhat less frequent, the audit generally noted a commitment to strengthening this area.

Good Practice

The audits identified several examples of good practice demonstrating the DBFs commitment to listening to the voices of children and young people.

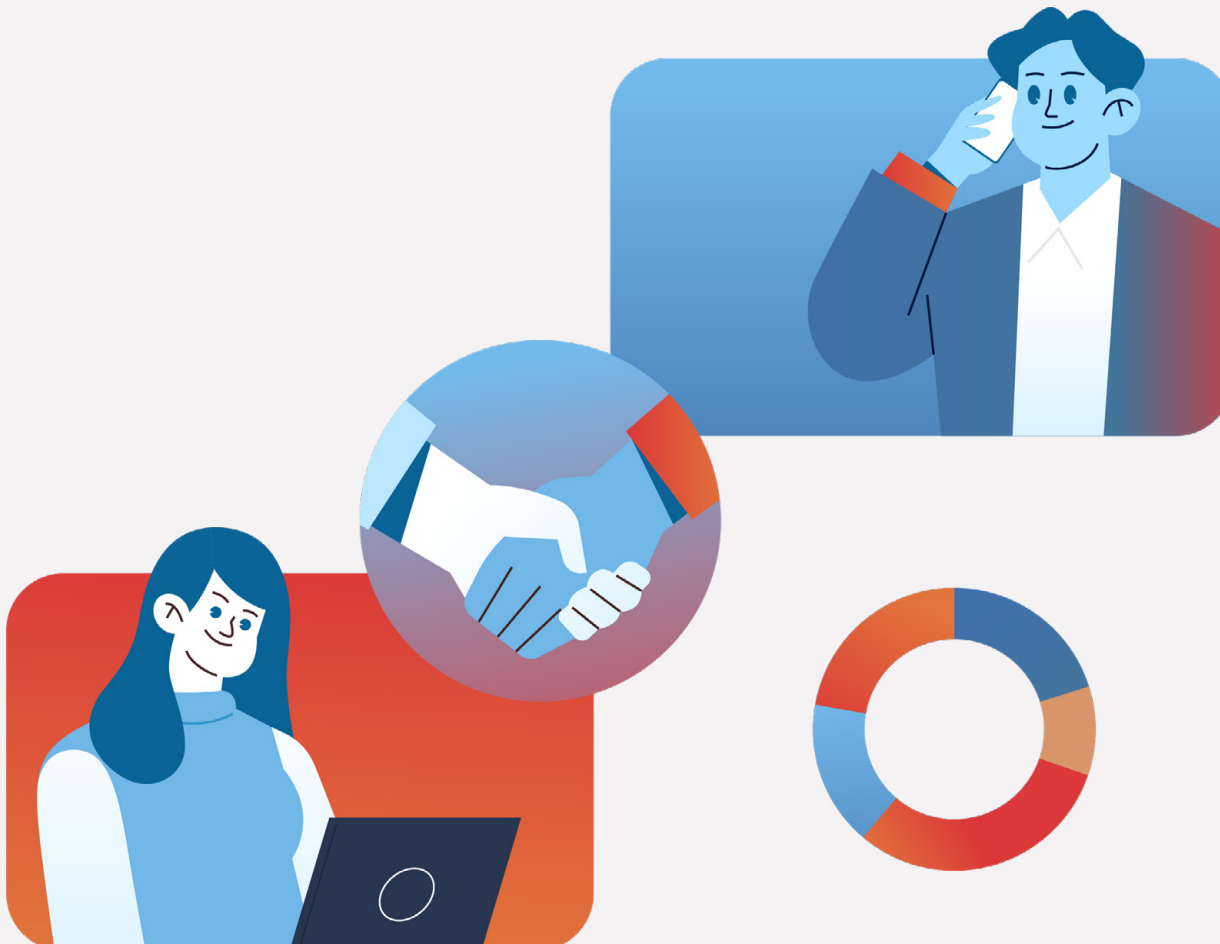
Initiatives like “Amplify: Whispers to Waves” encourage youth participation in church activities and empower them to turn ideas into action. A Youth and Families Padlet Board, maintained by one diocesan Children, Youth and Family Enabler, shares resources, activities, and safeguarding materials, including the “Raise your Roar with Roarry” campaign and Childline posters.

Recommendations

Diocese and Cathedral should consider formalising their approaches to listening to children, young people, and their wider families by establishing a dedicated advisory council, conducting surveys and focus groups, and implementing suggestion boxes or online feedback forms.



Lone Working



Themes

Findings from the Audit indicated that DBFs and cathedrals are taking steps to protect staff and volunteers who work alone. Such measures include implemented lone working policies that often include risk assessment templates, safety guidelines, and communication protocols. Training and resources are provided to help lone workers recognise and manage risks.

Good Practice

Some DBFs have introduced extra safety measures like personal safety workshops and technology for check-ins.

Recommendations



Cathedrals could further enhance this aspect of practice, particularly for key roles that are potentially exposed to a higher degree of lone working, such as vergers.

Safeguarding Risks Associated to Building Layout

Themes

The audits found that DBFs and cathedrals are actively embracing the CofE's Safer Environments and Activities guidance, and they are effectively promoting the Parish Safeguarding Handbook, which includes a 'Code of safer working practice.'



Most cathedrals have CCTV systems covering key areas, with staff and volunteers generally aware of their use. There are procedures in place for responding to incidents captured on CCTV, which may involve reporting to authorities or internal investigations. CCTV is often integrated into broader safeguarding policies and risk assessments, ensuring that surveillance is targeted effectively.

Good Practice

The audits found several encouraging examples of good practice regarding safeguarding and building safety.

One DBF demonstrates good practice by providing template policies with clear guidance on conducting home visits safely. This includes practical advice such as leaving bedroom doors open when visiting someone confined to bed and only entering rooms when invited, demonstrating a commitment to respecting privacy and personal boundaries.

Another DBF has taken proactive steps to equip individuals with the knowledge and skills to ensure personal safety. They have facilitated training sessions covering topics such as reacting to threats, violence, and creating safe areas at home, in church, and public spaces.

An audited DBF has provided support and advice to parishes on managing risks associated with the misuse of church outbuildings.

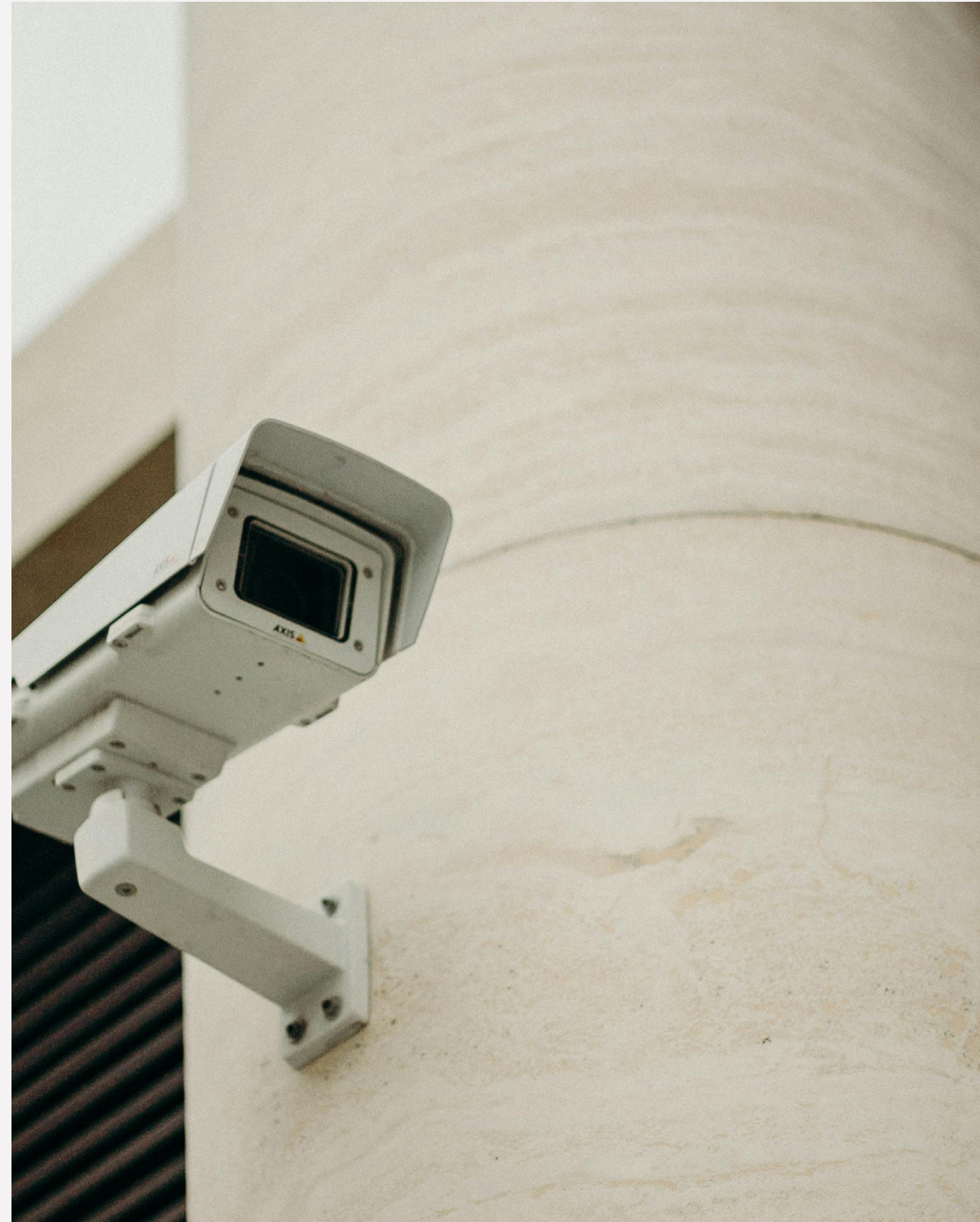
Finally, the audit teams also found a good understanding of safeguarding considerations within public online spaces. An article on one diocesan website covered taking photos at church and the importance of obtaining parental consent before publishing images of children.

Recommendations

When cathedral choirs visit parishes or other church settings, the risk assessment should include consultation with the DSO/CSA within the relevant area. This ensures any relevant information held by them informs a visit, such as whether a person of concern on a safety plan attends the setting. Confidentiality should be maintained throughout this process.



Cathedrals should enhance their CCTV systems by addressing several key areas. Firstly, eliminate coverage gaps in vulnerable locations such as organ lofts, Bell Towers, and song schools to mitigate specific risks. Secondly, older CCTV systems should be upgraded to improve image quality and retention. Thirdly, implement regular staff training programmes covering CCTV operation, data protection best practice and incident response procedures to ensure effective system utilisation. Finally, strengthen data security measures and establish a schedule for regular reviews of protocols to protect sensitive footage from unauthorised access.



Recognising, Assessing & Managing Risk

Whilst risk can never be completely eliminated, effective safeguarding practice robustly assesses and manages it within each unique and evolving context. This necessitates careful consideration, going beyond surface-level compliance. Risk assessments should be conducted by individuals with the appropriate training, experience, and understanding.

These individuals must be able to identify, analyse, and evaluate potential risks, gather and interpret information from various sources, communicate effectively, exercise professional curiosity, and make sound defensible judgements. Thorough record-keeping is also essential. These professionals should receive appropriate support, ongoing supervision, and work collaboratively with other agencies as needed to ensure the safety and well-being of children and adults at risk.



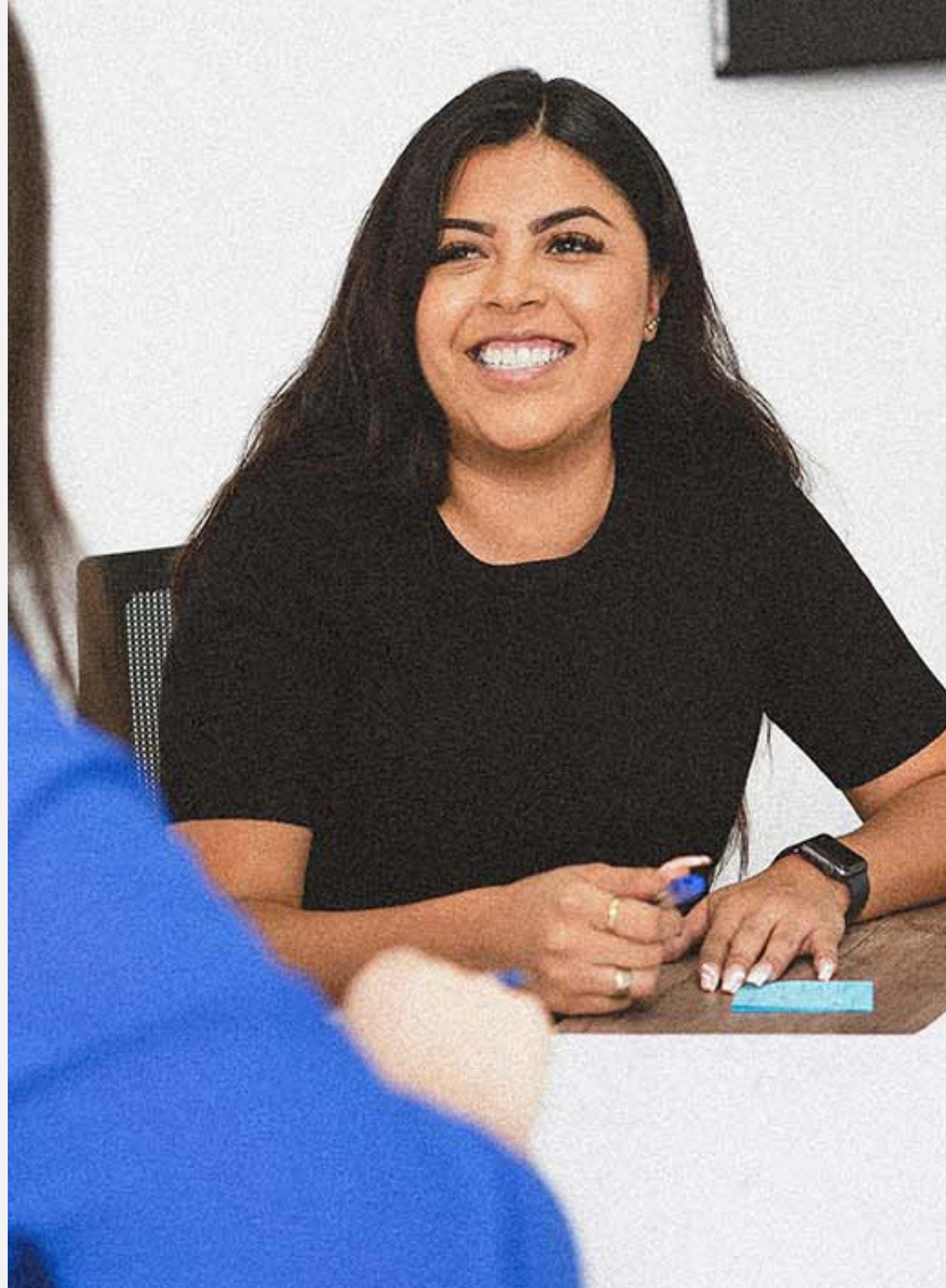
Risk Registers

Themes

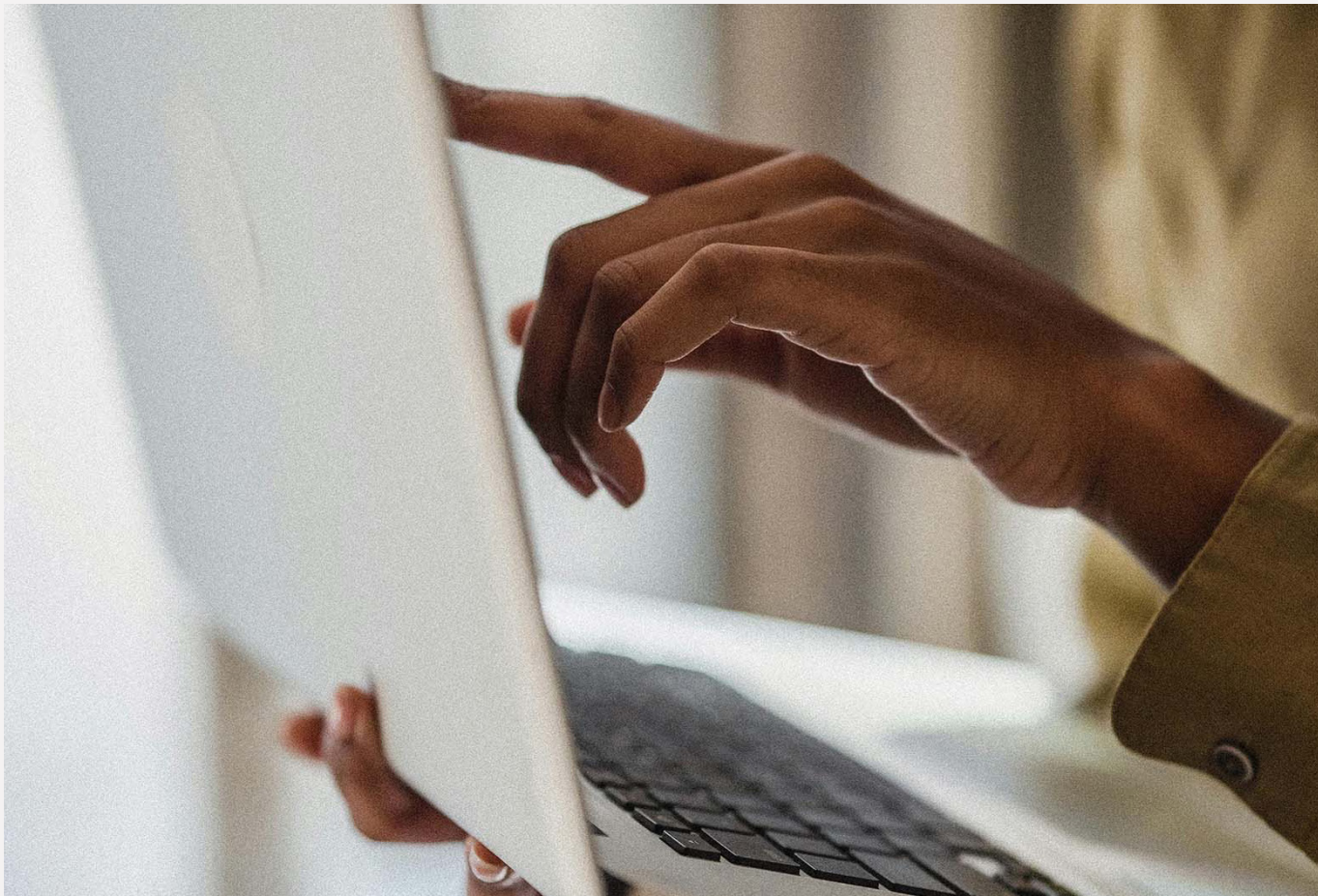
Risk registers operated by DBFs and cathedrals, in the main, demonstrate a consistent approach to safeguarding. Safeguarding-related matters are routinely included and there are appropriate oversight mechanisms, regular updates, and the documentation of concerns and control measures.

Recommendations

Whilst risk registers were seen to be used effectively in many areas, there is an opportunity to enhance their scope by incorporating a wider range of emerging risks and challenges. Specifically, risk registers could be strengthened by more routinely considering contemporary issues that are either directly or indirectly related to Church activity (i.e. such as the cost-of-living crisis or the potential impact of the Jay Report on workforce morale and well-being). This would ensure a more dynamic and responsive approach to risk assessment within both DBFs and cathedrals. To ensure ongoing relevance and effectiveness, all risk registers should include clear review dates to prompt regular re-evaluation and updates.



Case Management



Themes

The audits identified considered and consistent approaches that intentionally set a low threshold for reporting concerns. In short, DSTs are actively encouraging contact with them whenever someone might be worried and thereby creating the conditions where concerns are more likely than not to be escalated. Such arrangements are helping to build trust, confidence and good working relationships and are particularly important where risk might not be properly understood by the reporting person.

To drive consistency across all areas, there is likely to be merit in the CofE implementing a nationally prescribed 'threshold tool' that describes the local criteria for action by the DST.

Akin to the arrangements for safeguarding children set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023, this threshold tool could help drive uniformity in practice and provide a transparent and easily understood mechanism for making decisions.

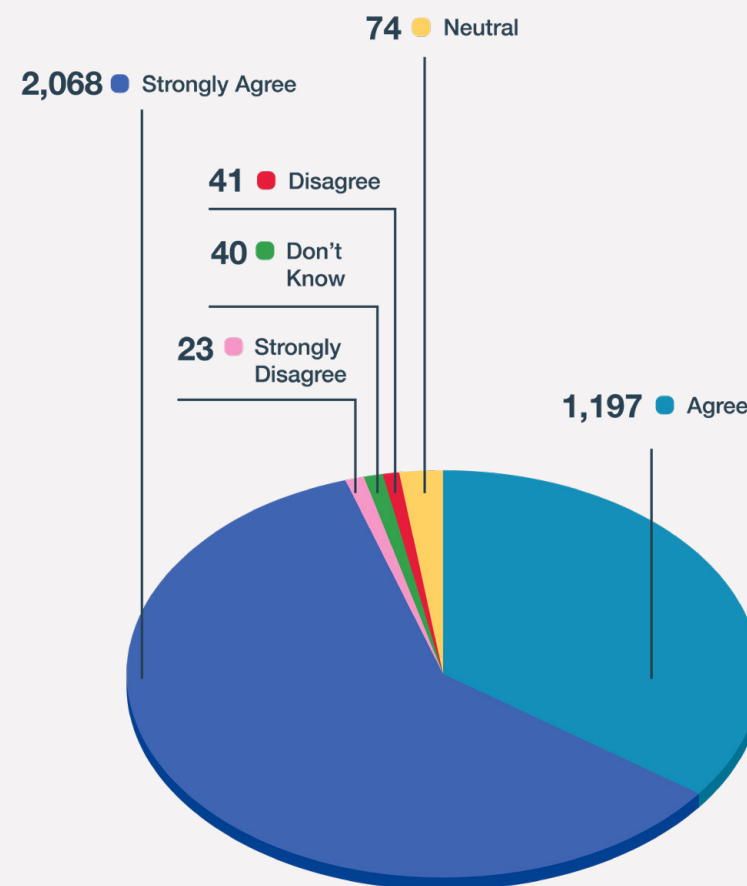
Findings from the audits demonstrate that DSTs are providing robust support and delivering a range of good interventions. The audits also highlighted the collaborative nature of their work, with strong statutory multi-agency engagement, particularly with Local Authority Designated Officers (LADOs) being firmly evidenced in most areas.

Good Practice

Most DBFs audited in 2024 have transitioned to the National Safeguarding Case Management System (NSCMS). The Audit found that Diocesan Safeguarding Teams (DSTs) have dedicated time to learn and understanding the NSCMS, resulting in its effective use.

“

I understand how to escalate a safeguarding concern”



Total Survey Responses 3,443

Audit Survey responses from Cathedral Workforce, DBF Workforce and Parish Workforce.

Audits highlighted several examples of good safeguarding practice, with DSA/Os demonstrating professional curiosity and confidence in handling sensitive issues. Strong, timely decision-making was evident, prioritising safety and wellbeing. Professionals also showed awareness of, and acted cautiously in, cases potentially impacting ongoing police investigations, ensuring their actions did not compromise legal processes.

Recommendations

The audits identified several areas where further embedding of the NSCMS guidelines and principles could be enhanced. Whilst DSTs have a strong grasp of the system's functionality, there is room for improvement. The CofE should strengthen the NSCMS by updating its terminology, replacing "historic abuse" with the preferred "non-recent abuse," and improving functionality. This includes adding clear mechanisms to identify Serious Incident Reports submitted to the Charity Commission, cases where Core Groups have been convened, and easy access to all current and active Safety Plans.

Church bodies should continue to receive support during their transition to the NSCMS. This support should encompass clear guidance, thorough training, and readily available assistance. This will ensure that all users, regardless of their prior experience, feel confident and competent in utilising the NSCMS effectively.

Furthermore, there is a clear need to strengthen the embedding of the guiding principles that underpin the NSCMS. This will ensure that the system is used effectively across all church bodies, promoting best practice in safeguarding.

The NST should revise the guidance on the use of the NSCMS to mandate clear and comprehensive recording of all safeguarding cases.

This revised guidance should explicitly state the requirement to document:

- **Rationale for risk grading and decisions:** A clear explanation of how risk was assessed and the reasons behind any decisions made.
- **Prioritisation:** The assigned priority level of the case and the rationale for this prioritisation.
- **Timescales for action:** Specific deadlines for completing actions, ensuring timely responses and follow-up.
- **Review of progress:** Regular reviews of the case, documenting progress made, any changes in risk level, and any further actions required.

The CofE should also revise its approach on supervision to ensure that all cases handled by DSTs, including those resulting in no further action or the provision of advice/guidance, are included in supervision discussions with / dip-sampled for quality by the NST. Currently, supervision tends to focus on complex or high-risk cases, leaving a potential gap in oversight for cases that might appear less serious.

Core Groups

Themes

The audits found that Core Groups are routinely established to address safeguarding cases involving Church Officers. These Core Groups demonstrate consistent effectiveness in overseeing individual cases, generally operating in a timely and well-managed manner. Membership typically includes relevant stakeholders, ensuring comprehensive consideration of a case with a strong focus on the support needs of all parties involved.

Good Practice

The audit teams saw evidence of trauma-informed and sensitive plans for victims/survivors. This commitment to providing appropriate support was further reinforced by the positive feedback received directly from victims/survivors themselves, who highlighted the benefits of this approach.

Several DBFs have enhanced their operational efficiency by ‘ring-fencing’ specific time slots each week in the diaries of key personnel involved in Core Groups.

Recommendations

The CofE should develop and deliver comprehensive training for all potential Core Group participants. This training should equip individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively fulfil their roles within the Core Group process.

All DBFs should implement a procedure of ‘ring-fencing’ dedicated time each week (or as frequently as deemed appropriate) for key personnel involved in Core Groups to come together. This dedicated time should be formally blocked out in their diaries to ensure its prioritisation.

Safety Plans

The Church, based on the message of the gospel, welcomes all individuals, including those who may present a risk. As such, the Church is committed to ensuring that any potential risk is thoroughly assessed and managed within a framework, adhering to the House of Bishops' policy and practice guidance. These processes are conducted in collaboration with relevant statutory agencies, in compliance with criminal, civil, and ecclesiastical law. Within this process, templates for risk assessment, decision making and management oversight form part of an overall Church Safety Plan. A Safety Plan details the actions and responsibilities of both the Church and the individual subject to the plan to ensure the safety and well-being of the entire church community.

Themes

The audits found evidence of strong practice regarding safety plans and associated risk assessment activity. There were numerous examples of prohibitions being regularly reviewed in person to reinforce accountability, responsibility and transparency. Risk assessments were also comprehensive and effectively informed Safety Plans, identifying potential harm and vulnerabilities. Those involved in the setting and monitoring of Safety Plans demonstrated professional curiosity, with decisive action being taken to ensure the integrity of plans and to mitigate the exposure of people to actual or potential harm.

Good Practice

The NSCMS currently lacks effective functionality when it comes to filtering or display all cases of individuals subject to a Safety Plan, whilst a user can search separately for 'Profile Flags' in the Profile section or filter by categories in the concern section for example, 'Safeguarding Agreement - Active'. The system is not user friendly or customised for church settings and whilst it has potential it is often described by users as 'slow' and 'clunky'. Attempts at implementing workarounds for this were seen by the Audit. For example, one DBF uses a spreadsheet to maintain a single view of Safety Plans and whilst not ideal (in terms of integration), this approach demonstrates the practical efforts being undertaken to address the system's limitations and maintain an effective oversight of risk.

Recommendations

Clear and consistent terminology is important. Therefore, further work is required to embed a consistent approach to terminology and standardise the use of the term “Safety Plan” across all dioceses (DBFs, cathedrals and parishes).



To enhance safeguarding practice and to better support both those working with individuals subject to Safety Plans, the CofE should prioritise the development and delivery of training on managing respondents and understanding offender behaviours. The training should focus on how offenders can groom victims and condition those around them through manipulation and deceit. It should also address how offenders minimise, self-justify and blame others and the development of effective strategies to manage risk. This training should be made available as soon as practicable in each area, with ongoing development and integration into the regular training curriculum for those working with respondents, including clergy, PSOs, and others involved in supporting individuals on safety plans.

The NST should develop clear procedures for managing a respondent’s refusals to sign a Safety Plans. This should include, but not be limited to, guidance on documenting the refusal and any reasons given, whom to inform about the refusal, and how to reassess the risk posed by the respondent. Additionally, it should outline alternative measures to manage the risk in the absence of a Safety Plan and when to seek legal advice on the implications of refusal.

The NST should also develop comprehensive procedures and guidance for terminating Safety Plans. Note: This recommendation may well be redundant given the fact that it is included in the Managing Allegations Code of Practice going before Synod in February 2025.

The CofE’s Safety Planning, Risk Assessment, and Management guidance should be revised to explicitly address the safety considerations for respondents who attend multiple church settings.

Information Sharing Agreements

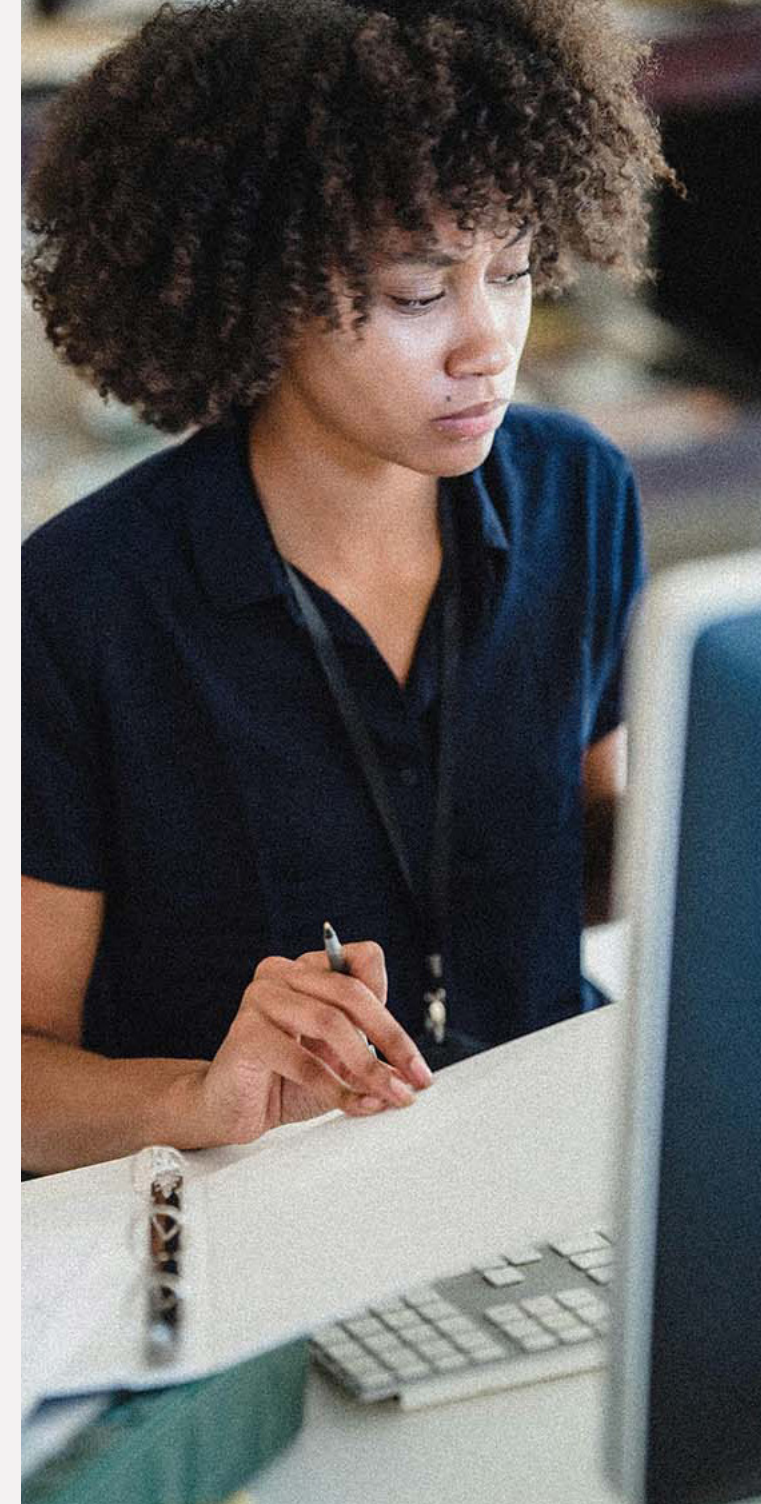
Themes

The audits found that several cathedrals and DBFs have implemented Service Level Agreements (SLAs) to govern information sharing. These SLAs establish clear parameters for complying with legal and good practice requirements when exchanging information.

There were variations in the awareness and application of the national Data Sharing Agreement between the National Police Chiefs' Council and the CofE. Some personnel demonstrated limited knowledge of the agreement and its practical implications for information sharing with the police.

Recommendations

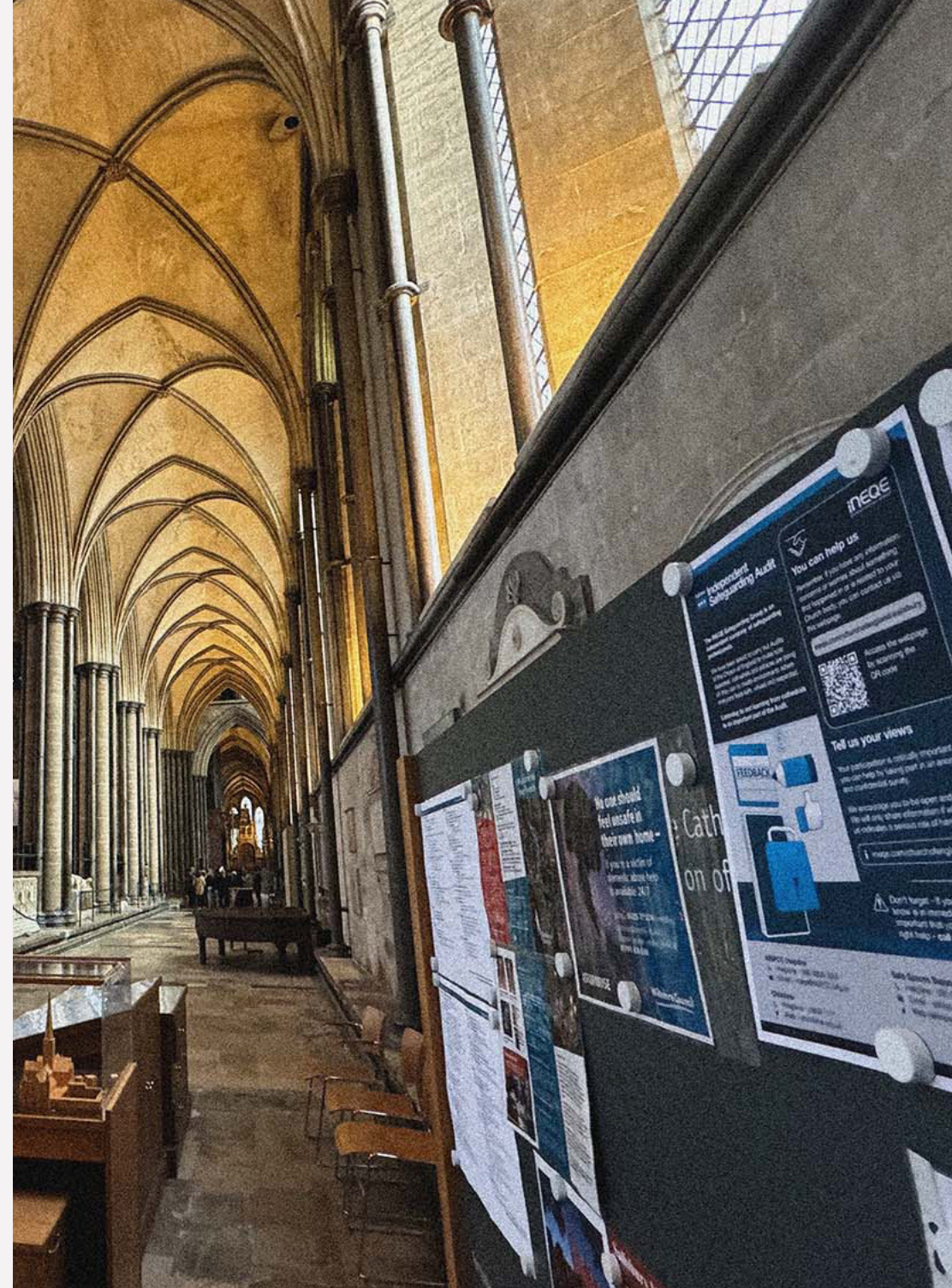
The CofE should enhance awareness of the National Data Sharing Agreement with the Police amongst clergy, church officers, and relevant staff across all Church bodies.



Serious Incident Reports

Themes / Good Practice

Both DBFs and cathedrals were found to have a developed understanding of their statutory duty to submit Serious Incident Reports (SIRs) to the Charity Commission. There was evidence of adherence to the House of Bishops' guidance on 'Safeguarding Serious Incident Reporting to the Charity Commission', and a solid awareness of reporting obligations. Where SIRs had been made to the Charity Commission, there was evidence of practice aligning to national guidance, with the NST being appropriately informed of related cases.



Victims & Survivors

For many victims and survivors, the task of disclosing abuse can be an incredibly challenging experience. They may feel overwhelmed by the process, worried about being re-traumatised or anxious about the outcome of disclosure.¹⁰ In this respect, it is essential that Church bodies ‘respond well’ and create environments that enable victims and survivors to be heard, supported and protected, whilst also learning from their voices to improve practice.

¹⁰<https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/safeguarding-e-manual/responding-victims-and-survivors-abuse/section-1-responding-well>



Victims & Survivors

As part of the audits undertaken on each DBF and cathedral, feedback from victims and survivors was captured through surveys, a confidential contact form, letters, and individual discussions. Survey responses revealed a range of different perspectives and hearing directly from victims and survivors provided invaluable insights into their unique experiences.



Engagement

Respectful and informed engagement with victims and survivors, prioritising their autonomy and choice, is essential to providing meaningful support. Critically, actively listening to and learning from their experiences is fundamental to shaping safeguarding practice and driving positive change through continuous improvement. Prioritising the survivor's experience, rather than institutional reputation, is paramount in promoting a culture of authentic care and accountability.

Themes

All those audited acknowledged the critical importance of engaging with and listening to victims and survivors. Evidence of how this was being achieved was seen through individual case work, the activity of senior leaders in meeting victims and survivors and representation in governance meetings, such as the DSAP. Overall, there was consistent evidence of areas having a firm commitment to implementing a trauma-informed approach, although for some victims and survivors, this had not been their experience.

The audits highlighted the impact of positive leadership, with the role of Diocesan Bishops being recognised as highly significant in listening to victims and survivors, advocating on their behalf and supporting them. In general, Bishops demonstrated a good understanding of the enduring impact of trauma on victims and survivors, and the importance of them offering apologies, attending meetings, and acknowledging an individual's desired level of engagement and response.



Cathedrals were seen to connect with victims and survivors in different ways.

Engagement is often informal, proactive, or through community projects, focusing on raising safeguarding awareness and improving reporting routes. This outreach extends to those facing broader challenges like homelessness or mental health issues, with signposting to relevant support.

Whilst efforts are being made to listen to victims and survivors, the audits found a lack of formal engagement structures. This was reflected in survey feedback. Many survey respondents felt their contributions were neither valued nor used to inform and improve practice. These are missed opportunities.

Good Practice

Some DBFs work with survivor groups to co-create resources. For example, one Survivor Group had helped develop a comprehensive 'Support for Survivors' leaflet.

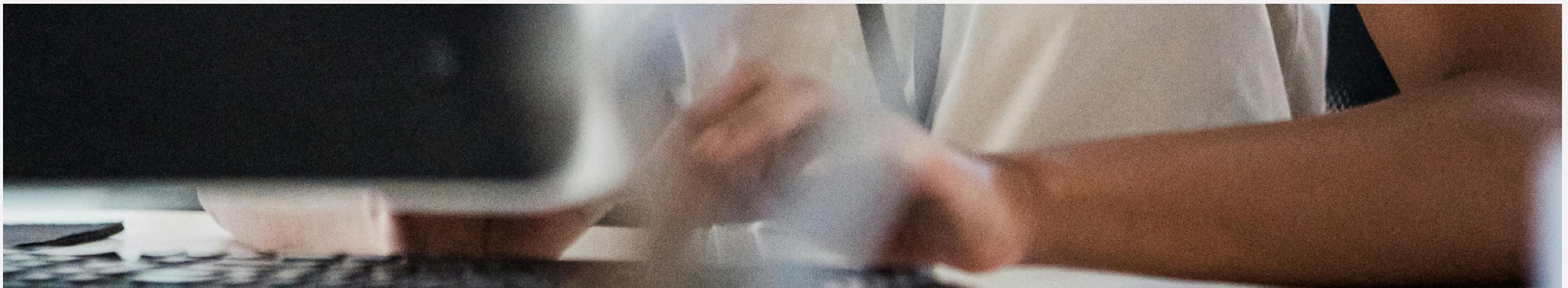
To enhance support for victims and survivors, some DBFs have designated a primary point of contact within their DSTs. This individual, often a Safeguarding Advocate or Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA), provides practical and emotional help within a Church context. Where in post, they accrued significant benefits in terms of the direct support they provided.

One DBF supports those affected by church-related abuse through its dedicated Chaplaincy to Survivors. A chaplain is the main contact for survivors, their support networks, and church staff needing guidance on handling abuse disclosures.

The Chaplaincy offers comprehensive assistance and resources. This model was highly effective and national-level consideration should be given to areas establishing a chaplaincy specifically dedicated to the needs of victims and survivors.



One cathedral participated in the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence by illuminating its exterior in purple and collaborating with partners to raise awareness of issues including domestic abuse, coercive control, and stalking. Information regarding support organisations such as Women's Aid and the National Stalking Helpline was also provided.



Recommendations

DBFs and cathedrals could enhance support for survivors by holding collaborative learning events, focus groups, and survivor-led projects. Leveraging their central locations, cathedrals could host these events to foster stronger connections between survivors and the wider diocese, building relationships with individuals they may not otherwise reach. These platforms provide opportunities for individuals to share their experiences, developing trauma-informed strategies. Such initiatives should be widely publicised and aligned with established good practices, such as those outlined in 'Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse'.

DBFs should enhance their support for parish volunteers working with survivors by providing better guidance and practical tools, building local confidence in trauma-informed responses. There should be a focus on maximising accessible online resources and reputable guides to deliver core knowledge and key concepts, especially where funding restricts formal training. This could also include the introduction of peer mentorship, linking experienced church officers with volunteers and/or incorporating role-play or scenario-based learning in group sessions (i.e. PSO networks) to enhance practical application.



Disclosure

Facilitating disclosures by creating a safe, supportive environment where victims/survivors feel empowered to report abuse is a vital part of providing effective support. This requires genuine listening, respect, belief, and compassionate, non-judgmental care. A victim/survivor-centred, trauma-informed approach is essential, along with transparent communication about reporting processes.

Themes

The audits evidenced that DSTs are generally seen as approachable, impartial, and interactions with them are typically described as positive.

DBFs are also committed to survivor engagement and prioritise a trauma-informed approach. However, a recurring theme emerged from a small minority of individuals regarding the timeliness and consistency of communication. The audits identified a need to avoid overpromising and manage expectations realistically. This finding highlights the importance of establishing clear communication protocols, which will be addressed in a later recommendation.

Resources highlighting reporting pathways are readily available, with contact information and procedures displayed on websites, posters, and other materials. Online and in-person training has helped create safe spaces for disclosure and increased reporting.

Good Practice



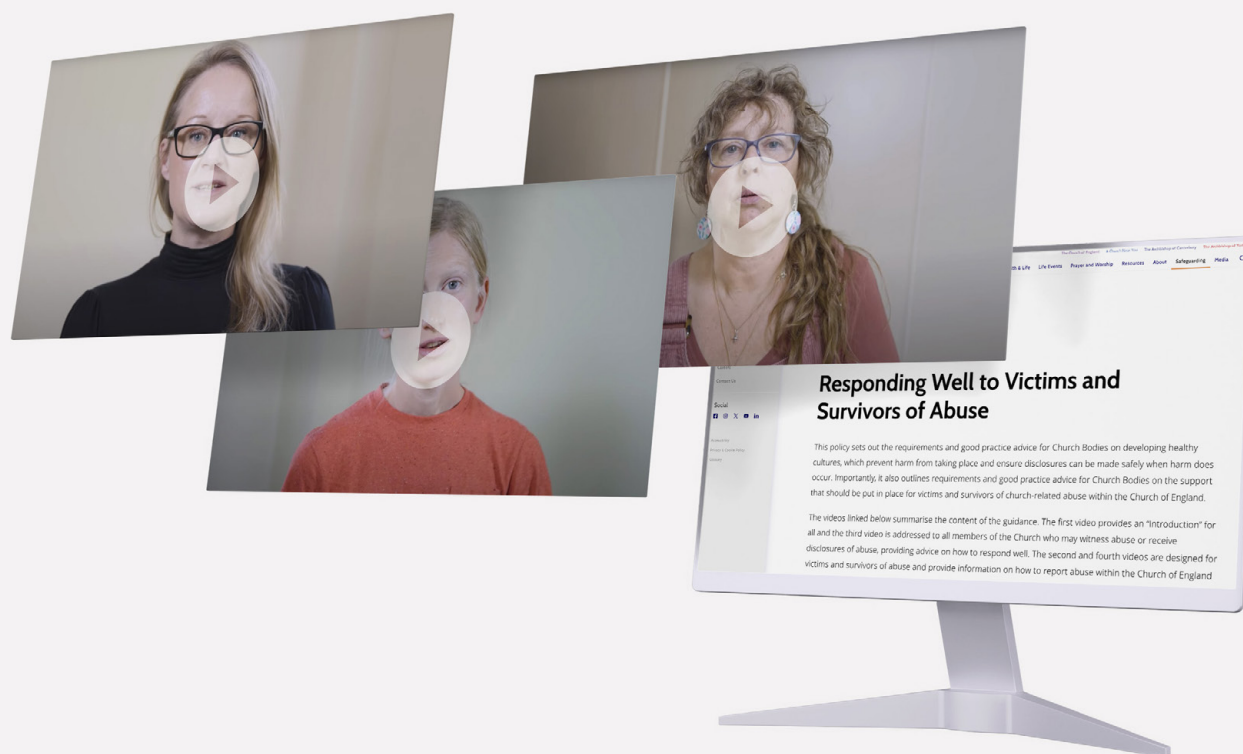
A number of cathedrals have engaged in visual and interactive displays of support for victims and survivors, for example, through participation in the national LOUDfence initiative.

A good practice example was seen in one area where survivors co-produced creative resources that were subsequently cascaded nationally ('If I Told You What Would You Do?' project). This survivor-led approach brought authenticity to complex conversations between those affected by church-related abuse and those responsible for help and protection. This work contributed to the implementation of 'Responding Well to Victims of Abuse'.

Recommendations

To minimise any negative impacts and manage expectations effectively, good communication is paramount. Church bodies should adopt a structured, diarised approach to scheduling discussions and meetings, ensuring that transitions in representation, engagement, and support are handled thoughtfully and transparently. When changes to established safeguarding practices occur, victims and survivors should be proactively engaged. This includes clearly explaining the reasons for any adjustments, outlining how consistent support will be maintained, and actively seeking feedback.

Church bodies should also improve access to digital resources by linking to or embedding the 'Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse' guidance and explainer videos on their websites. They should also review all related materials and integrate 'Responding Well' more thoroughly into existing communications and processes.

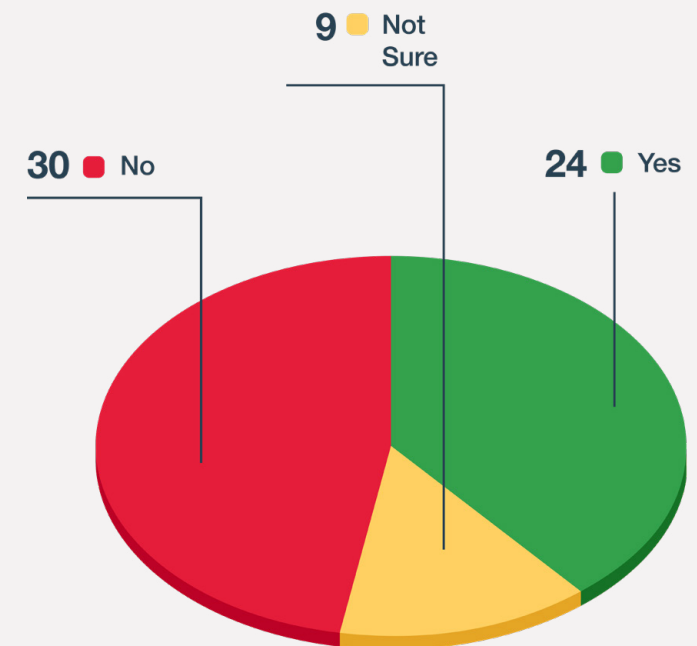


Support

Victims and survivors need effective support, including options like Support Persons, access to therapy, spiritual care, and appropriate apologies. Support must extend to those affected by abuse outside the CofE, and those with broader safeguarding needs (e.g., mental health, homelessness) must be connected to relevant local services. Any use of scripture must be sensitive, consensual, and survivor focused.

Themes

The audits found DBFs and cathedrals follow national guidance set out in 'Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse' House of Bishops'. However, responses to surveys highlighted that not all victims / survivors were aware of this guidance.



Are you aware of the Church's 'Responding Well to Victims and Survivor's of Abuse Guidance'?

63 Responses in 65 Results

The audits saw several instances of apologies being issued, along with acknowledgement of past failures and continued offers of support. Whilst this is the minimum standard outlined in national CofE guidance, where the audit could gauge impact of this was from hearing from victims and survivors themselves on their healing journey.

There was good practice in the effective signposting to a wide array of local support services. Individuals presenting with broader safeguarding concerns, or those requiring support external to the Church, were readily directed to appropriate agencies.

Engagement with victims and survivors should minimise the risk of re-traumatisation by reducing the need for them to repeatedly recount traumatic experiences. However, some individuals engaged in the audits described having to retell their accounts of abuse several times, particularly when accessing or extending support through the Interim Support Scheme. Even with advocate support, minimising repeat trauma is crucial, especially for those awaiting the redress scheme.

Good Practice



One cathedral's weekly breakfast club, run by volunteers, was an excellent example of how vulnerable community members can be supported. The club provides a safe and respectful environment that fosters dignity and belonging. Proactive risk management, including assessments and external partnerships, ensures the safety and well-being of all involved.

A Bishop (now deceased) engaged in regular meetings with a victim/survivor. This individual was effectively supported to access support and the Bishop advocated for them and helped them to be better heard by the Church – ultimately receiving an apology and access to further support.



One cathedral's "Lantern Initiative" holistically supports victims and survivors. It provides practical assistance with healthcare, housing, and finance to establish stability. It helps to empower individuals through co-produced projects, volunteering, and employment opportunities, and amplifies marginalised voices by challenging injustices. The initiative also nurtures spiritual recovery through retreats, meditations, and workshops, promoting overall healing and well-being.



Recommendations

DBFs and cathedrals should enhance awareness raising of the national “Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse” guidance. This includes promoting the guidance and fully integrating its principles and procedures into all local materials and practices.

Existing CofE guidance recommends a single point of contact for victims and survivors. To further strengthen this practice, in cases where a victim or survivor is involved with multiple areas, involved DBFs should formally designate a lead individual to serve as the primary point of contact. This streamlined approach is likely to facilitate better communication and support. This individual should be selected in consultation with the victim / survivor to ensure their preferences and needs are prioritised. By establishing a clear channel of communication, this measure reinforces a survivor-centred approach and simplifies the process for those navigating interactions with multiple Church entities.

The Church, both nationally and locally, should maintain and continually develop its understanding and awareness of the potential for misunderstandings of “forgiveness” and “repentance” within a faith-based context.

All procedures relating to access, support, or ongoing engagement with safeguarding professionals should be reviewed and revised through a trauma-informed lens. These should prioritise reducing the need for applicants to repeatedly recount traumatic experiences and ensure any application process does not exacerbate trauma. Supervision sessions with the RSL should include prompts and reminders of this approach.

Learning, Supervision & Support

Safeguarding training plays a pivotal role in building a culture where recognising and responding to risk is second nature. It ensures that those involved in the life of the Church have the knowledge and confidence to identify concerns and act decisively to protect others.

Although some historic challenges remain, safeguarding has become much more embedded into everyday practice within the Church. This has been evidenced through the range of tailored training courses, continuous professional development and improved supervision arrangements for those in safeguarding roles. The progress made reflects the dedication of those individuals and teams working hard to ensure that safeguarding is not just a policy, but a lived priority.



Safeguarding Learning

Themes

The delivery of safeguarding training has increasingly been integrated into the culture and mission of the Church, and all areas audited were aligned with the CofE's Safeguarding Learning and Development Framework. Many regions have gone further by tailoring this framework to address local priorities, incorporating topics such as mental health, dementia, and financial abuse. Domestic abuse has been a particular focus for many with an array of awareness raising initiatives.

The audits found that church officers often had to navigate capacity constraints in order to deliver and maintain effective training programmes for those who require them, while also striving to keep their own safeguarding knowledge and development up to date.

Immediate and longer-term evaluations of training are typically conducted by DBFs, with feedback leading to some change and improvements in course content and delivery style.

Good Practice

For training involving sensitive or potentially triggering subject matters, good practice was noted. Sensible and reasonable adjustments are made to accommodate individuals with lived experience or those needing additional support. For example, online domestic abuse courses are avoided where possible to ensure staff can provide immediate assistance and respond effectively to participants who may find the content distressing.

DBFs that have adapted national frameworks to include region-specific material have been able to evidence positive engagement and the effectiveness of training. Examples include bespoke sessions being delivered on offender behaviour and digital safeguarding, as well as scenario-based case studies that address local challenges.



Recommendations

Many DBFs rely heavily on the national framework as their sole training strategy. Whilst this provides consistency, limited capacity in many of the audited areas has left little room to address themes or skills that are specific to the local context. Implementing a structured approach a training needs analysis would help to better determine what additional training is required beyond that delivered nationally. This would support a more bespoke approach to the development of strategy and the necessary resource requirements to deliver it.

Feedback at a DBF and cathedral level suggests that training is perceived as being set at a national level without due consideration for specific local needs in the context their community settings. In this respect, a more consistent approach to training needs analysis should be introduced to collect feedback and determine the additional knowledge, skills and experience that the Church workforce needs to gain. This approach would help ensure training remains relevant and responsive to the needs of all.

The audits found that trainers often invest time in adapting case studies to suit the participants, location, and regional context of their courses. Providing a wider range of pre-designed case studies, developed collaboratively with multiple dioceses, would support shared, meaningful, and relevant learning while reducing the workload for trainers.

Access to theme-specific and role-specific training, such as for clergy, PSOs, and wardens, is inconsistent across diocese areas. A repeated theme identified across all the audits was that safeguarding training needed to provide deeper insights into critical themes, such as understanding sexual offenders' behaviour and managing digital risks. Providing these opportunities on a national basis would help ensure all roles receive relevant and practical safeguarding knowledge.

Owing in large part to capacity issues, a significant gap persists in evaluating the longer-term impact of training. While feedback is often gathered immediately after sessions, few systems are in place to assess whether the learning leads to improved practice over time and whether it has made a difference. This should be encouraged from a national level, and consideration should be given as to how best to implement this given capacity issues that may hinder its progress.

Supervision and Support of Safeguarding Roles

Themes

Supervision and support are essential for enabling safeguarding professionals to navigate complex and emotionally demanding roles. Structured induction programmes have been widely implemented, giving new staff and volunteers the tools to fulfil their responsibilities effectively. Regular supervision sessions, including clinical supervision in some areas, have provided essential support and reflection opportunities.

Good Practice

Several DBFs have demonstrated leadership by integrating clinical supervision and trauma-informed care into their offering for safeguarding staff.

Peer mentoring schemes and collaborative team structures have also strengthened the sense of support among safeguarding professionals.

Recommendations

The provision of psychological support remains inconsistent across DBFs and cathedrals. To address inconsistencies, psychological support should be made mandatory and universally accessible for staff within DSTs. The Audit is aware that some initiatives are already underway, not least via the role and responsibilities of the RSL. It therefore makes the following recommendations to assist and focus the continued development of this approach.

The NST should ensure that structured supervision processes, including clinical supervision, are standardised to ensure consistency and quality. As part of this approach, they should:

Develop a policy that clearly sets expectations regarding which roles are subject to supervision and support, when and from whom. This policy should include a uniform framework and approach to record keeping.

Help in the development of peer support networks that promote work-life balance. Such flexible arrangements can further enhance the resilience of safeguarding professionals in the Church.

Clergy Support

Themes

Safeguarding has become an integral aspect of clergy ministry which is reflected in MDRs. These reviews increasingly incorporate safeguarding discussions and encourage clergy to reflect on their roles and identify areas for growth. Ordinands and curates are similarly prepared for safeguarding responsibilities, with leadership training and hands-on experience such as parish audits.

Good Practice

Support services for clergy, such as trained Link Persons and dedicated counselling have been instrumental in addressing both professional and personal challenges related to safeguarding. These services exemplify a compassionate and holistic approach to clergy support.

In several areas, goals from the action plan created during leadership training were incorporated into the MDR process. The Audit supports this approach as it enables learning to be tracked.

Recommendations

Whilst clergy typically have access to a range of support services, there remains scope to deepen the integration of safeguarding into their routine development.

MDRs should include a review of goals from action plans created during leadership training to provide a well-rounded and accountable approach to safeguarding.

Further Information

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Diocesan Safeguarding Contacts

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

Diocesan safeguarding contacts |
The Church of England

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

Under 19 and Need to Talk?

Call Childline for free on 0800 1111 or get in touch online. You can talk to Childline about anything. No problem is too big or too small. It's confidential.

Contact Childline

www.childline.org.uk/

Safe Spaces

Safe Spaces is a free and independent support service, providing confidential, support to survivors of church related abuse. Call for free on 0300 303 1056.

Email Safe Spaces

safespaces@firstlight.org.uk

Visit Their Website

www.safespacesenglandandwales.org.uk/

Samaritans

Samaritans adult helpline is available for whatever you're going through. Call for free, anytime on 116 123

Email Samaritans

jo@samaritans.org

Visit Their Website

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

NSPCC

Contact the NSPCC Helpline for adults concerned about a child's safety or wellbeing. Call for free on 0808 800 5000

Email NSPCC

help@nspcc.org.uk

Visit Their Website

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

Glossary of Terms

CofE	Church of England	SMCs	Safeguarding Management Committees
NST	National Safeguarding Team	KCSIE	Keeping Children Safe in Education
DBF	Diocesan Boards of Finance	LSCP	Local Safeguarding Children Partnership
SCIE	Social Care Institute for Excellence	NSCMS	National Safeguarding Case Management System
PCR2	Past Cases Review 2	SIRs	Serious Incident Reports
LLR	Lessons Learned Reviews	ISVA	Independent Sexual Violence Advisor
DSAP	Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel	PoC	Persons of Concern
RAG	Red-Amber-Green	SLA	Service Level Agreement
PSOs	Parish Safeguarding Officers	MDR	Ministry Development Review
CSAs	Cathedral Safeguarding Advisors	NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
DSA	Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor	DST	Diocesan Safeguarding Team
DSO	Diocesan Safeguarding Officer	PCC	Parochial Church Council
PCCs	Parochial Church Councils		
ISAGs	Independent Safeguarding Advisory Groups		



Contact Us

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