

Safeguarding Report for Diocesan Synod

Date of meeting: 08.03.25

Report presented by: Malcolm Chamberlain

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Overview of activity since 20.01.25

The safeguarding team continue to be busier than usual and are therefore prioritising case work and the management of risk.

Over the last month, the safeguarding team has been involved to a greater or lesser extent with 49 cases which includes four new cases and three cases where we received new information on a case which had previous involvement. We have closed six cases. We have reviewed eight safety plans which has resulted in two plans ending as they are no longer required. We are in the process of reviewing a further ten. We have put in place three new safety plans. We have seven cases which have involved core group meetings and one where we attended a MAPPA meeting.

We received a similar number of requests for advice and guidance as we did in the same period last year with the majority being requests for advice. There have been a range of issues including concerns around domestic abuse, emotional abuse, concerns of a sexual nature and concerns around mental health. There have also been a number of queries around safe practice and safer recruitment.

General update:

The number of parishes using the dashboards and hubs continues to rise thanks to the concerted efforts of Claire Sayce. Claire is actively promoting use of the dashboards and proactively contacting all parishes who are not yet using them to offer training and support to get the parish started. The dashboards and hubs are an essential tool to assist parishes in meeting their safeguarding obligations and have been purchased by the Diocese. Use currently stands at 72% and any encouragement you can offer to your parish would be gratefully received.

Safeguarding Systems Together is a project working to connect all the various safeguarding systems to strengthen safeguarding compliance, reduce administrative burdens and promote a safer environment and culture. Sheffield is now signed up to the project and Claire will be our representative.

The survivor support & engagement working party continues to meet around quarterly. The group is considering how best to expand its membership and increase the range of voices within the group. There are currently two major pieces of work which the group are focussing on. The first is developing resources to increase awareness of survivors, of potential needs and working towards being more trauma informed at all levels and in all places throughout the diocese. The second is the preparation and delivery of a survivor focussed service on Safeguarding Sunday (16th November 2025). Julian Raffey is convening a small group with involvement of both survivors and young people to plan for this.

The Church of England is engaged in a five-year independent audit process of all Dioceses and Cathedrals with auditors INEQE. INEQE published their first annual report at the beginning of February 2025 and reported a positive and improving trend in the work of safeguarding within the Dioceses they had audited. They found that the vast majority of people connected to Church of England environments felt safe and respected, safeguarding becoming embedded and a growing number feeling the culture is improving. Sheffield Diocese and Cathedral will be audited in May 2026 and we are aware that this is a far-reaching audit of the entire Diocese and Cathedral and requires a large piece of work to gather evidence.

In the light of the Makin Review, and subsequent media stories, we have made an addition to the Diocesan risk register highlighting the potential impact of high-profile safeguarding failures in the wider church upon general confidence in Church of England safeguarding policy and procedure at all levels and the possibility of this undermining the work of the Diocesan Safeguarding Team and PCCs to create a safe church for all.

General Synod met in February and involved several safeguarding focussed debates. The most significant of these was around the future of church safeguarding. In this debate synod was asked to consider two different potential models. Model three involved a fully independent scrutiny body and the National Safeguarding Team (NST) being employed by an independent organisation. Model four involved not just independent scrutiny but full independent delivery of safeguarding involving the transfer of all safeguarding staff across all dioceses and Cathedrals as well as the NST into a new independent body. Model four involves complex legal implications and advice was given to synod from legal professionals and the Charity Commission.

The debate at synod was divided with the final agreement being that synod endorsed model three as a way forward in the short term with a call for further work around the legal and practical requirements necessary to implement model four.

Safeguarding training

During January 2025 259 online courses were accessed and Claire has trained 72 people face to face. This breaks down as 99 people completing the basic safeguarding course and 83 the foundation course with 24 completing the combined basic and foundation course. 12 people completed the leadership course, 4 the PTO specific leadership course, 31 the safer recruitment course, 68 the domestic abuse course and 3 the modern-day slavery course provided via the clewer initiative. 5 people completed training in the use of the safeguarding dashboards and hubs and 2 the PSO induction course.

Elina and Rachel have booked to attend the supervision course for ADSAs. Siân has attended a course on compassionate management.

The NST regularly reviews and updates the training courses provided and the required attendance at those courses. Following feedback, they have recently withdrawn the new version of the responding to domestic abuse course and reverted to the old version. This course is mandatory for all working with children, young people and vulnerable adults and the NST takes a broad view of the definition of this work.

The safeguarding team have reviewed the advice around the leadership course and the PTO version of the leadership course. The PTO version is designed for those members of clergy with PTO who exercise a limited ministry and as such the safeguarding team in conjunction with the Bishop's office have agreed that those eligible for the PTO pathway will be the small minority of people acting as Clerk in Holy Order around five times a year. All other individuals with PTO should complete the full leadership course.

Communications

The Code of Practice for Safeguarding in Acknowledged and in Recognised Religious Communities was passed by Synod in February. These will come into effect on 1st March. The Managing Safeguarding Concerns and Allegations Code of Practice as well as the Reporting Safeguarding Concerns and Allegations Code of Practice was also approved by Synod. There is period of implementation now underway ahead of the go-live date of the 1st September.

Siân Checkley
20.02.25