

Annual report of the Safeguarding Panel to Diocesan Synod

MAY 2024



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Introduction

Where we are now

The Diocese of Oxford is continually working to make the church safe.

The Safeguarding Panel has been developing how it makes its work more transparent and accountable within the Diocese. The Panel is accountable to Synod and Bishop's Council. It also feels accountable to Parishes, particularly to the volunteers who lead safeguarding and those who have been harmed or feel unsafe within the church.

We have examined how we report on our work as part of this commitment. We reviewed the annual reports across statutory agencies, charities and guidance for charity trustees. This format reflects our view of best practices in how agencies report their work.

Challenges ahead

This report summarises our work in 2023. We welcome questions and suggestions.

We want to become better at producing evidence about the impact we are making, including developing this style of annual reporting.

Safeguarding Structures in the Oxford Diocese

Where we are now

Each of the Episcopal areas has its own Area Advisor, with Louise as Head of Safeguarding, adding a Diocesan strategic perspective. The team is based at Church House, within the Department of HR and Safeguarding.

The team also has a Safeguarding Training and Policy Advisor and an administrator.

A Diocesan Safeguarding Panel oversees the diocese's safeguarding work. This panel brings informed and independent challenge and support. We have strengthened the Panel by being able to recruit people in current safeguarding practice.

The Diocese has been part of a national pilot for supervisory oversight and quality assurance from the National Safeguarding Team. This was a recommendation made by the Independent Inquiry in Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA).

Challenges ahead

The structure has facilitated better working links with safeguarding across the Diocese, and we monitor this.

We have seen benefits from the national pilot. Supervision has become more professional and there has been quality assurance of the panel as well as practice. We would like to see this mature into a national way of working.

Strategy

This year we have worked to create a new strategic framework to underpin our work across the next three years.

We have set five themes which align with the National Safeguarding Standards:

Objective 1 Prevention: The Diocese effectively enables preventative safeguarding alongside reacting to safeguarding situations.

Objective 2 Culture, Leadership, and Capacity: High quality safeguarding practices and outcomes are achieved across the diocese through safe and healthy cultures, effective leadership, sufficient resourcing and robust scrutiny.

Objective 3 Recognising, Assessing and Managing Risk: Risk assessments, safeguarding agreements and associated processes are of a high quality and are underpinned by effective partnership working.

Objective 4 Victims and Survivors: Victims and survivors experience a positive and timely response to disclosures and their subsequent support needs are met.

Objective 5 Learning, Supervision and Support: All those engaged in safeguarding receive appropriate learning, professional development, support and supervision to respond to safeguarding situations, victims and survivors, and respondents effectively.

Objective 1: Prevention

Where we are now

Currently nearly 80% of parishes are live on the Parish Dashboard, compared to 67% in January 2023. In May 2023 we launched the Safeguarding Hub which gives parishes the opportunity to use software to store all safer recruitment information securely.

A key message from our 2022 survey was the extent to which PSOs felt overburdened as volunteers, particularly by unrealistic expectations.

The Safeguarding Team have established drop-in sessions, a PSO working group, a PSO Handbook and an updated PSO page on our website.

Challenges ahead

There are still some parishes (approx. 80) that do not have a PSO in place. The Area Advisors are working with Area Teams to support parishes to recruit PSOs.

We would like to improve the support to Parish Safeguarding Officers within the Parish and think about the support from the incumbent, churchwardens and the PCC.

Building understanding of hindrances at a parish level.

Finding a balance between preventative and reactive work in the diocesan safeguarding team.

Objective 1: Prevention

A service and safeguarding workshops were held at Christ Church cathedral on Safeguarding Sunday 2023, led by the Bishop of Oxford, with more than 200 PSOs in attendance. This was an opportunity to thank PSOs for the work they undertake. We have had very encouraging feedback from PSOs about the service.



PSOs stand for their commissioning by Bishop Steven



The workshop on Spiritual Abuse, led by Dr Julie Oakley

Objective 2: Culture, leadership and capacity

Where we are now

Senior leadership: Creating a culture of safety means embedding safeguarding in everything the diocese does. There is commitment from senior leaders in the diocese to make sure that safeguarding is not seen as an obligatory, tick box exercise. This is evident in discussions within senior leadership training and the engagement with safeguarding at a senior level.

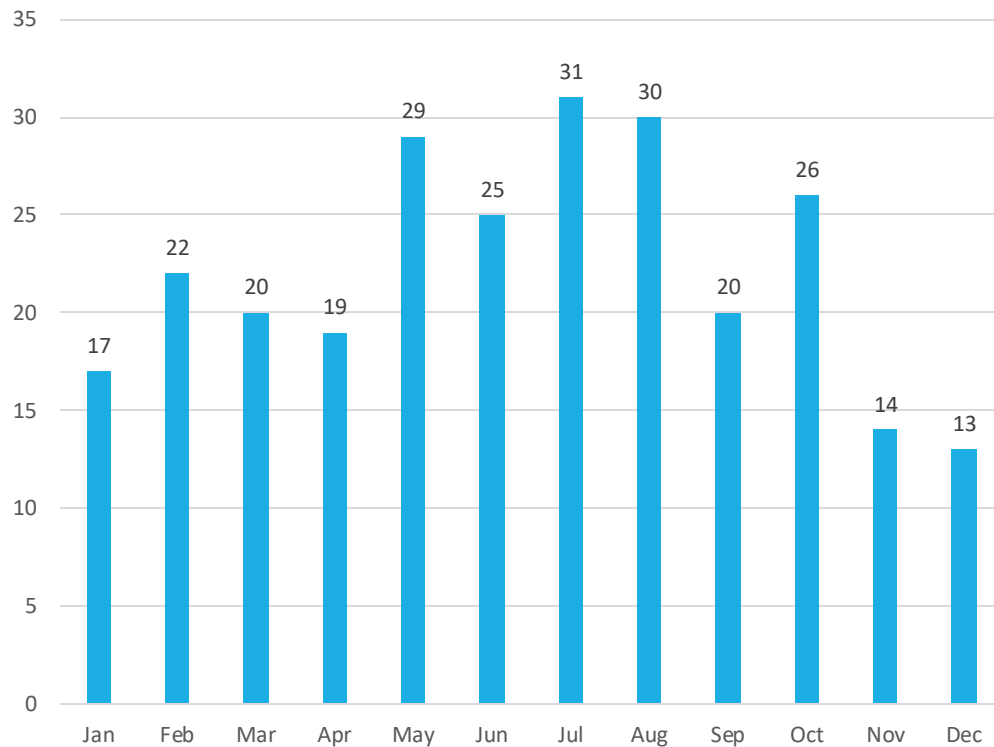
Learning: A healthy safeguarding culture is not defensive but open to learning and admitting when we get things wrong. The diocese has published learning reviews and committed to recommendations which it continues to action and implement. The most recent learning review was published in May 2023 and concerned events that took place in Tylers Green between 1981 and 2000.

Challenges ahead

Continue to raise awareness of issues raised in the review, including spiritual abuse.

Objective 3: Assessing, recognising and managing risk

Total referrals inputted on MyConcern, Jan-Dec 2023



On average the team received 22 referrals per month relating to safeguarding concerns during 2023. The majority of these constitute safeguarding support to parishes (for example, referrals to statutory authorities) and do not become safeguarding cases involving church officers or clergy.

The team received on average 50 enquiries per month during 2023. These enquiries do not meet the threshold for a safeguarding concern, but written advice is sent to the person making the enquiry. The team retains a copy of the advice sent.

Objective 4: Victims and survivors

Where we are now

In 2022, a group of survivors was established to strengthen the voice of survivors in our service. The group set its own terms of reference and working methods.

The group has been instrumental in setting standards for working with people who have experienced abuse, set up a chaplaincy for survivors and advised on our approach to funding counselling.

As part of our ongoing commitment to survivors, we have been providing support in various ways, including funding counselling services and the use of support persons as well as sign posting to other services.

Challenges ahead

Working in co-production with survivors will be a distinct change.

We want to make sure that all survivors who wish to have their voices heard feel able to do so within the Oxford Diocese

The group met six times in the year and continues to support in the setting up of a chaplaincy for survivors

Objective 5: Learning, supervision and support

Where we are now

All safeguarding staff receive monthly professional supervision and regularly undertake professional development.

Challenges ahead

All safeguarding staff to have professional development plans.

Safeguarding to feature in clergy continuing professional development.

Training activity

Where we are now

- In 2023, the Diocesan team delivered 125 training modules which, along with e-learning offerings trained 7533 participants.
- Supported 16 volunteer safeguarding trainers, who are vital to make this happen.

Challenges ahead

- Supporting parishes to communicate the importance of training to all church officers.
- Providing a range of face-to-face and online options to ensure training is accessible to all.
- Working with the National Safeguarding Team to further integrate diocesan records and the Online Learning Portal.

Training Activity

Safeguarding Learning Pathway Delivery January – December 2023

Safeguarding Learning Pathway	Sessions Delivered YTD	Participants Trained
Basic Awareness	e-Learning Locally delivered (21 in-parish)	2985 173
Foundation	e-Learning Locally delivered (20 in-parish)	2652 101
Leadership	Locally delivered (41 online, 9 in-person)	612
Parish Safeguarding Officer Induction	Locally delivered (5 online)	35
Permission to Officiate	Locally delivered (8 online, 9 in-person)	208
Domestic Abuse	e-Learning Locally delivered (5 online, 7 in-person)	411 84
Safer Recruitment and People Management	e-Learning	235
Modern Slavery	e-Learning	37
Total	125 locally delivered sessions	7533

Turning training into impact: what people have said after learning from training

“I have become more aware of preventative safeguarding measures that we can and should take. Whilst it is good to recognise signs of a safeguarding concern, and know how to respond, the training highlighted for me how much harm can be prevented through good safeguarding practice.”

“What was also helpful about this course was that it wasn't just about how we go about the business of safeguarding but why we do it. The theological imperative is just as important – if not more so – than the procedures.”

“The difference this has made to my ministry is to remind me that I have a duty to be a good example to others, because of my role and responsibilities, taking safeguarding seriously, because of the profound impact that abuse has on victims and survivors.”

“I have been reminded that I cannot expect others to follow best practice in safeguarding if I do not authentically model this best practice myself, and that this must include a recognition and embracing of diversity within the church family, and an awareness of my own areas of potential unconscious bias.”

“The theological reflection was particularly important in helping me to realise that ‘Safeguarding’ was not simply an imposed requirement by a professional body, but my responsibility as a follower of Christ, and even more as an Ordained Minister.”

Quality and Audit

Where we are now

The Diocese has continued with the approach to Quality and Audit as a subgroup with the majority of the group being independent (not Diocese employees)

The group is given access to full anonymised material to look at key themes, which have included

- Safeguarding risk assessments
- Current safeguarding agreements
- The experience of survivors

The group has seen good practice in all areas and identified where improvements could be made in practice and policy.

The meeting also creates a space for the lead Bishop and other senior staff to give feedback.

Challenges ahead

The assurance systems revolve around transparency and honesty, which requires working in ways which develop trust.

Last year we said we would start to track impact so that we can show what has changed as a result of this process.

Some of the impact from Quality and Audit

Areas of good practice identified:

The quality of the information recorded has noticeably improved. The work to devise the assessment format supported the risk analysis. Encouragingly, we saw in one assessment that initial thinking about a medium level of risk escalated due to using the assessment format.

We saw a change in the previous tendency to rely upon multi-agency assessment, with one case showing superb multi-agency working in which the church was a full partner, including volunteer groups which monitored drug misuse as an early trigger.

QARG engages with practice in a new way for the Panel, and the open approach taken by the Diocese and the team is evident. Their honesty in presenting casework is commendable.

Areas where policy and practice needs to improve:

We would like to see all assessments start to address the risks within the context of the church and parish

We have been pleased to see the development of the risk analysis. We like the identification and use of key themes and questions as tools for effective ongoing reviews which shows active curiosity.

Learning Reviews

Where we are now:

All our [learning lessons reviews](#) are available on our website. From 2020, these have included a one-page “seven-minute briefing” aimed at supporting actions, particularly for Parishes.

We published a Learning Review on past abuse at Tylers Green.

Challenges ahead

All our reviews have elements which link to wider Parish governance

We sent the seven-minute briefing on Tylers Green to all incumbents and PSOs. We also produced a safeguarding poster to be used in churches.

An action plan accompanies each review. We have continued to make good progress – for example, the development of the LGBTQ chaplaincy.

The Diocese and the National context

The Diocese has benefitted from piloting a new working arrangement between the National safeguarding team and Dioceses. This arrangement advances recommendations 1 and 8 made by the ICCSA.

Our hope for independent assurance has been translated into the appointment and rollout of a new audit framework led by INEQE. Our audit will take place in June 2024 and be published alongside an action plan.

The church's work with older people is increasing in many places, especially in the rural areas of our Diocese. The management of the high level of offending risk that we have seen in the Diocese pushes the understanding of cognition, age, and offending.

The National Church has a Response Group to the Jay Report and the Diocesan Secretary is a member.

Independent Safeguarding Audit Programme

An agreement with INEQE and the church provides a framework of expectations for the Church of England's Independent Safeguarding Audit Programme between 2023 and 2028. The programme is commissioned by the Archbishops' Council and co-ordinated by the National Safeguarding Team.

Through the programme, Participating Church bodies will receive a comprehensive and independent audit.

The audit will provide an evidence-based and strengths-based review of the Church body's safeguarding arrangements and practice. Audit reports will identify areas of good practice and make recommendations regarding areas where practice requires development.

The audit for Oxford will take place between 3rd -7th June 2024 and a report will be published in September 2024.

Moving forward

Bishop Olivia Graham, our Safeguarding Lead Bishop, is retiring at the end of September. We would like to take this opportunity to thank her for all her hard work and commitment to safeguarding and to this panel.

We will welcome Bishop Gavin Collins as the new lead Bishop in October's panel meeting and look forward to working with him.

The panel looks forward to working with the safeguarding team to implement the recommendations from the INEQE Audit.

We will go to advert and recruitment for a new panel chair to commence the role from June 2025.

In 2020, the Diocese’s Safeguarding Panel set itself these aims and there is evidence of progress in all areas.



LEADERSHIP OF THE
IMPORTANT PLACE OF
SAFEGUARDING IN PRACTICE
AND THROUGH STRATEGIC
DEVELOPMENT



WORKING TO KEEP
SAFEGUARDING WITHIN THE
CULTURE AND MISSION OF
THE THE CHURCH



PROMOTING ACCOUNTABILITY
AND TRANSPARENCY
THROUGH LEARNING, AUDIT
AND INDEPENDENT SCRUTINY



DEVELOPING AN APPROACH
TO COPRODUCTION WITH
SURVIVORS



IMPROVING COLLABORATION
– WITHIN A COMPLEX
DIOCESE AND WITH THE
STATUTORY SECTOR