

**Independent Safeguarding Audit of
Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance**

2024

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 The independent safeguarding audit programme for the Church of England (CofE) was commissioned by the Archbishops' Council and is overseen by the CofE's National Safeguarding Team (NST). Led by the INEQE Safeguarding Group and working to a consistent framework, the audits test the sufficiency of safeguarding arrangements within CofE dioceses, having a particular focus on Diocesan Boards of Finance (DBFs) and cathedrals. Christ Church Cathedral in Oxford is a Royal Peculiar. It is not under the authority of the Diocesan Bishop but rather under the oversight of the Crown. It has been subject to a separate audit, which is pending publication.
- 1.2 The audits take account of the CofE's new National Safeguarding Standards that provide the structure for this report.¹
- 1.3 Audit findings take account of the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) audits, Past Cases Review 2 (PCR2), other relevant material as well as evidence from surveys, focus groups, direct correspondence and interviews. For Oxford's DBF, this involved the following:
- Over 250 documents being collated and analysed prior to the Audit's fieldwork.
 - A range of interviews with Church officers (staff and volunteers), external partners, victims and survivors and other stakeholders.
 - 335 anonymous survey responses which gathered input from victims and survivors, children and young people as well as those worshipping and / or working within the Diocese of Oxford.

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

- Six focus groups.
- A confidential contact form accessible via a dedicated webpage.
- In total, the Audit undertook 30 separate engagement sessions reaching 82 people.

1.4 This report has been reviewed for factual accuracy by the Diocese of Oxford.

2 Context

- 2.1 The Diocese of Oxford is located in the Thames Valley, an area of natural beauty and home to many protected areas such as Windsor Great Park and the Chiltern Hills. Spanning 2,200 square miles, it encompasses a diverse geography, covering the rurality of the Cotswolds and stretching into parts of London. The region is associated with embracing an inclusive and multicultural attitude, demonstrated by its many communities and groups.
- 2.2 Oxford is the fifth largest diocese in the CofE by land area and the fourth most populated diocese in the country. It comprises 624 parishes which are organised into 29 deaneries, within four Episcopal areas. The latest census data shows the Thames Valley as having a population of over 2.5 million, with a higher proportion of ethnic minorities habituating the more urban areas such as Reading and Slough.
- 2.3 The Thames Valley is also amongst the UK's most prosperous and dynamic regions, with a thriving economy and close connections to other countries via road, rail and air. It has a lower unemployment rate in comparison to many other regions in England. There is also a strong educational sector in the diocese, with associations to numerous universities and research centres, such as the Universities of Oxford, Milton Keynes (Open University), Reading and Buckingham.
- 2.4 The diocese is home to 810 places of worship, has 142 chaplains and 285 schools. Average weekly attendance at services stands at 35,000, as reported in the CofE Statistics for Mission in 2023.

3 Progress

- 3.1 Progress by the DBF has been strong in response to the SCIE audit, PCR2 findings, Lessons Learned Reviews (LLR) and its self-defined improvement journey. SCIE and PCR2 made 43 recommendations covering a range of safeguarding related issues, with three LLRs also prescribing a range of improvement activity.
- 3.2 Oversight of progress has been effectively led by the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP) through a collated action plan. Whilst the overwhelming majority of recommendations have been met, a small number have been subsumed into other workstreams and a few remain linked (and reliant upon) policy and practice being delivered at a national level.
- 3.3 The SCIE audit was published in October 2017 and resulted in 23 ‘considerations’, all of which were accepted. A defined action plan was created that addressed SCIE considerations 1-13, whilst 14-23 were not part of the action plan, the Audit has seen evidence that they were actioned and, indeed, a few are still in progress.
- 3.4 The PCR2 report was received on 30 October 2021. The 20 recommendations identified improvements across a range of issues. Examples of relevant progress include better management of Clergy Files (colloquially known as the Blue Files) by the Bishop’s Office and the management of information, not least that stored at the parish level.
- 3.5 LLRs summaries are posted on the Diocese of Oxford website and the Audit has seen evidence that the recommendations were implemented promptly. All have elicited appropriate levels of reflection across the diocese, generating an increased focus on preventative measures and safeguarding vigilance.

- 3.6 The events relating to the abuse and crimes committed by an individual (Stowe and Maids Moreton LLR) were extremely high profile, resulting in the creation of a dramatisation '*The Sixth Commandment*' and the documentary '*Killer in the Congregation*' broadcast by BBC. Some individuals are receiving ongoing support as a result of this case, and parishes continue to be encouraged to question when things do not seem right.
- 3.7 Overall, the DBF has made positive progress in its improvement journey. Oxford's Safeguarding Strategy mirrors the National Safeguarding Standards and documentation provided to the Audit has evidenced a particular emphasis on the development of preventative measures.

4 Culture, Leadership and Capacity

- 4.1 Whilst there have been no surveys focused on culture since the SCIE and PCR2 audits, the DBF has actively sought to utilise post LLR reflective sessions to drive cultural change at a senior level.
- 4.2 The Audit has seen examples of this work delivered by the Head of Safeguarding (DSO) and the Director of People. Multiple sessions from 2022 onward have focused on abuse of trust, power dynamics and how to build a safe and healthy culture, not least by prompting the use of professional curiosity and encouraging difficult and challenging conversations. Furthermore, information and an explanation of culture is easily accessible on the Diocese of Oxford website. This is good practice.
- 4.3 Feedback from the majority of those engaged by the Audit in interviews, focus groups and anonymous surveys suggest that this work is having a positive impact. The majority of respondents to the survey across the DBF (workforce) and parishes (workforce and community) indicated that they felt safe amongst their colleagues and congregations, had seen improvements in safeguarding arrangements and believed that a safeguarding culture is now embedded.
- 4.4 An examination of minutes from key meetings provides evidence of critical issues relating to culture being raised, challenged and appropriately debated. This has included areas that can cause discomfort to some, including sexual activity (too often, sex is equated with sin), cultural relativism (i.e., being cautious and fearful of being discriminatory), and the need to differentiate between safeguarding concerns and a safeguarding culture. This latter point has covered the use of language and the need to avoid safeguarding being weaponised.

- 4.5 The DBF introduced a Dignity and Respect Policy in 2021, which included creating and recruiting a pool of Volunteer Authorised Listeners (Bullying and Harassment) to support the process for addressing such matters. The DBF have also recently participated in the pilot of the 'Responding to Bullying and Harassment' and 'Living Well with Differences' online courses, which are part of the national initiative 'Working Positively Together', in partnership with Place for Hope.
- 4.6 The Audit saw and heard evidence of the significant efforts that have been made to ensure greater engagement and support regarding inclusion, disability and equality. This activity has accelerated following the launch of the DBF's Diversity and Inclusion Policy in January 2023. For example, the work of the Diocesan Disability Oversight Group and efforts to ensure those who are living with disabilities are included in the fostering of a healthy and mutually respectful culture. This now includes, amongst other initiatives, mentoring, the completion of disability access audits and awareness sessions for parish or deanery groups.
- 4.7 Furthermore, responding to requests from individuals from within the Diocese for a safe space to be heard, the DBF set up an LGBTQIA+ Chaplaincy.
- 4.8 The Head of Safeguarding (DSO) facilitated sessions with Bishops, Archdeacons and Associate Archdeacons after the Diocesan Safeguarding Team (DST) raised concerns about harm being caused in churches that are not open about their theological position (and whether they affirm people who are LGBTQIA+). The Audit welcomes the commitment of the most senior leaders to consider how they can help ensure that all churches are transparent about their position.
- 4.9 At the time of the Audit, the DBF was at an advanced stage of considering how best to implement a Survivor's Chaplaincy and minutes of meetings from late 2023 evidence the

level of detail and thought going into its construction. These include, amongst other issues, listening to and responding well to victims and survivors (in particular the Oxford Survivor Group), the provision of a trauma informed approach, the application of lessons learnt from other chaplaincies and utilising the strengths and experience of those on the DST who have developed considerable experience in this area. The Audit identifies this approach as good practice.

Leadership

- 4.10 The Bishop of Oxford is reflective and consciously applies the lessons that he has personally learnt during his tenure. He acknowledges past criticism and accepts the need to demonstrate that leadership in the Church has learnt from past errors of judgement.
- 4.11 He is unequivocal in his acknowledgement of his own safeguarding responsibilities and ultimate accountability and is equally clear about the role, responsibilities and authority of the Head of Safeguarding (DSO). The Audit saw evidence of a strong professional relationship between them.
- 4.12 Interviews and an examination of records evidenced that the Bishop has been robust when dealing with matters of conduct related to safeguarding issues.
- 4.13 The Bishop is also an active safeguarding voice at a national level and was influential in the development and passage through the House of Lords in what is now the Online Safety Act.
- 4.14 There is a firm focus on safeguarding across the senior leadership team and exemplary leadership from the highly regarded and engaged Lead Safeguarding Bishop. Given its size, the Diocese of Oxford is divided into areas. One Area Bishop is delegated as Lead

Safeguarding Bishop. They are well informed, highly effective and have built a significant level of knowledge and expertise. She is engaged with several charities promoting children's voices and following the brutal murder of a child in Reading, co-convened a Knife Crime Forum, bringing together more than 50 organisations including, churches, community groups, charities, sports clubs and the Police.

- 4.15 From a leadership perspective, the work that has gone into succession planning (the Safeguarding Bishop will shortly retire) is good practice and an example of how such important transitions should be managed.
- 4.16 Those in key roles such as the Diocesan Secretary, Area Bishops, Archdeacons, Associates and Area Deans have a firm focus on safeguarding and are able to explain how what they do relates to it. Archdeacons, Associates and Area Deans work well together in a structured approach, not least regarding visitations and parish inspections. The Audit saw evidence of their authoritative practice, professional safeguarding curiosity and challenge in action.
- 4.17 The DBF's governance arrangements reflect the expectations of the CofE and relevant requirements, such as those issued by the Charity Commission. Safeguarding is an agenda item at Bishop's Council Meetings and a review of minutes evidence good oversight, insight, and challenge. This includes updates on the important role of PSOs, issues such as financial and elder abuse, agreement on the DBF's Safeguarding Strategy and consideration and agreement on increasing the capacity of the DST.
- 4.18 The most recent safeguarding report to Bishops Council was divided into sections reflecting progress against the National Safeguarding Standards. This is good practice.

Recommendation 1: The Bishop’s Council should carry out a skills, inclusion and diversity audit. In doing so, it should consider whether it could co-opt a senior non-executive member with a strategic statutory safeguarding background. This would enhance their ability to apply appropriate governance level scrutiny.

4.19 The Bishop’s Staff Meeting (BSM) is a key forum and provides frequent and routine insight into a range of safeguarding issues. Focus has been applied on the pressures facing key safeguarding roles, pastoral care, the need to keep records of difficult conversations (the Audit concurs), communication issues and matters relating to training and DBS delays. This is good practice. However, the Head of Safeguarding (DSO) is only invited when it is deemed that safeguarding matters are to be discussed. This assumes that those without professional safeguarding expertise are alive to safeguarding issues indirectly related to other business. For example, expanding the church and housing, both of which have implications for safeguarding.

4.20 Expanding the church, will involve engaging with and welcoming more people into congregations. If successful, this will result in greater numbers of children and young people, as well as more adults, some of whom may be vulnerable. In simple terms, such an ambition must be matched by the churches ability to identify, manage and mitigate risk and their capacity to provide greater levels of support. The provision and management of housing goes beyond the administration of who lives where and the care and upkeep of buildings. Housing staff and those who engage in routine maintenance work have key safeguarding roles. Plumbers, electricians and others providing services in or around the home often have direct line of sight on those who are vulnerable and at risk of abuse. They therefore require a heightened level of awareness about what to look for and what to do if they have a concern. This requires specific training so that they can play their part in making people safer. It should not be assumed that a well-intentioned senior manager will

pick up such nuance. It is much more likely that an experienced safeguarding professional will.

Recommendation 2: The Head of Safeguarding (DSO), or a member of their team if they are unavailable, should be a permanent member of the BSM, rather than attending by invitation. This ensures that no matters impacting safeguarding will be overlooked.

The DSAP

- 4.21 The DSAP is active, engaged and well led by a chair with credible and relevant experience. The minutes of meetings seen by the Audit reflect a well-managed and appropriately focused agenda. There is good internal representation at all levels across the diocese and support from key statutory partners. The inclusion of independent members with relevant safeguarding experience is a strength and good practice.
- 4.22 The DSAP's Terms of Reference (ToR) were reviewed in January 2024. The ToRs follow the NST template and meetings are now configured to reflect the National Safeguarding Standards. This aligns with the approach adopted by the Head of Safeguarding (DSO) regarding the format of safeguarding reports submitted to governance and oversight meetings. This is also good practice.

Recommendation 3: Notwithstanding the current good practice regarding independent safeguarding experts sitting on DSAP, the DSAP should carry out a skills, inclusion and diversity audit. This should consider how it can further strengthen its oversight via the inclusion of relevant local community organisations (e.g. foodbanks), charities and those advocating on behalf of marginalised groups.

4.23 The DSAP operates a Quality Assurance Review Group (QARG). This is a sub-group that applies closer scrutiny of casework. The group is well supported by the Safeguarding Bishop, who believes it is one of the key groups within the DBF's safeguarding architecture. The Audit concurs. QARG has applied active oversight on a range of operational issues including the management of safeguarding concerns, risk assessments, safety plans and the service provided to victims / survivors of abuse.

4.24 In line with current national guidelines, the DSAP functions in an advisory capacity, exerting influence rather than providing independent scrutiny based on formal authority.

The DST

4.25 The Diocesan Safeguarding Team (DST) is made up of a highly capable and blended team. They are extremely well led and are relied upon to support those in governance and leadership roles, scrutiny functions, core groups, safety planning and HR and CDM processes. The team provides safeguarding advice, case management and training across the diocese. It has a firm focus on supporting the frontline of safeguarding in parishes.

4.26 The DST was restructured in 2021 resulting in a Head of Safeguarding post being created, alongside three Area Safeguarding Advisors, a Training Officer and administrative support. The team has been deliberately built to ensure it consists of complimentary skill sets and this is a clear strength. Its safeguarding arrangements are well organised, understood and underwritten by a sensible area framework. This is to be strengthened by the recruitment of a further Area Safeguarding Advisor this year. This is a positive development and one that is welcomed by the Audit. It demonstrates the ongoing commitment of the DBF to invest in and support what is the foundation of safeguarding practice in the diocese.

4.27 The area model presents opportunities to create networks utilising PSO coordinators. This would strengthen resilience and complement the existing approach regarding volunteer trainers.

Recommendation 4: The DBF should consider creating area networks utilising PSO coordinators. The payment of an honorarium should be considered to reflect the additional responsibilities such a role would bring.

4.28 Interviews of external statutory agencies with whom the DST collaborate, including the Local Authority Designate Officer (LADO), revealed high levels of confidence in practice.

4.29 The DST's engagement with Universities (Chaplains) and Theological Education Institutes (TEI) is also positive. However, any engagement should be underwritten by a baseline safeguarding assessment provided to the DST by the relevant body. This will ensure that the DST has an understanding of the identified safeguarding strengths and weaknesses of the institution they are being asked to support.

Recommendation 5: To provide a degree of reassurance regarding support to TEI arrangements, the DBF should request that they carry out an independent safeguarding review has been completed and submitted to them by the relevant TEI seeking their support.

4.30 During the Audit, several individuals highlighted what was referred to as religious communities and or fellowships. These were explained as religious communities that, whilst broadly under a CofE banner, sit outside normal arrangements. Such groups will undoubtedly require advice and support and to this end, they should be identified and their needs and potential risks scoped, where responsibility falls with the diocese. Whilst this may be a national issue, given that it was raised with the Audit, it attracts the following recommendation.

Recommendation 6: To provide a degree of reassurance regarding relevant religious communities and or fellowships operating within the diocese, the DBF should develop a better understanding of the range and safeguarding arrangements applied in such settings.

Clergy Files (Blue Files)

4.31 The Audit observed good practice with regard to the management of Clergy Files. This follows a clear and well understood system. The Audit is aware that Clergy Files (and their administration and use) are the subject of a national review, it is therefore difficult to make local recommendations at this time. However, notwithstanding the work undertaken on reviewing such files during the PCR2, it is good practice for a member of the DST to review a file on its arrival at the Bishop's Office. This Audit process will make a number of recommendations to the NST regarding Clergy Files. These will relate to the management, maintenance, and timeliness of delivery and examination upon the appointment of new clergy to the diocese. They will also cover archiving (post-digitisation) and the need to plan for the integration of other related systems such as the Clergy Register.

Ministerial Development Reviews (MDRs)

4.32 The Audit is aware of planned changes to Ministerial Development Reviews (MDRs). It will be important to ensure that such changes achieve uniform and meaningful inclusion of safeguarding as a section within them. Critically, how MDRs can help reflection and target personal development of safeguarding knowledge and practices.

Capacity

4.33 The DBF has an ambitious strategy to grow the church. It will therefore be important that it maintains and incrementally increases capacity to pre-empt need. Matching the scale of ambition with the ability to identify, mitigate and manage risk is key.

4.34 This is the sixth diocese that Auditors have engaged with. During the process it has

become clear that safeguarding arrangements would benefit from a Director of Safeguarding role. This would facilitate a safeguarding directorate, emphasising the greater independence from HR and other related functions. Furthermore, this would differentiate strategic from operational roles, provide insight at all governance and oversight meetings, provide capacity to manage transition regarding the DBF growth strategy and the possible implications regarding transitional management if the Jay Report recommendations are adopted. It would also provide for the Director of Safeguarding's presence in senior leadership meetings by virtue of right rather than invitation.

Recommendation 7: The DBF should:

(a) Appoint a Director of Safeguarding role. This could incorporate the role of the DSO. This would differentiate strategic from operational roles, provide insight at all governance and oversight meetings, provide capacity to manage transition regarding their growth strategy and the possible implications regarding transitional management if the Jay recommendations are adopted.

(b) If the appointment of a Director of Safeguarding role (incorporating the DSO authority) is agreed, a Senior Area Safeguarding Advisor should be appointed to support the operational roles of the Area Safeguarding Advisors.

4.35 In order to enhance the opportunities to engage in early help and awareness raising, not least via training, the DBF should expand their training capacity. This will increase networking opportunities via training and release Safeguarding Advisors to concentrate on more early help strategies.

Recommendation 8: The DBF should increase their training capacity and capability (beyond the NST's current template).

4.36 It is important to ensure that HR and safeguarding functions are not mixed and matched. This creates potential for confusion. To this end the DBF should review the way it currently divides responsibility regarding the administration of HR functions and those linked to the administrative support of safeguarding.

Recommendation 9: Whilst the current approach balances a number of administrative functions and resources the DBF should consolidate their approach by committing the current shared HR resource to HR matters only and the current administrative support role exclusively to the Safeguarding Team.

Recommendation 10: Given the growth in need across society and the likely increase in safeguarding requirements, alongside the DBF's ambition to grow the Church, the DBF should commit to a biennial review of its safeguarding capacity.

5 Prevention

- 5.1 Safer recruitment is a priority for the DBF. The House of Bishops' guidance (Safer Recruitment and People Management) is followed, procedures are aligned to legislation and practice is robust. There are established role descriptions, reference gathering, role specific vetting and a defined process to manage 'positive' returns on DBS checks. The Audit saw good use of 'Practice Notes' for data protection and security when handling positive DBS disclosures.
- 5.2 To further strengthen its arrangements, the DBF could add to the wording within its job adverts, application forms and job descriptions. For example, including a statement about the DBF's commitment to safeguarding will emphasise its focus within the Church and help to deter unsuitable applications.

Recommendation 11: The DBF should ensure that its commitment to safeguarding is embedded in all job adverts, application forms and job descriptions.

- 5.3 Alongside its own arrangements, the DBF provides a good range of support to parishes on safer recruitment. A DBS Eligibility Tool is provided via a third-party organisation and a 'Safer Recruitment and People Management Toolkit' sets out templates for resources such as applications forms, role descriptions, risk assessment, checklists and letters. The DBF also oversees and tests the sufficiency of safer recruitment in parishes via the Safeguarding Dashboard and Safeguarding Hub systems. As an early adopter of the Dashboard, the DBF has been able to encourage and drive participation. At the time of writing, nearly 80% of Oxford's parishes are registered and actively using the Parish Dashboard. This represents good practice.
- 5.4 It is positive that there are processes in place to monitor and report on the trends and data available through the Parish Dashboard. That said, the Audit makes the following

recommendation to support the transition from a self-assessment to a system which facilitates dip sampling and quality assurance.

Recommendation 12: In order to assure itself of the quality and impact of Parish Dashboard data, the DBF should define and adopt a Parish Dashboard quality assurance process. While it should be built on the principle of ‘working with’ rather than ‘doing to’, it should involve dip sampling to test the veracity of Parish Dashboard data.

- 5.5 The prevention agenda also links with staff and volunteers maintaining appropriate boundaries as part of their work. This issue is effectively supported through the DBF’s implementation of the national guidance ‘The Code of Safer Working Practice’, ‘Safer Environment and Activities’ and the promotion of the Parish Safeguarding Handbook. Arrangements have been further strengthened through the delivery of an ‘Enacting Appropriate Boundaries’ workshop held in the diocese.
- 5.6 The DBF’s conduct policies are set out within the Staff Handbook and for those who occupy voluntary positions, there is the ‘Code of Conduct for Volunteers and Individuals on Work Placement’. The Audit is aware that the volunteer process is currently being reviewed, this will involve an update to policy.
- 5.7 In parishes, Section 11.1 of the Parish Safeguarding Handbook outlines a ‘Code of safer working practice’. This is easily accessible through the Diocese of Oxford’s website, which represents good practice. This is supported by the Parish Workforce survey feedback in which the overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that they ‘follow the code of conduct’.
- 5.8 Raising awareness about safeguarding and making sure that people know what to do if they are worried is an important aspect of prevention. The Audit saw good practice in this

regard. This was corroborated by survey findings which indicated that the wider workforce were confident that they could recognise harm, respond to it and manage any subsequent safeguarding disclosure.

- 5.9 Effective awareness raising was also seen through 'Safeguarding Sunday', posters, the regular distribution of leaflets and interactions with senior clergy. During Safeguarding Sunday in 2023, PSOs were engaged on subjects such as issues surrounding spiritual abuse and managing those who present a risk of harm.
- 5.10 The regular use of newsletters is also good practice. The Audit noted a range of issues being covered such as the Parish Safeguarding Hub, resources for children, indicators of financial, elder and domestic abuse. The Bishop has also highlighted other contemporary safeguarding issues facing children and young people in particular those that manifest in the online environment. Newsletters are circulated via defined mailing lists. These lists are kept up to date as part of an annual audit of CMS during the Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM).
- 5.11 Other measures adopted to help prevent abuse and neglect include routine and meaningful conversations about safeguarding. The Audit saw and heard evidence of regular discussions taking place. At the senior leadership level, these include the Diocesan Synod, Bishop's Council, BSM, and Bishop's and Archdeacons Meeting (BAM).
- 5.12 At parish level, the DBF encourages PCCs to include safeguarding on their agendas at least twice a year and to ensure safeguarding is discussed at their APCM.
- 5.13 Attendance by the DST at Area Dean and Area Meetings also provides opportunities to keep safeguarding 'on the agenda' as does the activity undertaken in the context of youth work via the 'YouShape' initiative.

- 5.14 Actively seeking and responding to the views of children, young people and adults is a key component of effective prevention planning. In this regard, the DBF has established a victim / survivor group and there is evidence of a range of activity. For example, the victim / survivor group coproduced a survivor leaflet, a video with young people was launched (showing their insights into race equality week) and specific projects have been developed to listen to the voices of children and young people (*'Amplify: Whispers to Waves'*). This is all good practice.
- 5.15 The Diocese of Oxford website presents a strong, modern theme that loads quickly, performs well with search engine optimisation (SEO) and is mobile-responsive. The 'safeguarding' section is prominently featured and is both accessible and easy to navigate. Recent updates to the layout and available materials have improved the site and there are significant resources and appropriate signposting throughout. Users are also provided with information on safeguarding training, complaints and whistleblowing processes, as well as briefings on topics such as spiritual abuse and learning from reviews.
- 5.16 In terms of preventing harm to staff and volunteers, the DBF has a Lone Working Policy in place. This is comprehensive and covers areas such as responsibilities, risks, procedures, issues to consider, tips, record keeping and a personal safety risk assessment.
- 5.17 The Audit also observed evidence of template risk assessments that are completed for a range of Church activities. Such templates cover risk assessments for clergy, Church officers, and for specific circumstances when people connected to the Church have committed sexual offences.
- 5.18 The DBF recognises the need to raise awareness about safety in the context of the structural environment across the diocese and this is included within its safeguarding strategy action plan. This is good practice.

6 Recognising, Assessing and Managing Risk

- 6.1 Arrangements are in place that support the recognition, assessment, and management of risk across the diocese. These include the appointment of a blended and experienced DST, safeguarding guidance, policies, training and awareness raising. Clear and established reporting pathways exist and overall, the structures increase the likelihood of early risk detection, collaborative decision making, assessment and timely interventions.
- 6.2 A risk management review conducted in 2023 involved consultation, scrutiny, risk assessment and the involvement of a consultant to evaluate the level of risk throughout the diocese. This included a review of safeguarding. The Audit considers this approach to be good practice.
- 6.3 The DBF's strategic risk register covers key corporate issues and includes reference to safeguarding, with concerns and control measures being well documented. At the time of its submission to the Audit, the risk register had last been updated in January 2024. That said, the emphasis on safeguarding in the most recent iteration was relatively limited. Whilst capturing key issues such as safer recruitment and responding to victims and survivors, the register could be improved by going beyond the obvious and considering a wider context.
- 6.4 In this respect, it may be helpful for the DBF to think about how risk is described in relation to the National Safeguarding Standards. This could help the DBF better articulate how risk can manifest from pressures such as the cost-of-living crisis, the exponential rise of mental health or the impact of the Jay Report. The Audit also suggests that developing a separate safeguarding risk register for the DBF would be beneficial. This would allow for more thorough scrutiny and focus on wider safeguarding concerns. Some of which might be elevated from DSAP / QARG.

Recommendation 13: The DBF should develop a standalone safeguarding risk register to allow for more dedicated focus and scrutiny. Risks should be identified and defined against the National Safeguarding Standards and reviewed on a quarterly basis as a minimum. The DST / QARG should be consulted on the development of an expanded risk register.

- 6.5 Safeguarding concerns are appropriately triaged with the Head of Safeguarding (DSO) sensibly setting the threshold for engagement at a lower level to encourage contact. This process is as much about providing advice and guidance as it is about building trust and confidence with those in safeguarding roles. This helps create the conditions where concerns are more likely than not to be escalated to the DST. It also allows for a good line of sight on issues where the risk may not be properly understood by the reporting person. These arrangements are further strengthened by the ease of accessibility to Area Safeguarding Advisors by PSOs.
- 6.6 The MyConcern safeguarding case management system was adopted in the Diocese of Oxford in 2022. It is a centralised and secure database, allowing for safeguarding concerns to be reported and recorded. There is also a facility to attach relevant case reports, quickly retrieve referrals to external agencies and record correspondence and documentation in one place.
- 6.7 There is however room for improvement both in terms of the national system itself and the application of its functionality. For example, (as highlighted in previous Audit reports) some of the system's terminology is outdated referring to 'historic' concerns and there is no simple mechanism to identify concerns where Core Groups have been convened or where referrals have been made to the DBF by external organisations.
- 6.8 There are some frustrations amongst users with the system. It was described as "*disjointed and time consuming*" to navigate. Whilst recognising there are pros and cons with the

system, the general consensus is that it lacks the full functionality to meet the needs of the DST. The long-term impact of the adopted system is not yet known. The Audit has seen evidence that the DST have taken the time to develop their knowledge and understanding of the system's functionality and they are therefore able to use it well.

Recommendation 14: The DBF should continue to review the effectiveness of the MyConcern system and engage at a national level to share their experience and to help ensure the system meets local needs.

6.9 At the time of the Audit, there were 85 open concerns recorded on MyConcern, with 1787 that had been 'filed'. Cases were allocated an owner and a risk level, with 61 of the open cases graded as low risk, 16 medium and eight as high. The DST sensibly do not record all enquiries on MyConcern but keep separate records for those not meeting the safeguarding threshold. For example, this may include enquiries about DBS checks. Such enquiries can account for a substantial proportion of contact to the DST, (circa. 150 enquiries a month), many of which do not require a service, but add to the demand on the team. The Audit noted well-co-ordinated and timely responses to safeguarding concerns.

6.10 The case management process is well managed and supervision entries are recorded by the Head of Safeguarding (DSO). That said, the supervision of cases could be strengthened by adopting a more structured approach that captures the key issues discussed, risks identified and actions agreed. Along with supervision entries that outline the rationale for case closure, this approach would strengthen the current process.

Recommendation 15: Supervision entries recorded on MyConcern should follow a consistent format and be uploaded on at least a monthly basis.

Recommendation 16: The Head of Safeguarding (DSO) / DST should record the rationale for closing a case on the system.

6.11 Outcomes of cases brought to the attention of the DST typically involve one or more of the following:

- a) Onward referrals to statutory authorities.
- b) The management of individuals within the worshipping community.
- c) The provision / signposting to support.
- d) The initiation of disciplinary processes, such as the Clergy Disciplinary Measures (CDM).
- e) The initiation of safeguarding processes, i.e. the Core Group process.

Recommendation 17: The decision regarding how and by whom a concern is escalated or managed should be recorded on MyConcern.

6.12 The nature of the cases passed to the DST represent a range of concerns. The Audit is reassured that those that meet a statutory threshold are passed to the relevant agency. However, other concerns are less straightforward. In such cases where specific actions aren't deemed necessary the rationale for such decision making should be recorded, including reference to advice taken from any other person, or statutory or non-statutory partner.

Recommendation 18: Entries on MyConcern should provide a rationale for any 'inaction' on cases, where decisions have been made by the Head of Safeguarding (DSO) / DST not to pursue any particular action.

6.13 Risk assessments conducted by the DST are initiated in response to concerns involving Church officials, members of the religious community, or individuals from specific high-risk categories seeking participation in Church events or services. These assessments adhere

to national directives and prioritise the safety of victims, potential victims and vulnerable individuals.

6.14 The DST have significant offender management experience within their team and work well with relevant statutory agencies. At the time of writing, there were 48 safety plans in place, some of which have been managed over many years. The Audit recognises that setting up, monitoring and reviewing such arrangements is challenging and the work done is a credit to the DST and the incumbents they support. That said, the pressure of combined caseloads needs to be considered in respect of support to the DST, incumbents and others involved in safety plans.

6.15 Most of the plans are well-defined, proportionate and authorised. There is evidence of a multi-agency approach that incorporates routine and proportionate information sharing with the Police, probation service and LADOs. There is also evidence that the health and wellbeing of the respondent is taken into consideration and, where appropriate, steps taken to mitigate risks to them.

6.16 The significant majority of safety plans examined by the Audit set clear prohibitions regarding expected behaviours. They also recorded review dates and contained the written signatures from all relevant stakeholders including the respondent. However, the Audit noted that some safety plans had not been signed by all stakeholders.

Recommendation 19: The DST should review all safety plans and ensure that they are signed by all relevant parties and understood by the respondent.

6.17 Furthermore, the review of records indicated that an individual parish had drafted its own safety plan. This is unusual insofar as there is no evidence that a credible risk had been identified or agreed concerning a respondent in that parish by any other relevant agency.

The Audit notes that the Head of Safeguarding (DSO) had thoroughly reviewed this case. This is good practice.

Recommendation 20: The Head of Safeguarding (DSO) should:

- a) Ensure that the approach to safety plans is consistent and applied on the basis of agreed policy and practice.

6.18 During the field visit, the Audit met with a respondent. It was concerning that the respondent did not understand some of the expectations set in their current agreement. It was also noted that arrangements did not take account of the fact that some respondents were likely to visit other churches or other Church-related settings. The following recommendation is made in this regard. The Audit acknowledges that the national template itself does not take account of the likelihood of an offender attending multiple Church or Church-related settings. The issues related to the national template will be drawn to the attention of the NST. In the interim period, the following recommendation is made.

Recommendation 21: All existing safety plans should be reviewed to ensure that they include a clause that encompasses contact with Church attendees outside of the Church setting and attendance at other churches / associated Church settings.

6.19 The Audit was made aware that a review of a safety plan had taken place within the home of a PSO. Examination of records reassured the Audit that this is not normal practice within the diocese. It is however important to reinforce that a respondent should not be invited to the home of a PSO or anyone else involved in managing a safety plan. Given such plans involve individuals who are known to pose a risk of harm, the Audit do not consider such an approach to be good practice either in terms of staff / volunteer safety or reinforcing the formality attached to these arrangements.

Recommendation 22: Reviews of safety plans with respondents should not take place within informal settings such as the homes of PSO's or other staff and volunteers. Reviews should always take place in a formal setting.

6.20 Whilst the Audit recognise that training related to offender management is a national issue, more effective training should immediately be made available to those who work directly with respondents. This is particularly relevant for those working with sex offenders who, in the experience of the Audit, tend to manipulate, minimise, self-justify and blame others for their behaviour.

Recommendation 23: Whilst the development of training is a national issue, as an interim measure, the DBF should consider commissioning targeted training specifically on offender behaviours for those engaged with respondents on safety plans, such as link workers, clergy and PSOs.

6.21 Core Groups are routinely chaired by Archdeacons. They take a collaborative approach and encourage professional curiosity and challenge to help inform actions that mitigate risk. In complex cases and in keeping with the House of Bishop's guidance (that the DSO is not directly involved in the case), the DSO can act as chair. Whether as the chair or an attendee, it was clear in the feedback from Archdeacons and other Core Group members that the Head of Safeguarding's (DSO) professionalism and expertise was seen as a valuable resource.

6.22 Whilst not all meetings take place within the stipulated 48-hour time period, they are ordinarily timely, conducted online, managed well and comprise relevant representation. Critically, they actively consider the support needs of all parties.

6.23 The Audit saw and heard evidence of appropriate safeguarding first decisions by the Core Group. In one case seen by the Audit, this resulted in the suspension of a person of concern.

6.24 Core Group could be strengthened by ensuring that all parties involved including Archdeacons are aware of the existing escalation process should differences of opinion arise.

Recommendation 24: The DBF should ensure that Core Group participants are made aware of their escalation procedures.

6.25 The DBF is a registered charity with a statutory requirement to submit Serious Incident Reports (SIRs) to the Charity Commission. Support and practice guidance on SIRs is available at a national level.

6.26 One case was provided to the Audit which had met the threshold for SIRs submission. On examination of this case, the Audit found that trustees had been properly notified and that appropriate and timely considerations had informed their decision. Compliant reports were made to the Charity Commission and shared with the NST.

6.27 The diocese has a number of national information sharing agreements (ISAs) in place and follows the national data sharing agreement with the Police. Where an SLA is adopted with any other organisation it should include a formal information sharing agreement. For example, were the DBF to engage with a cathedral, an information sharing agreement would be required.

6.28 The Audit was told there is no defined escalation process in place to manage differences of opinion about the decisions and action taken on safeguarding cases by or within the

DST. Whilst the Audit saw evidence of effective and collaborative working relationships, a formal process to enable professional challenge would strengthen the DBF's safeguarding arrangements.

Recommendation 25: The DBF should develop and implement a defined escalation process for dealing with differences of opinion regarding decision making and actions taken on safeguarding cases within the DST.

6.29 Professional supervision of the Head of Safeguarding (DSO) is carried out by the NST Regional Safeguarding Lead. Such supervision tends to focus on the more significant or complex cases and whilst the Head of Safeguarding (DSO) has sensibly invited the NST to dip sample cases of their choice, there appears to be little scrutiny of cases where no further action has been directed. To further strengthen the supervision process the Audit makes the following recommendation.

Recommendation 26: Referred cases resulting in no further action and / or the provision of advice or guidance should be included as part of the supervision discussions between the Head of Safeguarding (DSO) and NST. This issue has been raised by the Audit with the NST.

6.30 The Head of Safeguarding (DSO) provides monthly supervision for members of the DST. This is linked to personal development portfolios enabling reflection and forward planning. This provides line of sight on practice and the identification of learning or developmental needs. Evidence of this good practice was captured in supervision reviews on MyConcern.

6.31 Wider supervision processes are further enhanced by the quality assurance arrangements involving Archdeacons who ring-fence specific time each week to consider safeguarding matters, including case management reviews. This is good practice.

- 6.32 The storage of personal information held by the DST on MyConcern is compliant with data protection legislation and the UK General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Clergy, staff and volunteers receive training on data protection and this is refreshed every three to four years. Additional guidance is outlined in the DBF's staff handbook and data protection forms part of the induction process. Positively, the majority of the DBF's workforce are aware of the diocese's privacy notice (identified via the Audit's surveys).
- 6.33 Whilst current arrangements for electronic communication include password protection, the Audit were advised of the absence of a secure email system across the diocese. This can result in an additional burden on the DST (and less security) in terms of information sharing with stakeholders and partners.

Recommendation 27: The DBF should introduce a secure email system to enhance data protection arrangements regarding information sharing.

7 Victims and Survivors

- 7.1 For many victims and survivors, disclosing the abuse they have suffered can be exceptionally challenging. Some will carry their pain in silence, others will come forward, but only when they are ready to do so. The decisions that need to be made in this respect will never be easy, but in the absence of any witnesses, they are ultimately decisions for victims and survivors alone.
- 7.2 Results of the Audit's survey indicated that half of the victim / survivor respondents felt that their experience of the safeguarding process in their Church "*had been better than they expected*". Even for the very small number who disagreed, there was more confidence with current arrangements. One victim / survivor explained "*I believe it is better than 5 years ago when the abuse to me happened as at least there is a safeguarding officer in our church*"
- 7.3 In this context, it is essential that all Church bodies create the conditions that build confidence amongst victims and survivors that they will be heard, taken seriously and that help, and protection will be effective. To do this, strong leadership, a healthy culture and robust arrangements for enduring support are key.
- 7.4 The DBF follows the House of Bishop's 'Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse' policy. Whilst not all respondents to the independent survey were aware of the guidance, the Audit has seen and heard evidence of the positive steps that the DBF has taken in this regard.
- 7.5 From a leadership perspective, there is absolute focus by the DBF on collaborating with victims and survivors and learning from their experiences. There is relevant representation at DSAP and the Audit saw a range of good practice across the DBF. One such example

involved the late Bishop of Buckingham who had been regularly meeting with a victim / survivor. This person was effectively supported to access redress and the Bishop helped them to be better heard by the Church – ultimately receiving an apology and access to further support. The Audit wishes to take this opportunity to highlight the good work done by the late Bishop of Buckingham, as he endeavoured to advocate by, for and on behalf of victims / survivors.

- 7.6 There is also evidence of a committed approach by the DST to engage with and support victims / survivors. This is evident in the establishment and support of the Oxford Survivor Group. This group plays a key role advising and collaborating on the production of resources to help raise awareness and shape future initiatives.
- 7.7 The Oxford Survivor Group is comprised of individuals who are highly experienced and skilled in their own right. They give up their valuable time because they are committed to helping improve practice by strengthening the safeguarding arrangements across the Diocese of Oxford. The co-production of the ‘Support for Survivors’ leaflet is a good example of the work they lead and is acknowledge by the Audit as good practice.
- 7.8 One member of the Survivor Group told the Audit that *“if I didn’t feel things were being addressed, I wouldn’t be in this group.”* That said, every victim / survivor is different and it is important to recognise this. Whilst some victims / survivors who engaged with the Audit felt supported with care and compassion and indicated that they had been signposted to relevant support and assistance, others took a very different view. Whilst few in number, some shared very different experiences, expressing less confidence in the support they had been offered or received.

Recommendation 28: The DBF should review the arrangements in place for signposting victims / survivors to support and test the outreach and accessibility of this information via its Survivors Group.

7.9 The DBF informed the Audit that it is committed to developing a culture and methodology which is trauma-informed and the Audit has seen and heard evidence from a small number of victims / survivors who had a positive view of the DST. One respondent said “[The DST are] very open to engaging with survivors, very honest and keen to improve the Diocesan response”. This is promising but will require sustained effort moving forward.

Recommendation 29: The DST should continue to support the Oxford Survivor Group and endeavour to reach out, engage and listen to as many victims / survivors of Church-related abuse as possible. This work should be frequently tested by the use of audits, focus groups and engagement with existing victim / survivor networks. For example, whether the current level of outreach, check-ins and appropriate support is meeting the needs of the individual victim / survivor.

7.10 The Diocese of Oxford website contains a good range of promotional material and advice. This includes key contact details, redress scheme information, reporting routes, further resources and contact details for support organisations.

Recommendation 30: Links to these pages should be frequently and routinely shared using all forms of digital and traditional communication methods.

7.11 The DBF reported that there are no specific challenges in accessing local support services and indeed reflected that they are ‘well supported’ by local services. This message should be promoted in line with the above recommendation.

8 Learning, Supervision and Support

- 8.1 There are arrangements in place across the diocese to support training, learning and development opportunities. Many of these align with the CofE's Safeguarding and Learning Development Framework and reflect the requirements of the National Safeguarding Standards.
- 8.2 That said, there is no defined DBF safeguarding training strategy to support the current arrangements. The CofE's Safeguarding Learning and Development Framework 2021 (due for renewal 2024) states: "...safeguarding needs to move away from something that is in some respects external/imposed upon the Church, to something that flows from within the soul of the Church." The Audit believes that a singular strategy would help promote this vision and ensure both direction and clarity within the training context.

Recommendation 31: The DBF should develop a training component within their Diocesan Safeguarding Strategy.

Strategic priorities should be defined based on NST requirements but in the context of the Diocese of Oxford and the roles and responsibilities of those it seeks to educate and empower.

As a minimum, this should outline:

- a) The key priorities and aims of safeguarding training.
- b) The responsibilities of staff and volunteers.
- c) The role and function of the DST / relevant staff.
- d) The means by which a needs analysis will inform future training (this should involve the DSAP).
- e) The delivery and evaluation process.
- f) An action plan outlining how these priorities will be met.

- 8.3 The DST has a dedicated role and defined administration support to help deliver safeguarding training across the diocese (see recommendation re capacity). The main focus is on the delivery of the national safeguarding modules. The two post-holders currently job share and they are further supported by Area Safeguarding Advisors and volunteer trainers. There is regular reporting to the DSAP which maintains oversight of training performance.
- 8.4 The training programme is reviewed every six months to ensure sufficient sessions are available to meet the needs of the workforce. The programme provides clarity on the courses available, and there are clear processes in place outlining when and how such opportunities can be accessed.
- 8.5 Delivery is face-to-face, online and via the national e-learning system. In addition to those with a training remit, the DST has two members of staff trained as domestic abuse champions and one trained in Adult Mental Health First Aid. This is good practice.
- 8.6 The majority of respondents to the Audit's survey agree that they had seen improvements to training across the diocese. The Audit acknowledges the flexibility shown by those involved in the delivery of training to deliver some modules locally, when individuals are unable to complete the training online. This is good practice. Beyond training itself, it can reinforce a sense of being valued and appreciated. This is critically important amongst those at the frontline of safeguarding in Church parishes.
- 8.7 NST training is supplemented by additional learning opportunities that help to develop the skills, knowledge and experience of the workforce. For example, the DST boosts its capacity by engaging external statutory organisations, charitable organisations and guest speakers. In 2023 guest speakers addressed topics including spiritual abuse, managing the risk of those who have sexually offended, and restorative justice. The Audit recognise

this as good practice. This model could provide the foundation for DBF PSO and Warden Annual events, exposing this critical workforce to external voices on subjects relevant to their work. Moreover, the event would be an annual opportunity to extend thanks and demonstrate appreciation to the frontline safeguarding community.

Recommendation 32: The DBF should continue to host PSO / Church Warden events to thank, value, educate, empower and inspire these key safeguarding volunteers. These should take place every year or every other year.

- 8.8 There is also a good range of material available on the Diocese of Oxford website, which contains a dedicated section on training.
- 8.9 Other good practice seen by the Audit includes the DST hosting drop-in sessions for PSOs, participating in Safeguarding Sunday and facilitating Safeguarding Hub workshops.
- 8.10 Sessions have also been provided on helping staff and volunteers with the Parish Dashboard and managing the risk of people who have sexually harmed. Overall, there is a range of good practice in place that responds to the diverse needs and learning styles that exist across the diocese's workforce.
- 8.11 Some challenges do remain, such as face-to-face courses being cancelled due to a lack of participants or a lack of capacity within the DST. The DST understands the value of its direct involvement in training (with such contact helping to build relationships and confidence) but equally recognises capacity limitations due to other demands on their services.
- 8.12 Whilst it is reassuring that training is well managed, many of those engaged by the Audit felt that more face-to-face training would be of benefit and particularly welcome within

parishes. This view was not only articulated due to the digital challenges faced by some, but because of the recognition that face-to-face training can help to promote discussions, reflection and the identification of contemporary concerns. The Audit concurs with this point.

Recommendation 33: The DST should maximise the use of volunteers to deliver contextualised training based on local need across parishes.

Recommendation 34: The DST should continue to maximise the use of face-to-face training where possible, particularly where digital challenges exist for parishes.

8.13 The Audit noted the positive work undertaken by the DST to deliver ‘train the trainer’ sessions. This has resulted in a dedicated pool of 20 such trainers. The Audit takes the view that this is good practice which could be further strengthened by the development of an accreditation scheme. Ultimately, this will become a national issue and will attract a recommendation from the Audit to the NST. Notwithstanding this fact, capacity permitting, the DBF could continue its role as a trailblazer by developing a pilot accreditation scheme.

8.14 Given the pressure the current team faces, the Audit takes the view that the DBF should consider the appointment of a further dedicated training resource. This would have the potential to increase the network of trainers, the number and type of courses and to develop greater frontline confidence in competence.

Recommendation 35: The DBF should consider the appointment a further dedicated training resource.

Recommendation 36: Capacity permitting, the DBF should develop a pilot accreditation scheme. This could be done in conjunction with the NST.

- 8.15 The Audit was made aware by the DBF that there is no training available in different languages. Such provision would help to meet the needs of some parish staff and volunteers (where English is not their first language) and would lend itself to online delivery at a national level. The Audit will raise this with the NST.
- 8.16 Feedback to the Audit on the administration, quality and delivery of training was positive. This was strongly reflected in survey results, interviews and the various documentation examined. The Audit listened to the recording of a safeguarding speech delivered at a parish by the Head of Safeguarding (DSO). Accessible through the Diocese of Oxford website, this covered key messages including complacency, awareness, curiosity and safeguarding fatigue. This approach to raising awareness is considered good practice.
- 8.17 Following engagement with the workforce and through its examination of available evidence, the Audit believes there is a need for targeted training on sex offenders. This would complement available NST training and include detailed learning about offending tactics and behaviours - a relevant and current issue for the Church.
- 8.18 Furthermore, considering the rise in incidents across society, where social media and technology are being used to either harm, abuse or facilitate abuse, a greater understanding of online safeguarding is likely to make people safer. The Audit acknowledges that the NST holds overarching responsibility for training in these areas, although the DBF should seek to introduce local training in advance of any nationally delivered solution.

Recommendation 37: Alongside the Recommendation 22, specific training sessions focused on the topic of digital safeguarding should be introduced into the training programme and made accessible to relevant Church officers, volunteers and staff in the DBF and parishes.

- 8.19 Overall, the Audit is reassured that the combination of NST training and local initiatives are generally robust in preparing individuals for dealing with safeguarding concerns.
- 8.20 In terms of potential improvements, there are opportunities to build on the arrangements in place, specifically regarding the capacity within the DST. The demands of maintaining a comprehensive system of training analysis, delivery and evaluation requires time and investment. Findings indicate the administrative tasks associated with the training role are burdensome and the demands placed on the trainers can see them stretched.
- 8.21 Some of these capacity issues reportedly emanate from IT data systems not 'speaking to each other' and impacting on time management. For example, the Audit was informed that the records to provide the percentages of clergy who have completed the training through the NST online portal are inaccurate because roles are self-identified and there is no identifier to match to CMS records. This problem has been raised with the NST. The Audit will further raise this as an issue.
- 8.22 Training is evaluated in line with the Safeguarding Learning and Development Framework through a range of methods including initial feedback to trainers during sessions, post training evaluation forms, online quizzes and a follow up self-reflection task 6 weeks after the training session. This is considered good practice. That said, the low percentage rate for those completing evaluation forms (30% in 2023) remains a challenge. The reflection task varies for each course, with some including an action plan or project tasks to demonstrate how participants' learning will be applied to their working context.

Recommendation 38: The DBF should scope initiatives to increase the submission of post-training evaluation forms. For example: issue training certificates on completion of evaluation forms. This could be linked to the increased provision of a training resource (as highlighted in Recommendation 7) on capacity.

- 8.23 Key trends and challenges from training courses are shared at DSAP and feedback is provided to the NST to inform the revision, development and release of new course content. This can contribute to the consultation on the new draft of the Safeguarding Learning and Development Framework.
- 8.24 Professional development is provided at the induction process, through regular trainer meetings, supervision sessions, observation and co-facilitation of subjects with post session debriefs. Volunteer safeguarding trainers complete a specific trainer review form reflecting on their challenges and experiences.
- 8.25 The Audit saw good practice in the use of warnings whereby reminder letters are forwarded from the Bishop's office and if necessary, the Bishop themselves, if training has been cancelled or has expired for a period of time. This reinforces the importance and significance of compliance with training requirements.
- 8.26 Arrangements for induction are in place across the Diocese. For those in safeguarding roles, this can include pre-read material, targeted 1-1 meetings with the DST, and online safeguarding training. There are also orientation days for staff and clergy which include a focus on safeguarding. The Audit was particularly interested in the Head of Safeguarding's (DSO) view on the potential for a Learning and Improvement case review repository, similar to the one hosted by the NSPCC for child safeguarding practice and serious case reviews. This is an issue that the Audit will raise with the NST.
- 8.27 Induction takes place before a Church officer commences engagement directly with children, young people and vulnerable adults. Survey findings for the DBF workforce showed the overwhelming majority had completed the induction course (86.4%) however for parishes, half of the workforce had not. For PSOs, only 33.5% have completed induction. The Audit recognise that some respondents may have been in post prior to the process being implemented in 2021 but this gap must be addressed.

Recommendation 39: The Audit should ensure those in post for a number of years are up to date with any new safeguarding information provided during the current induction process and to this end should initiate a specific audit and further prompts. This should be monitored at the DSAP and progress reported to the BSM.

- 8.28 The Audit observed a thorough process for overseeing the discernment of licensed lay and ordained ministry. It is positive that safeguarding is a dominant theme. For example, all candidates are required to have completed specific safeguarding training, reflect on their experiences of safeguarding and explore past cases and reviews. This is considered good practice.
- 8.29 There is a clear commitment to promoting and developing a healthy work-life balance for those in safeguarding roles. Members of the DST can use TOIL and flexible working arrangements are available. Out-of-hours cover is provided by an external company. Employees and clergy also have access to the Employee and Clergy Assistance Programme (EAP). This offers emotional support, provides access to counselling, and the use of a helpline. There are additional support processes for clergy including access to St Luke's national charity which extends to spouses and children.
- 8.30 Additional arrangements exist to support Church officers when an allegation of abuse or complaint is made against them. Clergy can access a trained Link person, pastoral support and / or counselling.
- 8.31 The DST demonstrated a strong commitment and passion for their roles. They clearly understand the nature of the work they are exposed to and have access to a range of support. Considering the nature of the work, the Audit recognises the potential for routine exposure to trauma. Given the need to maintain stability in a small team, the Audit believes

that the mandatory psychological support should be made available to those in roles assessed as most likely to suffer from transferred trauma.

Recommendation 40: The DBF should consider implementing mandatory counselling sessions for members of the DST to ensure they are sufficiently supported in the challenging role they do.

9 Conclusion

- 9.1 Notwithstanding the stubborn and very real challenges the DBF has faced over recent years, its culture and leadership has developed to a position of strength. In no small measure, this is due to the leadership team's ability to reflect on lessons, invest in safeguarding and build better. The Audit has seen recognition of and overwhelming support for, the changes implemented over the last few years right across the diocese.
- 9.2 The DBF's principal strength, is in the solid safeguarding foundation delivered by its exceptionally well-led and blended Safeguarding Team. This is complemented by the sensible area framework, distributed leadership and the DBF's ambition to strengthen its arrangements via proportionate and incremental growth.
- 9.3 There is a sense of optimism across the frontline in many parishes, where talented PSOs lead by example. Collaboration is strong and manifests in relationships across, within and outside of the Church. Whether engaging with statutory services, flexing to deliver face-to-face training, building networks of volunteer trainers or supporting safety plans and case management, the DST's partnership with parishes is on an upward trend. That is not to ignore the very real challenges that still exist in some areas, but the Audit has seen an undeniable focus in all areas on a 'safeguarding first' philosophy.
- 9.4 This philosophy is reflected in the way the national standards have become embedded in the language of so many across the DBF and within parishes. From the Director of People to volunteers, the language of inclusion, prevention, risk management and a focus on actively seeking to be trauma-informed was evident.
- 9.5 There is still some work to be done to engage and support victims and survivors and those who engaged the Audit were divided on whether change (or enough of it) had occurred.

That said, the progress in building on the success of the Oxford Victim Group and the positive feedback from a number of victims / survivors is a good foundation to build on. It is also fitting to push forward with the work undertaken by the late Bishop of Buckingham, who did so much to advocate by, for and on behalf of victims and survivors.

9.6 Moving forward, the DBF and its Safeguarding Team need to build on their strengths and focus on those areas of practice that could be further developed. These areas are highlighted within the body of the report and include allocating more time to early help and support in parishes. They also include delivering on the commitment to create a chaplaincy for victims and survivors, further reinforcing scrutiny regimes, enhancing safety planning and innovating to educate, empower and protect the communities they serve.

9.7 Given the significant strengths highlighted in this report concerning committed leadership, an outstanding Safeguarding Team and strong governance and scrutiny mechanisms the DBF only needs to reinforce its capacity and implement the recommendations herein to become an exemplar in its field.

10 Appendix 1 – Recommendations

Recommendation 1: The Bishop’s Council should carry out a skills, inclusion and diversity audit. In doing so, it should consider whether it could co-opt a senior non-executive member with a strategic statutory safeguarding background. This would enhance their ability to apply appropriate governance level scrutiny.

Recommendation 2: The Head of Safeguarding (DSO), or a member of their team if they are unavailable, should be a permanent member of the BSM, rather than attending by invitation. This ensures that no matters impacting safeguarding will be overlooked.

Recommendation 3: Notwithstanding the current good practice regarding independent safeguarding experts sitting on DSAP, the DSAP should carry out a skills, inclusion and diversity audit. This should consider how it can further strengthen its oversight via the inclusion of relevant local community organisations (e.g. foodbanks), charities and those advocating on behalf of marginalised groups.

Recommendation 4: The DBF should consider creating area networks utilising PSO coordinators. The payment of an honorarium should be considered to reflect the additional responsibilities such a role would bring.

Recommendation 5: To provide a degree of reassurance regarding support to TEI arrangements, the DBF should request that they carry out an independent safeguarding review has been completed and submitted to them by the relevant TEI seeking their support.

Recommendation 6: To provide a degree of reassurance regarding relevant religious communities and or fellowships operating within the diocese, the DBF should develop a better understanding of the range and safeguarding arrangements applied in such settings.

Recommendation 7: The DBF should:

(a) Appoint a Director of Safeguarding role. This could incorporate the role of the DSO. This would differentiate strategic from operational roles, provide insight at all governance and oversight meetings, provide capacity to manage transition regarding their growth strategy and the possible implications regarding transitional management if the Jay recommendations are adopted.

(b) If the appointment of a Director of Safeguarding role (incorporating the DSO authority) is agreed, a Senior Area Safeguarding Advisor should be appointed to support the operational roles of the Area Safeguarding Advisors.

Recommendation 8: The DBF should increase their training capacity and capability (beyond the NST's current template).

Recommendation 9: Whilst the current approach balances a number of administrative functions and resources the DBF should consolidate their approach by committing the current shared HR resource to HR matters only and the current administrative support role exclusively to the Safeguarding Team.

Recommendation 10: Given the growth in need across society and the likely increase in safeguarding requirements, alongside the DBF's ambition to grow the Church, the DBF should commit to a biennial review of its safeguarding capacity.

Recommendation 11: The DBF should ensure that its commitment to safeguarding is embedded in all job adverts, application forms and job descriptions.

Recommendation 12: In order to assure itself of the quality and impact of Parish Dashboard data, the DBF should define and adopt a Parish Dashboard quality assurance process. While it should be built on the principle of 'working with' rather than 'doing to', it should involve dip sampling to test the veracity of Parish Dashboard data.

Recommendation 13: The DBF should develop a standalone safeguarding risk register to allow for more dedicated focus and scrutiny. Risks should be identified and defined against the National Safeguarding Standards and reviewed on a quarterly basis as a minimum. The DST / QARG should be consulted on the development of an expanded risk register.

Recommendation 14: The DBF should continue to review the effectiveness of the MyConcern system and engage at a national level to share their experience and to help ensure the system meets local needs.

Recommendation 15: Supervision entries recorded on MyConcern should follow a consistent format and be uploaded on at least a monthly basis.

Recommendation 16: The Head of Safeguarding (DSO) / DST should record the rationale for closing a case on the system.

Recommendation 17: The decision regarding how and by whom a concern is escalated or managed should be recorded on MyConcern.

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Recommendation 22: Reviews of safety plans with respondents should not take place within informal settings such as the homes of PSO's or other staff and volunteers. Reviews should always take place in a formal setting.

Recommendation 23: Whilst the development of training is a national issue, as an interim measure, the DBF should consider commissioning targeted training specifically on offender behaviours for those engaged with respondents on safety plans, such as link workers, clergy and PSOs.

Recommendation 24: The DBF should ensure that Core Group participants are made aware of their escalation procedures.

Recommendation 25: The DBF should develop and implement a defined escalation process for dealing with differences of opinion regarding decision making and actions taken on safeguarding cases within the DST.

Recommendation 26: Referred cases resulting in no further action and / or the provision of advice or guidance should be included as part of the supervision discussions between the Head of Safeguarding (DSO) and NST. This issue has been raised by the Audit with the NST.

Recommendation 27: The DBF should introduce a secure email system to enhance data protection arrangements regarding information sharing.

Recommendation 28: The DBF should review the arrangements in place for signposting victims / survivors to support and test the outreach and accessibility of this information via its Survivors Group.

Recommendation 29: The DST should continue to support the Oxford Survivor Group and endeavour to reach out, engage and listen to as many victims / survivors of Church-related abuse as possible. This work should be frequently tested by the use of audits, focus groups and engagement with existing victim / survivor networks. For example, whether the current level of outreach, check-ins and appropriate support is meeting the needs of the individual victim / survivor.

Recommendation 30: Links to these pages should be frequently and routinely shared using all forms of digital and traditional communication methods.

Recommendation 31: The DBF should develop a training component within their Diocesan Safeguarding Strategy.

Strategic priorities should be defined based on NST requirements but in the context of the Diocese of Oxford and the roles and responsibilities of those it seeks to educate and empower.

As a minimum, this should outline:

- g) The key priorities and aims of safeguarding training.
- h) The responsibilities of staff and volunteers.
- i) The role and function of the DST / relevant staff.
- j) The means by which a needs analysis will inform future training (this should involve the DSAP).
- k) The delivery and evaluation process.
- l) An action plan outlining how these priorities will be met.

Recommendation 32: The DBF should continue to host PSO / Church Warden events to thank, value, educate, empower and inspire these key safeguarding volunteers. These should take place every year or every other year.

Recommendation 33: The DST should maximise the use of volunteers to deliver contextualised training based on local need across parishes.

Recommendation 34: The DST should continue to maximise the use of face-to-face training where possible, particularly where digital challenges exist for parishes.

Recommendation 35: The DBF should consider the appointment a further dedicated training resource.

Recommendation 36: Capacity permitting, the DBF should develop a pilot accreditation scheme. This could be done in conjunction with the NST.

Recommendation 37: Alongside the Recommendation 22, specific training sessions focused on the topic of digital safeguarding should be introduced into the training programme and made accessible to relevant Church officers, volunteers and staff in the DBF and parishes.

Recommendation 38: The DBF should scope initiatives to increase the submission of post-training evaluation forms. For example: issue training certificates on completion of evaluation forms. This could be linked to the increased provision of a training resource (as highlighted in Recommendation 7) on capacity.

Recommendation 39: The Audit should ensure those in post for a number of years are up to date with any new safeguarding information provided during the current induction process and to this end should initiate a specific audit and further prompts. This should be monitored at the DSAP and progress reported to the BSM.

Recommendation 40: The DBF should consider implementing mandatory counselling sessions for members of the DST to ensure they are sufficiently supported in the challenging role they do.

11 Appendix 2 – Glossary of Abbreviations

APCM	Annual Parochial Church Meeting
BAM	Bishops' and Archdeacons Meeting
BSM	Bishop's Staff Meeting
CDM	Clergy Discipline Measure
CMS	Case Management System
CofE	Church of England
DBF	Diocesan Board of Finance
DBS	Disclosure and Barring Service
DSAP	Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel
DSO	Diocesan Safeguarding Officer
DST	Diocesan Safeguarding Team
EAP	Employee and Clergy Assistance Programme
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulations
HR	Human Resources
ISA	Information Sharing Agreement
LADO	Local Authority Designated Officer
LGBTQIA	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual
LLR	Learning Lessons Reviews
MDR	Ministerial Development Review
NST	National Safeguarding Team
ODBF	Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance
PCC	Parochial Church Council
PCR2	Past Cases Review 2
PSO	Parish Safeguarding Officer
QARG	Quality Assurance Review Group
SAA	Safeguarding Area Advisor
SCIE	The Social Care Institute for Excellence

SEO	Search Engine Optimisation
SIR	Serious Incident Report
SPOC	Single Point of Contact
TEI	Theological Education Institutes
ToR	Terms of Reference



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