

# **Independent Safeguarding Audit of Bath and Wells Diocesan Board of Finance and Wells Cathedral**

2025

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# Introduction

# 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 Diocese Boards of Finance (DBFs) and Cathedrals. They have a particular focus on the CofE's new National Safeguarding Standards that provide the structure for this report.<sup>1</sup>

1.2 Audit findings have taken account of the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) audits, Past Cases Review 2 (PCR2) outcomes, other relevant material as well as evidence from surveys, focus groups, direct correspondence and interviews. For Bath and Wells DBF and Wells Cathedral, this involved the following:

- Over 370 documents being collated and analysed prior to the Audit's fieldwork.
- A range of interviews being held with Church officers (staff and volunteers), external partners, victims, survivors and other stakeholders.
- 670 anonymous survey responses being received, which gathered input from key communities connected to the Church. These were submitted by victims and survivors, children and young people, as well as those worshipping or working within the DBF, Cathedral and parishes.
- Six focus groups.
- A confidential contact form being made available via a dedicated webpage.
- In total, the Audit undertook 42 separate engagement sessions reaching 103 people.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/national-safeguarding-standards-and-quality-assurance-framework\\_sep23.pdf](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/national-safeguarding-standards-and-quality-assurance-framework_sep23.pdf)

- 1.3 The Audit report is separated into Part One, Bath and Wells DBF and Part Two, Wells Cathedral. This has been done to ensure that each audited body is able to focus on their own strengths and areas for identified improvement.
- 1.4 The report has been reviewed for factual accuracy by both the DBF and Cathedral.

# **Part One - Bath and Wells Diocesan Board of Finance**

## 2 Context

- 2.1. The geographical footprint of the Diocese of Bath and Wells predominantly aligns with the historic county of Somerset, with a small inclusion of land within Dorset. Its administrative structure incorporates the unitary authorities of Bath and North East Somerset, North Somerset, and Somerset County Council. The Diocese is further divided into three archdeaconries and 18 deaneries, encompassing 463 parishes and 569 places of worship throughout a diverse blend of rural and urban environments. The urban centres of Bath, Weston-Super-Mare, Taunton, Bridgwater, and Yeovil constitute nearly a third of the total population within the Diocese.
- 2.2. Characterised by its appealing rural countryside and coastline, the area boasts over 60 miles of coast, two-thirds of Exmoor National Park, and several Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It features numerous visitor attractions, including the well-known Cheddar Gorge and Caves. The area is also known for its events, such as the Glastonbury music festival and Bridgwater's illuminated carnival.
- 2.3. The region has good employment levels, but severe deprivation remains in some urban areas. In Bath and North East Somerset, wealthy areas contrast with deprived social housing, and some towns struggle with high unemployment and low-paid jobs. North Somerset and Bath and North East Somerset have significant wealth gaps. The region is mainly Christian or non-religious, with small populations adhering to other faiths.
- 2.4. Education is a notable focus, with Bath and North East Somerset hosting two universities, the University of Bath and Bath Spa University, which together have over 20,000 students. These universities are significant employers.
- 2.5. The region also faces challenges with child poverty. In the Somerset County Council area, child poverty levels are around 25% and in Bridgwater and West Somerset, they reached

33% in 2019-20. Overall, the proportion of children in Bath and North East Somerset is proportionately low.

- 2.6. Bath and Wells Diocese has an estimated population of around one million, growing incrementally since 2001. Data collected through Statistics for Mission (2023) showed that Bath and Wells Diocesan average Sunday attendance was around 13,600.



### 3 Progress

- 3.1. The SCIE safeguarding audit and PCR2 made 61 considerations / recommendations for the DBF in Bath and Wells. These covered a range of issues, including capacity, safer recruitment, case management and supporting and engaging with victims and survivors.
- 3.2. The SCIE audit was published in December 2016, resulting in 17 considerations, all of which were accepted. The Audit heard that the implementation of resulting actions was overseen by the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP) and the current Diocesan Safeguarding Officer's (DSO's) predecessor. This period of change spanned approximately two years and followed a dedicated action plan. Since then, the DSO has provided updates on the progress and changes that have been made. At the time of the Audit, the only remaining action was the recruitment of external members to the DSAP. This is being actively addressed.
- 3.3. The PCR2 commenced in March 2020, with the independent reviewers submitting their report in December 2021. There were 44 recommendations which applied to the local context of Bath and Wells. A dedicated action plan was created in response and overseen by the DSO currently in post. The Audit heard of the improvement activity undertaken and was reassured of the progress that has been made. Many actions have been completed, with others still progressing, such as bringing all historic files up to standard and expanding communications to victims and survivors.
- 3.4. The DBF has also demonstrated its commitment to continuous improvement by positively responding to a Local Learning Review (LLR), which made 46 recommendations. A central concern of this LLR was the handling of misconduct and whilst the DBF can demonstrate how it has applied learning locally, some actions await national progress. Another LLR is currently underway. Whilst the location of this LLR fell outside this Audit's direct terms of

reference, a separate report concerning matters raised will be shared with the Diocesan Bishop and DSO.

- 3.5. Under the current DSO, significant improvements have been implemented, including the restructuring of the Diocesan Safeguarding Team (DST) and the outsourcing of out-of-hours provision. That said, increased safeguarding awareness and demand have created capacity challenges, which are impeding further progress. These issues are addressed in more detail in Part One: Culture, Leadership, and Capacity.

## 4 Culture, Leadership and Capacity

### Culture

- 4.1 Feedback from surveys and focus groups across the DBF workforce and parish community indicated a strong desire to build and maintain a proactive and collective safeguarding culture. This view was promoted by the Diocesan Bishop and the wider leadership team, who, with the support of the engaged and visible Diocesan Safeguarding Team (DST), are committed to ensuring that safeguarding is everyone's business, with responsibility for its delivery being distributed throughout the Diocese.
- 4.2 The Audit saw and heard evidence of the work being undertaken to make safeguarding more personal and relatable. This included persistent and positive outreach by the Diocesan Bishop and Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO), and the work of trainers who now focus on encouraging and supporting parish-level ownership. This has empowered key advocates, such as Parish Safeguarding Officers (PSOs) and those engaged during leadership training, to cascade learning across their areas of influence.
- 4.3 Responses to the Audit's surveys also indicate that this diocesan-wide commitment is having a positive impact. The most common words used to describe the work and worship environments were welcoming, supportive, collaborative, and inclusive; a sentiment strongly reinforced by most survey respondents in the free text commentary. The overwhelming majority reported observing improvements in overall safeguarding arrangements, which most now consider embedded within their community. This impressive feedback also reflected a widely held confidence about raising safeguarding concerns without fear of reprisals.
- 4.4 It was evident that the Diocesan Bishop is acutely aware of his responsibility in setting the cultural tone, and that his emphasis on safeguarding is central to this. He explained his

aim is to enable an environment of trust and connection, thereby creating psychological safety, building trust, and enabling more meaningful and transformative conversations. This helps ensure individuals feel genuinely known and valued. An example of this in practice can be seen in the changes implemented to Ministerial Development Reviews (MDRs). The reconfiguration of the MDR process has moved beyond form-filling to arrangements that are more personal, reflective, and insightful. There is wider outreach and consultation and an aspiration to reach 75 parishes per year. The Diocesan Bishop's timely and reflective engagement was also noted. His genuine listening and person-centred responses to victims and survivors, whenever opportunities for engagement and support arise, were particularly highlighted. Nearly all staff and volunteers who spoke with the auditors acknowledged his philosophy and commitment.

## **Leadership**

- 4.5 The Audit found the Diocesan Bishop to be self-aware, reflective, and dedicated to improvement. He holds ultimate accountability for safeguarding, a responsibility that he unequivocally accepts.
- 4.6 The Audit also found substantial evidence of the Diocesan Bishop's commitment, enthusiasm, and positive impact. Interviewees consistently spoke highly of his engagement, support, and encouragement. Furthermore, the Audit process successfully triangulated evidence indicating a consistent application of a 'safeguarding first' philosophy in his approach to decision-making. This included instances where he made difficult authoritative decisions and raised challenges.
- 4.7 The Diocesan Bishop has a strong and collaborative relationship with the Dean of Wells Cathedral and is well-supported by an active and experienced Bishop's Chaplain, as well as an effective and thoughtful Diocesan Secretary and Assistant Diocesan Secretary. The

Assistant Diocesan Secretary currently line manages the DSO. These senior staff members demonstrate a sound, general understanding of safeguarding, their individual roles and responsibilities within it, and the appropriate avenues for seeking help and support.

- 4.8 The Audit observed evidence of a thoughtful approach by senior leaders and, when necessary, investment in the wider safeguarding team. This was apparent in the Diocesan Secretary's prompt action to reinforce capacity during a period of reduced capability by procuring suitably qualified external support. This demonstrates good practice.

### **Archdeacons and Safeguarding**

- 4.9 Archdeacons are central to the safeguarding framework in place across the Diocese. Demonstrating their commitment to improving their contributions, they have proactively supported and encouraged a range of safeguarding activities, notably during benefice visits. The Audit also highlighted their positive engagement within the revised MDR process and their active involvement in Core Groups.
- 4.10 To further strengthen safeguarding practices, the following recommendations are proposed.

**Recommendation D1:** The DBF should establish a rotating Lead Safeguarding Archdeacon Role. This formal position, rotating every two to three years, would enhance the presence of safeguarding in key leadership and governance meetings. This would ensure that relevant discussions are appropriately considered and communicated to other Archdeacons and their respective areas. The role would provide a clear point of contact, improve the dissemination of safeguarding information within the leadership structure, and enable a deeper understanding of safeguarding principles and procedures among all Archdeacons.

**Recommendation D2:** The focus of safeguarding during Archdeacon visits and meetings:

To build upon the existing safeguarding work undertaken during both formal and informal engagements, Archdeacons should:

- a) Implement annual safeguarding meetings: Convene yearly meetings with their area PSOs, the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP) chair, the DSO, and any other relevant individuals. This forum should serve to plan for the upcoming year, documenting key safeguarding themes and emerging issues.
- b) Integrate safeguarding into visit planning: This annual process should include identifying, recording, and planning for significant events such as conferences, workshops, and any scheduled inspections or visitations. This proactive approach will enable the DST and their support officer to effectively plan how to best inform and support the Archdeacons' safeguarding responsibilities. This support should specifically include:
  - I. Pre-Visit / Inspection Briefings: The DSO should provide briefings before visits, outlining relevant issues specific to the area. This should go beyond standard checks on signage, PSOs, training, and dashboards to include, for example, the potential for pre-visit safeguarding surveys, the number of active safety plans, any particular needs or areas for development / discussion, the impact of relevant national CofE news, and opportunities to meet with victims and survivors.
  - II. Post-Visit Debriefs: Archdeacons should provide recorded debriefs for the DSO after each visit. These should capture identified good practices, key safeguarding themes or issues, and any necessary remedial actions, along with an action plan and timeline for implementation.

**Recommendation D3:** Develop a pool of trained Core Group chairs:

Currently, the Bishops' Chaplain chairs Core Group meetings. To mitigate potential conflicts of interest (personal, work-related, or geographic), a pool of trained individuals (typically Archdeacons) should be established. To facilitate this, the DBF (in consultation with the NST) should:

- a) Develop chairing skills training: A training programme should be developed to equip potential chairs with the necessary skills and abilities.
- b) Facilitate regional training workshops: Opportunities for annual regional training workshops should be identified to allow Archdeacons and other chairs to share best practices.

### **The Diocesan Safeguarding Lead**

4.11 The DSO is a highly qualified, competent, and respected safeguarding professional with previous senior roles in statutory services. They undertake a demanding role with a wide array of responsibilities covering operational safeguarding activities, including case management (and a significant caseload), risk assessment, safety planning, direct support to parishes, and the supervision of the current DST. Furthermore, the DSO is expected to provide expert advice and guidance to senior leaders, as well as participate in and report to scrutiny and governance boards.

4.12 A critical challenge, given the identified capacity constraints, is the need to balance immediate operational pressures with essential strategic leadership oversight, while also safeguarding their own and their team's wellbeing. This key vulnerability is further explored in the capacity section of this report.

4.13 Currently, the Assistant Diocesan Secretary line manages the DSO. While this individual

demonstrates a good understanding of the challenges faced by the DSO and DST, they lack professional safeguarding expertise and are not part of the Bishop's Senior Leadership Team. This arrangement further isolates the DSO from direct (or even indirect) insight into leadership discussions.

**Recommendation D4:** When sufficient capacity is available, the DSO (or Director of Safeguarding, if this role is established) should attend all Senior Leadership Team meetings. If capacity remains a concern in the interim, the DSO should be line managed by the Diocesan Secretary.

4.14 The Bishop's Office effectively manages and secures the Clergy (Blue) Files within the existing system. The Audit noted positive practices are in place, including clear content identification, curation, and removal of duplicate documents, alongside an access log.

4.15 Furthermore, the Bishop's Chaplain and the DSO both review these files upon receipt and before dissemination to another area. This process helps to ensure the accuracy of the CCSLs, which should be constructed to reflect the information held within the Clergy (Blue) File. This is considered good practice.

4.16 However, the current storage of these documents does not utilise secure, fireproof cabinets. To enhance the positive arrangements already identified and provide an added layer of security for these valuable records, this should be rectified.

**Recommendation D5:** Secure, fireproof cabinets should be implemented for the storage of all Clergy (Blue) files.

4.17 The DBF conducts a range of appropriate governance and oversight meetings that align with CofE expectations and relevant requirements, including those set by the Charity Commission.



- 4.18 However, during the Audit, many senior leaders and staff acknowledged that the DBF is still evolving. A recent positive appointment of a new Finance Chair is seen as a catalyst for change.
- 4.19 Looking ahead, it is crucial for leaders to develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of safeguarding, including its complexities and challenges, that goes beyond mere compliance and financial investment. This enhanced understanding will facilitate more effective scrutiny, ensuring that individual and collective insights into safeguarding are always substantive.
- 4.20 While the Audit commends the DSO's open invitation to attend any leadership or functional meeting – a unique finding compared to other audits – their participation is ultimately constrained by their availability. This is dependent on demand and the need to prioritise managing new and ongoing cases. Furthermore, the DSO is not a formal member of the Senior Leadership Team. This arrangement, where attendance is by invitation but limited by operational demands, weakens what initially appears to be a positive practice.

**Recommendation D6:**

- The DBF should review its current membership across all governance (DBF), leadership, and scrutiny bodies (DSAP). This review should ensure the DSO's presence at the DBF, Bishop's Council, and any other relevant Senior Leadership Team meetings. Relevant meetings are defined as those that consider not only safeguarding in isolation but also broader aspects such as vision, growth, recruitment, housing, new projects, and outreach initiatives.
- Each governance, scrutiny, and leadership meeting (within the bounds of their legal frameworks) should undertake a skills, diversity, and inclusion audit. This audit should

aim to ensure appropriate and broad representation, including informed safeguarding perspectives and a composition that reflects the diversity of the communities served.

- As part of any reflection or workshops focused on the effectiveness of governance and scrutiny, the DBF should document evidence of actual scrutiny that extends beyond briefings and observation. They should also agree on strategies to further strengthen their oversight and assurance regarding safeguarding.
- Meetings should be synchronised to ensure that they maximise appropriate safeguarding insight and oversight at each level, i.e., operational, scrutiny and governance. In this respect, one meeting will complement the other and ensure that the relevant leaders are in a position to comply with their responsibilities when reporting to the Charity Commission.

### **Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP)**

4.21 The DSAP has experienced several changes in its Chair over recent years, leading to some inconsistency in its approach. Feedback from Audit discussions and a review of DSAP minutes suggest a tendency towards a passive and observational role, rather than a proactive, inquisitive, and challenging one. This needs to evolve for the DSAP to provide the effective and authoritative scrutiny expected of it. A well-functioning DSAP should not merely listen to DSO briefings, but should actively initiate in-depth reviews, focused audits, themed challenge sessions, and robust scrutiny that tests practice, drives improvement, offers reassurance, and demonstrates tangible impact.

4.22 The Audit acknowledges the current DSAP Chair's background and senior-level experience as being credible, as well as their effective approach in another diocese. This

suggests that rapid improvement is achievable. To facilitate this, the Chair and existing panel members need to adopt a more structured and rigorous approach, broaden their membership, and develop a three-year plan to accelerate their progress.

**Recommendation D7:** The DSAP should restructure its meetings to align with the forward plans of the Senior Leadership Team and Governance meetings. The DSAP agenda should complement an overarching strategy for operational oversight, safeguarding scrutiny, and governance assurance.

**Recommendation D8:** The DSAP should engage in annual meetings with the Cathedral Safeguarding Advisory Panel (CSAP), Archdeacons and the DSO (as per recommendation elsewhere in this report) to coordinate forward planning and scrutiny in a way that supports and reinforces the work of other stakeholders.

**Recommendation D9:** The DSAP should expand its representation and community involvement. This should include stronger engagement with survivors' and victims' groups, diversifying membership to include representatives from local charities, and more consistent engagement with statutory agencies (through outreach if necessary, such as the Chair holding brief, focused virtual meetings with key statutory leads twice a year, participating in Local Authority partnership groups, and sharing relevant briefings with the DSAP).

**Recommendation D10:** To enable in-depth reviews of specific areas linked to National Safeguarding Standards and action plans, a three-year meeting cycle should be implemented. This should be developed in consultation with the DBF, DSO, and senior leadership groups, taking into account the annual Archdeacons' safeguarding planning meeting to ensure complementary activities.

**Recommendation D11:** The DSAP should commission its own practice audits to move beyond simply receiving briefings. This will enable deeper insight, facilitate robust challenge, and measure the impact of safeguarding practices.

- a. To support this, the DSAP should conduct a skills audit of its members and PSOs across the parishes. This audit would help identify the significant skills available within the workforce and volunteer body and identify individuals willing to use their skills to support short, focused audits led by the DSAP.

**Recommendation D12:** In preparation for each meeting, members should submit a brief written update report. This report should address four questions relevant to the member's area of responsibility or organisation and should be reviewed, along with other pertinent documents, before the meeting. For instance:

1. What emerging safeguarding issues are pertinent to your role / organisation and the diocese?
2. What key safeguarding risks might affect your ability to participate in the DSAP (e.g., capacity constraints, reduced organisational funding)?
3. This question will be dynamic, set at the conclusion of each meeting for the subsequent one (e.g., "what impact has the Makin report had on your stakeholders?" or, "how are you ensuring consideration of the cost-of-living crisis within your role / area / organisation?")
4. What demonstrable impact have your recent safeguarding activities had?

4.23 The Audit notes that the DSAP currently operates with influence rather than formal authority in its scrutiny role. This is recognised as a national challenge and has been

highlighted in the 2024 Annual Independent Safeguarding Audits Report.

## Capacity

- 4.24 The DST is well-led. The DSO / Head of Safeguarding, Caseworker, Safeguarding Coordinator, and dedicated trainers have made substantial positive contributions to safeguarding awareness, culture, and practice across the diocese.
- 4.25 Feedback from individuals, focus groups, and written submissions consistently acknowledged the skills, abilities, and dedication of the team. Their proactive and collaborative ethos, alongside the transparent and supportive work environment they have cultivated, were frequently commended.
- 4.26 However, an examination of caseloads, management responsibilities, meeting commitments, and work that is undertaken through voluntary effort or accumulated time off (often not taken) underscores the Audit's finding that the team is understaffed. Indeed, it lacks the necessary resilience to provide both strategic and operational support effectively, or to manage long-term complex cases and unexpected crises.
- 4.27 To enhance the DST's authority and influence, the Audit recommends a strategic restructuring of the diocesan safeguarding function, establishing a dedicated Safeguarding Directorate headed by a professional Director of Safeguarding.

**Recommendation D13:** To significantly strengthen safeguarding across the Diocese, the DBF should establish an operationally autonomous Safeguarding Directorate, headed by a Director of Safeguarding.

This Directorate would consolidate all safeguarding resources, providing comprehensive and consistent support and direction to the Diocesan Bishop, DBF, parishes, and the Cathedral.

The Director of Safeguarding would have the ability, authority and autonomy to:

- a) Provide expert advice and robust oversight and ultimate direction on all safeguarding matters.
- b) Challenge senior clergy and Church bodies when necessary, ensuring accountability.
- c) Escalate concerns directly to higher authorities, including the National Director of Safeguarding at the NST without undue influence.
- d) Provide professional strategic safeguarding advice to the Diocesan Bishop to ensure compliance with policy, practice, and legal expectations.

**To ensure the effectiveness and influence of this structure, the following are required:**

- a) The Director should be a member of, and report directly to, key decision-making bodies, including the DBF, Bishop's Council, Chapter, and the Diocesan Bishop's Senior Leadership Team.
- b) A comprehensive MoU / SLA between the DBF, Parish Parochial Church Councils (PCC), and the Cathedral should clearly define the Director's agreed authority and responsibility. This includes providing safeguarding advice, support, and ultimate authoritative operational decision-making on any safeguarding-related matter across the geography of the diocese.
- c) The Directorate should be adequately resourced and staffed, incorporating all professional safeguarding personnel (including those currently based at the Cathedral).

Note: This recommendation should be read in conjunction with the Safeguarding Directorate section in the [Independent Safeguarding Audits Annual Report \(2024/2025\)](#).<sup>2</sup>

**Recommendation D14:** As an immediate step towards supporting a strengthened safeguarding structure, the Diocese Board for Finance (DBF) should prioritise the recruitment of two additional Caseworkers/ADSAs. Opportunities to consolidate existing resources into one of these roles should be explored, such as reviewing the current use of non-safeguarding specialists as trainers to potentially replace that role with a safeguarding specialist capable of delivering training.

4.28 This increase in staffing would enable an area-based and portfolio approach, allowing for more focused work on crucial areas like victim / survivor support, offender management, and training provision. It would also allow the team to further diversify its skill sets, and adopting a job-share model could offer significant opportunities to recruit individuals with relevant safeguarding experience from criminal justice, probation, health, education, or social care backgrounds.

**Recommendation D15:** To fully leverage the valuable contributions and potential of the current Safeguarding Coordinator, it is recommended that their role be refocused. This may be facilitated by a targeted investment in training and professional development. This realignment would support the goal of creating a dedicated telephone point of contact for parishes, enhancing support and providing improved guidance on dashboard usage and other relevant activities. This approach would simultaneously strengthen support for parishes and streamline the core safeguarding team's operations by diverting non-safeguarding enquiries.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://ineqe.com/churchofengland/>

4.29 The Audit welcomes the existing agreement to recruit a dedicated Cathedral Safeguarding Advisor / Officer. Furthermore, it acknowledges the good practice of embedding the professional supervision of this individual within the DST. This safeguarding advisor should develop a specialist understanding of the unique nature of safeguarding within the precincts of a Cathedral.

**Recommendation D16:** To effectively address the unique environment and risk profiles within a cathedral, the Cathedral Safeguarding Advisor should cultivate specific knowledge, skills, and abilities. To facilitate this development, the Cathedral should arrange a short secondment to a statistically similar cathedral that already has an experienced Cathedral Safeguarding Officer / Advisor (CSO / A).

This specialist focus should not undermine the ability of the CSO to provide support when required across the dioceses to support unforeseen operational needs or other contingencies.

4.30 The Audit highlighted instances of sensible resource sharing between the Cathedral and the DBF, notably in areas like the National Safeguarding Case Management System (NSCMS). This collaborative approach is considered good practice.



## 5 Prevention

- 5.1 Safer recruitment is a priority for the DBF, with its arrangements being clearly articulated within its' Recruitment and Selection Policy. 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 risk assessment process to manage 'positive' returns on DBS checks.
- 5.2 To further strengthen its approach to safer recruitment, 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 help to emphasise its focus within the Church and deter unsuitable applications.

**Recommendation D17:** The DBF should include a statement reinforcing its commitment to safeguarding 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. This includes direct links and access to administrative support and guidance videos, step-by-step DBS guidance for applicants, hints and tips for digital ID checks, eligibility flowcharts, guidance specifically for PCCs and churchwardens on vetting checks and training, information on the DBS Update Service, frequently asked questions and a confidential declaration form.
- 5.4 The DBF also oversees and tests the sufficiency of safer recruitment in parishes via the Safeguarding Dashboard. Positively, 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 the current 'self-assessment'

process to a system which facilitates dip sampling and quality assurance.

**Recommendation D18:** 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', this process should involve dip sampling to test the veracity of Parish Dashboard data.

- 5.5 Meaningful and appropriate discussions about safeguarding are regularly integrated into the DBF through several channels. A dedicated safeguarding trainer actively participates in a regional forum led by Gloucester DBF, facilitating the sharing of good practice and new ideas. This helps to inform training initiatives, such as the planned spiritual abuse training and the informal agreements made with the DBFs in Salisbury and Bristol for leadership training. Furthermore, the DBF engages with the South West Ecumenical Safeguarding Forum (SWESF), encouraging members to share training ideas, project engagement, good practice, and insights to enhance understanding. Similarly, the regional South West DSO forum facilitates the sharing of effective strategies and provides peer support, enabling collaborative agreements like cross-diocese training, sharing of LLR outcomes and Continuing Professional Development (CPD).
- 5.6 Across the various congregations in Bath and Wells, Safeguarding Sunday is actively promoted and celebrated (most recently in November 2024). On this day, clergy throughout the Diocese led services specifically addressing safeguarding, using the opportunity to acknowledge and commend the vital contributions of Parish Safeguarding Officers (PSOs), church officers, and all other individuals who are dedicated to promoting and making the Church safer.
- 5.7 During Deanery Chapter Visits, the DSO raises the profile of safeguarding with key parish members. The Diocesan Safeguarding Team (DST) actively encourages collaboration by

inviting members from other DSTs for discussions at its regular team meetings. Furthermore, safeguarding is highlighted at Churchwarden and Clergy days.

- 5.8 To develop a supportive network among PSOs and facilitate the sharing of effective practice and feedback, the DST conducts regular PSO forums. The most recent forum, held in September 2024, centred on DBS eligibility and training requirements. This session highlighted a need for clearer guidance regarding DBS checks and training obligations for PCC members, as well as information on the DBS update service. Consequently, the DST has since developed resources to address these specific areas and provide the necessary clarity. This is good practice.
- 5.9 The DBF adheres to the House of Bishops' Safeguarding Policy, 'Promoting a Safer Church', and details the full range of safeguarding policies that it follows on a dedicated [webpage](#).<sup>3</sup> This webpage encompasses resources such as the CofE's Learning and Development Framework, 'Promoting a Safer Church' materials, and Safe Spaces posters. The DBF is committed to following the national legal and procedural framework for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, alongside CofE policy and practice, including the 'Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse' guidance. A selection of frequently requested templates and resources are available on the webpage, with additional templates accessible on the CofE website. Examples of the resources provided include Department of Education Safeguarding Guidance, Lone Working Guidance, model forms for consent, equal opportunities, parish safeguarding policy, activity registration, risk assessment, and a safeguarding statement for church hire agreements, as well as a Parish Safeguarding Handbook and guidance on the recruitment of ex-offenders.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bathandwells.org.uk/parish-support/safeguarding/safeguarding-resources-and-policies/>

- 5.10 The DBF employs a range of materials and methods to promote safeguarding across its various communication channels, ensuring suitability for diverse audiences. These include digital platforms such as the diocesan website, regular newsletters, social media channels (YouTube, Vimeo, Facebook, and Instagram) for sharing messages and resources, and printed materials like posters, cards, and mailings distributed to churches and communities.
- 5.11 The DBF has a monthly safeguarding email newsletter, distributed via an email marketing platform to approximately 3,187 PSOs and clergy, with an average open rate of 70% and click rates of 10%. The platform's analytics help assess engagement and plan follow-up actions, such as social media promotion or inclusion in other newsletters like "Connect," which featured 22 safeguarding stories in 2024. "Connect" is a bi-monthly mailing reaching clergy, church officers, lay leaders, and subscribers. Additionally, the ad-hoc Bishop's Bulletin is utilised to disseminate safeguarding updates and guidance from bishops to clergy and lay leaders. Beyond digital communications, relevant printed materials are distributed to churches and communities.
- 5.12 The DBF's use of video to communicate safeguarding messages, including the creation of a dedicated YouTube [Diocese of Bath & Wells Safeguarding Playlist](#)<sup>4</sup>, demonstrates a contemporary approach to communication. This is good practice.

**Recommendation D19:** The DBF should consider options for increasing the visibility of safeguarding content on its YouTube homepage, including, for example, featuring specific playlists.

- 5.13 Recent Diocese of Bath and Wells newsletters have highlighted key safeguarding matters,

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvYduF4WrclAlzxi9Gk9k1sFggC4DFrM\\_](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvYduF4WrclAlzxi9Gk9k1sFggC4DFrM_)

including updates on contemporary practices within the CofE and discussions at General Synod. They have emphasised suicide prevention with newly formed guidelines. Significant attention has also been given to the Makin Review, alongside the promotion of Safeguarding Sunday and a Train the Trainer initiative. Additionally, newsletters have covered the sensitive issue of Child-to-Parent Domestic Abuse and provided resources for Parish Dashboards. Finally, Bishop Michael has commented on the Scolding Independent Review, referencing the Diocese of St Albans' action plan and broader recommendations.

- 5.14 The DBF's *Go Team* equips youth workers with safeguarding training, enabling them to deliver safeguarding-aware youth work across the Diocese. Additionally, the DBF provides parishes with practical 'How to' guides developed by the Go Team, incorporating safeguarding considerations such as physical space safety, adult-to-child ratios, risk assessments, toilet access, and safer recruitment practices. These guides cover various aspects of children's and youth ministry, including employing staff, listening to young people, running holiday clubs, establishing family and youth ministries, and ensuring inclusive practices for those with additional needs. This is good practice.
- 5.15 During the Audit, it was reported that the Safeguarding Team and the Go Team operate in close collaboration. Furthermore, a risk assessment prepared for a pilgrimage to Taizé, France evidenced a well-considered approach to the control measures for the identified risks.
- 5.16 Despite a limited number of responses to the Audit's survey for children and young people (CYP), the feedback received indicated a positive experience for those engaging in church activities within the Diocese of Bath and Wells. Encouragingly, no CYP who responded reported ever feeling 'unsafe' at church. The overwhelming majority agreed that they could talk to a trusted adult at their church if they felt uncomfortable, upset, or worried.

Furthermore, the most frequent word chosen by CYP to describe their feelings at church was 'happy'.

- 5.17 As with all good communication, this needs to be a two-way process. Actively seeking and responding to the views of children, young people and vulnerable adults is a key component to effective prevention planning. In respect of children and young people, the DBF employs a Youth Voice Lead responsible for "Raising Young Voices," a diocesan blog that champions the perspectives of children and young people in churches, schools, and various other diocesan settings. The Audit notes the valuable work already undertaken by the Youth Voice Lead, particularly the successful launch of this blog. To build upon and further develop this engagement with children and young people, especially concerning safeguarding-specific subject matter, the Audit makes the following recommendation.

**Recommendation D20:** The DBF should develop engagement mechanisms to consider the needs, experiences and voices of children, young people and vulnerable adults within safeguarding prevention planning. Such children and youth initiatives could be led by, and build upon the existing work of, the Youth Voice Lead / Growing Faith Adviser.

- 5.18 In respect of hearing the voices and learning from the experiences of victims / survivors of abuse, see the Victims and Survivors section of this report.
- 5.19 The DBF has issued a model Lone Working Policy for PCCs, which emphasises risk assessment and safety protocols for individuals working alone, particularly during church and home visits. It provides guidelines on personal safety, procedures for home visits, safeguarding measures, record-keeping practices, and the support available to lone workers, including the use of risk assessment tools and the importance of clear communication and awareness of potential risks.

- 5.20 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.
- 5.21 The Audit observed evidence of appropriate risk assessments for Church activities where potential safeguarding risks were identified.

## 6 Recognising, Assessing and Managing Risk

- 6.1 The DBF's risk register was last updated in January 2025 and sets out a range of important topics, with safeguarding being included as a specific section (albeit limited in scope) within the main document. Whilst acknowledging this reference, developing a distinct safeguarding risk register would, in the Audit's opinion, allow for a more thorough and focused assessment of both strategic and operational safeguarding risks.

**Recommendation D21:** The DSAP should develop a standalone safeguarding risk register to allow for more focused scrutiny on the full range of safeguarding concerns, some of which might graduate to the strategic risk register held by the DBF. This should be reviewed and updated at a minimum cycle of quarterly.

- 6.2 As part of the DST's approach to triaging concerns, the DSO (as is standard practice across the CofE) sensibly applies a 'low threshold' to encourage reporting. Evidence of this is reflected on the NSCMS. This has helped the team to build relationships with those in safeguarding roles, and promote behaviours where concerns are more likely than not to be escalated to the DST. The receipt and screening of lower-level concerns ensures the DST has oversight on cases where risk might not be properly understood by the reporting person. Defined processes are in place for the receipt and triage of new concerns, risk assessment, and case allocation, alongside clear definitions and terminology. This is particularly important within the context of the church, where definitions of vulnerability and safeguarding can differ from statutory definitions.
- 6.3 The value of this approach and the support provided is highlighted by Audit feedback, with comments from parishes including:

*"In my experience, I think that [the DST] are very open to support or give advice on any issue."*



*"The low threshold is incredibly helpful to enable me to feel confident that what I've got to say will be taken seriously and the support will be there for me."*

- 6.4 At the time of the Audit, there were 103 open cases recorded on the NSCMS. The DST makes good use of the risk grading function on this system, with all cases being allocated a risk level - 47 were graded as 'low' risk, 47 'medium risk' and nine were 'high risk.'
- 6.5 Overall, the DBF adheres to good practice in its use and application of the NSCMS. However, the Audit highlighted some areas for potential improvement. For instance, within the open cases, four were not allocated to a named individual, instead being marked with a 'reported by' field and assigned to the DST as an 'owning group'. The absence of a designated caseworker risks blurring lines of accountability and responsibility for managing these cases and hindering the accurate oversight of the activity undertaken by individual team members.
- 6.6 Further improvements could also be made in how the categories of risk are articulated on the NSCMS. Whilst the headline risk is helpful, including a written rationale for why the grading has been assigned (alongside there being clear timescales for review) is likely to make the context of risk better understood.

**Recommendation D22:** As part of the triage process, the DSO should record the rationale for the risk grading, alongside specifying timescales for review.

- 6.7 For those cases referred to the DST, outcomes 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 Clergy Disciplinary Measures (CDM)
- e) Initiation of the Safeguarding Case Management procedure (formerly Core Groups)

- 6.8 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, vulnerable individuals and the respondent.
- 6.9 At the time of the Audit, there were 15 respondents categorised as having active Safety Plans on the NSCMS. The Audit saw good use of these plans in managing risk. They were well-defined, proportionate to the identified risks, and appropriately authorised. Positively, practice was seen to adhere to the national template issued by the CofE, outlining what was working well, identifying risks and detailing the potential consequences of non-compliance. The plans also explained how information may be shared with relevant authorities and relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, they clarified the terms and timescales for review, outlined prohibited actions and established clear boundaries. Overall, practice in the context of developing and discharging Safety Plans was good.
- 6.10 Due to unforeseen circumstances, the Audit team was unable to meet directly with one respondent regarding their Safety Plan, although two reference group members were engaged (an incumbent and a PSO). Both demonstrated a solid understanding of the consultation protocols with the DST, knew the plan in detail and maintained appropriate professional relationships with the individual concerned.
- 6.11 In recognition of the inherent risks managed by the Church through Safety Plans, and to further strengthen this critical area of practice, the Audit recommends targeted training,

specifically for reference groups and the broader cohort of individuals involved in monitoring respondents. Recommendations concerning sexual offender training, context-specific training, and training tailored for particular roles are set out in the Learning, Supervision, and Support section of this report.

- 6.12 The Audit saw convincing evidence of the effective use of Safeguarding Case Management Groups (SCMGs) in managing complex cases involving church officers. The current arrangements reflect good practice, with SCMGs being typically chaired by the Bishop's Chaplain and following a structured agenda to promote effective collaboration, scrutiny and information gathering.
- 6.13 As a participating area within the pathfinder project, safeguarding supervision has been provided by a regional lead from the NST since Autumn 2022. This supervision is supported by a formal agreement between the DSO, the NST lead and the DSO's line manager. Supervision takes place every six weeks (as a minimum), with a degree of operational flexibility to accommodate other professional demands and periods of leave. Ad-hoc supervisory support is also available for discussions, advice, and formal supervision pertaining to casework management, management responsibilities, or strategic matters.
- 6.14 The Audit recognises the established practice of regular supervision with a structured agenda. However, to enhance effectiveness, these sessions should incorporate a greater focus on case management oversight. Currently, discussions predominantly address complex cases, offering limited visibility of lower-level cases. For example, there is no formal mechanism for reviewing DSA / DSO judgment in cases closed with no further action. This finding echoes previous observations in other areas and will be addressed nationally with the NST.

**Recommendation D23:** Referred cases resulting in no further action and / or the provision of advice / guidance should be included as part of the supervision discussions between the DST and NST.

- 6.15 The DBF is a registered charity with a statutory requirement to submit Serious Incident Reports (SIRs) to the Charity Commission. Support and practice guidance is available at a national level regarding SIR referrals. The Audit was informed that two cases had met the threshold for SIRs in the last 12 months. The referrals to the Charity Commission aligned with national guidance and the NST was appropriately informed.
- 6.16 The DBF is a registered charity with a statutory requirement to submit Serious Incident Reports (SIRs) to the Charity Commission. Support and practice guidance is available at a national level regarding SIR referrals. The Audit was informed that two cases had met the threshold for SIRs in the last 12 months. The referrals to the Charity Commission aligned with national guidance and the NST was appropriately informed.
- 6.17 The DBF has established several information sharing agreements with other bodies to ensure the proper handling of data, particularly in relation to safeguarding. For example, an Information Sharing Agreement (ISA) is in place with an external DBS provider. A data sharing agreement also exists with Wells Cathedral and covers areas such as safer recruitment and the sharing of data (i.e., DBS check outcomes). The DBF is also part of a national data sharing agreement with the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), using Data Sharing Leads as points of contact. Additionally, a Service Level Agreement (SLA) is in place with a charity for survivor support. This includes aspects such as information governance and data breach reporting.
- 6.18 There is no defined escalation process to help manage differences of opinion about the

decisions and action taken on safeguarding cases. In instances where the disagreement relates to an internal investigation, the DBF adheres to the procedures outlined in the House of Bishops' *Practice Guidance: Responding to, assessing and managing safeguarding concerns or allegations against church officers*. In the event of disagreements falling outside this guidance, the established line management structure would typically be employed.

**Recommendation D24:** 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.

6.19 The DBF addresses the security and storage of personal information to align with UK data protection legislation and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) through several key measures. Mandatory GDPR training is provided to all DBF staff upon induction via the iAMCompliant online platform. For data storage and communication, the DBF utilises platforms such as Microsoft Outlook for email, Mailchimp for distributing monthly newsletters, Microsoft Teams for internal collaboration, Zoom for training delivery, and CallSwitch for telephony. Furthermore, to enhance the security of sensitive communications, the DBF actively promotes the use of dedicated safeguarding-specific email addresses for all parish safeguarding work. That said, the Audit noted that some PSOs are continuing to use their personal email addresses for work purposes. Currently, the DBF does not offer specific GDPR training to clergy and volunteers.

**Recommendation D25:** The DBF should reinforce to Parishes the importance of using encrypted or secure email communication involving any safeguarding case. This should be emphasised routinely in relevant training and through any other engagement undertaken by the DBF with the PSO cohort.

## 7 Victims and Survivors

- 7.1 For many victims and survivors, living with the abuse they have suffered can be profoundly traumatic. Disclosing it to others can be incredibly difficult. Individuals may feel overwhelmed by the processes involved, worried about the potential for re-traumatisation or anxious about potential outcomes. In this context, it is crucial for Church bodies to create and maintain a nurturing environment that enables victims and survivors to feel heard, supported and protected, whilst also learning from their experiences.
- 7.2 In evaluating the DBF's response to this key standard of safeguarding practice, the Audit obtained feedback from victims and survivors from across the Diocese through an anonymous online survey.
- 7.3 One issue raised by victims / survivors was their lack of awareness of the House of Bishop's policy, 'Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse'. Indeed, whilst the DBF actively promotes this guidance (such as through the inclusion of a statement on its 'Survivor information' webpage and in the introductory paragraph of its local Survivor Strategy), some survey respondents had no knowledge of it. Furthermore, there was uncertainty about whether it would have made any difference for victims / survivors had it been in place at the time of reporting their abuse.

**Recommendation D26:** To improve the visibility of '*Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse*', the DBF should signpost directly to this guidance and utilise the helpful explainer videos contained within this national guidance.

- 7.4 With regards to the Survivor Strategy (2024-25), this was informed by discussions with

victims / survivors, academics, and charities (including *FearFree*). The strategy aligns with the CofE's National Safeguarding Standards, and highlights aspects such as disclosures, support, and the local Domestic Abuse Policy statement.

- 7.5 The Survivor Strategy also references the DBF's commitment to managing expectations through being transparent about the potential for long investigations and the value of honest communication. On this issue, an opportunity exists to strengthen the support to victims / survivors by implementing routine check-ins with the DST, even if there are no substantial updates. Survey findings revealed that only a small number felt they received ongoing and timely updates post-disclosure. On this basis, the Audit makes the following recommendation.

**Recommendation D27:** The DBF's Survivor Strategy should outline a process for ensuring consistent communication with victims and survivors. This process should include:

- a) Determining the communication frequency and method in advance with the victim / survivor, respecting their preferences.
- b) Establishing and adhering to agreed check-in schedules with the DST.
- c) Maintaining planned communication with victims / survivors, even when there are no substantial updates from the DST.

- 7.6 The strategy could also be enhanced through the inclusion of different mechanisms for victims / survivors to contribute towards improving safeguarding practice locally. See **Recommendation D28.**

- 7.7 Overall, the Diocesan website serves as a central hub for anyone seeking assistance. Individuals can readily find contact information for the DST, including their phone numbers and email addresses. The 'Reporting a Concern' webpage houses an online reporting form, out of hours signposting to the DBS provider and instructions on how to report

confidentially.

- 7.8 A comprehensive list of statutory and voluntary agencies helps to ensure that individuals have access to a wide range of support options. These include pathways for contacting safeguarding boards / partnerships, as well as voluntary sector agencies such as the National Domestic Abuse Helpline, Mental Health Crisis, Samaritans, Action Fraud, the Survivors Trust and Men's Advice Line. Given the local safeguarding themes of domestic abuse, suicidal ideation, self-neglect, dementia and financial abuse, these signposts are well-placed.
- 7.9 The DBF provides information through its YouTube channel, website, and regular newsletters. These resources aim to raise awareness about current safeguarding practices, different forms of harm, and available support for those affected. The Audit saw how the Diocesan Bishop and DSO had recently communicated their responses to the Makin Report (and other recent issues) with both care and understanding. There was an acknowledgement of the impact of harm, and a clear reflection of their intent to create a more secure environment, whilst offering clear pathways for individuals to reach out with concerns.
- 7.10 The DBF offers various support services for victims / survivors such as support workers, therapy options and interim redress scheme provisions. It also contracts a respected local survivor service (*FearFree*) that can provide independent advocates to liaise between the victim / survivor and the DBF where necessary.
- 7.11 The Audit recognises the DBF's work in arranging apologies and meetings between victims / survivors and church leaders (DSO / Safeguarding Manager and senior staff). These engagements aim to provide a platform for sharing experiences, asking and answering questions, and empowering victims / survivors by understanding their needs and exploring



ways to offer support and potentially rebuild relationships.

- 7.12 A representative from FearFree, a charity offering support for domestic abuse, was invited to DSAP in October 2024. The DBF hopes this ongoing partnership will help to highlight different perspectives when considering changes and improvements for the future. That said, the Audit recognises an opportunity for capturing a broader range of voices and makes the following recommendation.

**Recommendation D28:** The DBF should promote a culture of collaboration and shared decision-making throughout the Diocese's safeguarding structures, ensuring that the perspectives of victims and survivors are consistently sought and valued at every stage. For example, the DBF could look to partner with the Cathedral to host diocese-wide listening events, providing an additional platform to hear from a diverse range of voices to inform local practice.

## 8 Learning, Supervision and Support

- 8.1 The arrangements for safeguarding training are good. Supported by a clear training strategy, there is a well-considered training programme that focuses on local needs. Two experienced trainers and the DSO / Safeguarding Manager help to deliver training and robust processes are in place to monitor compliance. The Audit heard that a new system is being introduced that will issue automated reminders for upcoming and overdue training. Positively, this is likely to help reduce the administrative burden on the DST.
- 8.2 The DBF's trainers noted that some national content can be pitched at a level that is not always accessible to parish participants. Where appropriate, and with permission from the NST, amendments have been made to case studies and the delivery style to support accessibility. Pre-course materials have also been adjusted in response to the needs of participants. This is good practice.
- 8.3 The trainers are alert to wider safeguarding issues relevant to their context, such as county lines, although they note this has not been raised locally in some years. They recognise this could be due to underreporting or a lack of awareness, rather than the absence of risk, but have prioritised training on other key themes relevant to parishes.
- 8.4 The DBF has taken a proactive approach to managing resources by co-commissioning training with others. This includes bespoke content on chaplaincy roles, preventing spiritual abuse, mental health first aid, and plans to introduce dementia-friendly training.
- 8.5 Whilst the development of bespoke training that reflects the needs of the Diocese is commendable, there remain two areas where further consideration is warranted. Given the Diocese's geographical proximity to the M5 corridor (a known route for criminal

exploitation) and the rising prevalence of associated issues nationally, county lines training should be prioritised.

**Recommendation D29:** The DBF should ensure that awareness of county lines is incorporated into the safeguarding training offering. Given the Diocese's proximity to the M5 corridor (a known route for such exploitation), this represents a relevant and necessary focus. Training could be rolled out in order of priority, starting with those in direct contact with children, young people, and adults at risk. This could be delivered through targeted briefings on key signs, indicators, and referral pathways, ideally in partnership with local police or statutory agencies.

8.6 Staff reported that some clergy and lay personnel are unfamiliar with the term 'Safety Plan' and its practical implications. In this respect, it is important that sex offender training, including how safety plans are developed, implemented, and monitored are rolled out more widely. These areas are likely to feature in future national training recommendations, however, in the interim, the DBF should seek alternative ways to ensure these key messages are delivered to those who need them.

**Recommendation D30:** The DBF should provide training on sex offenders that includes the development, implementation, and monitoring of Safety Plans, ensuring that clergy and lay staff understand their role in managing these appropriately within the church context.

8.7 The DBF also plans to take a trauma-informed approach to delivering the new domestic abuse training, by increasing the online delivery of the course and making available immediate support to those who may find the content difficult. This is good practice.

8.8 Leadership and PSO training sessions are evaluated following delivery, with a six-month follow-up email used to evidence and assess impact. A high response rate was noted with the evaluations, reflecting good practice and a workforce that is responsive. The Audit supports the DBF's decision to continue this on an annual or bi-annual basis. The DBF

also acknowledges the need to expand the evaluation process to include other courses.

**Recommendation D31:** The DBF should introduce the evaluation process across all training courses, covering the immediate post-course evaluation and the longer-term testing of impact.

## Clergy Support

8.9 There is a good range of support available to the clergy and this remains a focus for the DBF. For example, to help support clergy manage the emotional impact of their roles, a clergy wellbeing day was organised and delivered by the DBF. Furthermore, clergy can readily access counselling support through a confidential referral system, as well as obtain additional support from the DST and Archdeacons. Core groups can be convened where issues are more complex. Additionally, the Audit saw evidence of how the MDR process can effectively support clergy, including through its focus on safeguarding.

8.10 Recognising the impact of mental health more generally, the DBF has committed to the ambitious goal of having a mental health first aider in every church. This is commendable. To further enhance the DBF's focus in this area, consideration should be given as to how relevant expertise can be incorporated into the DBF's arrangements and used to help inform local initiatives and the oversight of performance.

**Recommendation D32:** The DBF should invite an experienced mental health professional to join the DSAP to help support its strategic and operational focus on mental health, including suicide prevention.

## Supervision and Support of Safeguarding Roles

8.11 The DBF provides a clear induction package for PSOs, supported by online networking forums and resource sharing. These are supplemented by role-specific networking events, coordinated by the DST, and supported by the current safeguarding coordinator who has

developed a range of resources to assist with Dashboard set-up. This level of peer support and practical guidance is a strength.

## 9 Conclusion

- 9.1 The DBF in Bath and Wells has developed a strong and positive safeguarding culture, driven by committed leadership, engaged safeguarding personnel, and effective strategies that personalise safeguarding and empower local parishes. Feedback indicates a significant and positive impact on both the work and worship environments, encouraging a growing sense of safety and confidence in raising concerns. The Bishop's personal commitment, leadership, and his efforts to build trust and connection were widely acknowledged as central to this change.
- 9.2 The DBF benefits from an excellent DSO, DST, and committed PSOs. There is an improving approach to safeguarding governance, with a clear appetite for improvement, good safer recruitment practices, robust policies, and extensive parish support. Safeguarding is positively integrated into communications, highlighted at events, and promoted through various outlets, including occasional input via a dedicated YouTube channel. Youth workers receive specific training, and children and young people engaged by the Audit all reported feeling safe.
- 9.3 Victims and survivors are a key focus. The Audit found clear evidence that the DBF is committed to listening, providing meaningful support, and developing a strategy informed by their direct input. A well-established website hub provides easy access to the DST, advocacy, counselling, and other vital support services. Furthermore, the DBF is committed to ensuring that victims and survivors can access key leaders on their terms, and the Audit observed the delivery and impact of such engagement.
- 9.4 However, further work is required to strengthen the DBF's safeguarding arrangements, governance, and practice. Governance needs to adopt a deeper, more nuanced

understanding of safeguarding, moving beyond a focus on compliance and ensuring effective and substantive scrutiny of impact and outcomes. While the open invitation for the DSO to attend Senior Leadership Team meetings is a strength, their participation is often limited by caseload demands. This is a missed opportunity for the DBF to accrue the benefits of the DSO's expertise and strategic input.

- 9.5 Crucially, the work of the DSAP must evolve beyond a passive role to one that is proactive, inquisitive, and challenging, actively initiating reviews and scrutiny that establishes actual impact.
- 9.6 The strong collaboration, mutual respect, safeguarding focus and support evident between the Diocesan Bishop, the Dean and their respective teams is a significant strength and foundation upon which to build. In the opinion of the Audit, they set an outstanding example in this regard.
- 9.7 However, to optimise their potential, professional safeguarding capacity must be addressed. Implementing the recommendations of this Audit report will help to strengthen existing practice, provide a foundation for better oversight and scrutiny, and deliver a more resilient safeguarding ecosystem. Central to future success will be the investment in a consolidated, operationally independent safeguarding team, led by a strategic director of safeguarding.

# Part Two – Wells Cathedral



## 10 Context

- 10.1 The original settlement of Wells, and later the city and Cathedral's name, gets its name from the local springs that can still be seen in the Bishop's Palace Garden. Back in 705 AD, King Ine of Wessex authorised a minster church to be built here. The current Cathedral, which began construction in 1175, replaced this church and is known for being the first English Cathedral built entirely in the new Gothic style (introduced from France by Bishop Reginald de Bohun). After the completion of a high tower, structural issues necessitated the famous 'scissor arches.' Bishop Ralph of Strewsbury added the Chapter House, Lady Chapel, and Vicars' Close. Wells, a secular 'old foundation' Cathedral, avoided Reformation destruction but sustained damage during the Civil War, notably to the Lady Chapel's stained glass.
- 10.2 The Cathedral is situated in the relatively small city of Wells, which lies in central Somerset, just south of the Mendip Hills. Despite its modest size, the city is a well-liked tourist spot, drawing visitors with its historic buildings and heritage sites. It is also used as a location for filming. The city has a total population of 12,110 residents. On average, the Cathedral sees 1,561 people attending specifically for worship each week, and while the total number of visitors can vary throughout the year, the average for 2024 was 5,893.
- 10.3 The religious landscape of Wells includes three Anglican churches: the Cathedral, St Cuthbert's, and St Thomas's. For education, the city has Wells Cathedral School and the Blue School (both secondary) and Stoberry Park, St Cuthbert's CofE Junior, and St Joseph & St Teresa Catholic School (all primary). Community life is vibrant, with several annual festivals celebrating literature, comedy, theatre, running, a boat race, and, starting in 2024, Pride. For administrative purposes, Wells is divided into St Cuthbert's parish, which covers most of the city, and St Thomas's parish, covering the east end. The Liberty area

encompassing the Cathedral and Bishop's Palace is considered a separate entity.

## 11 Progress

- 11.1 The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) audit of Wells Cathedral, published in May 2022, resulted in 36 ‘considerations’. Furthermore, the Diocesan Past Cases Review 2 (PCR2) generated just one recommendation concerning the Cathedral.
- 11.2 Wells Cathedral accepted all the SCIE audit considerations. The Audit noted that the former Chief Operating Officer (COO) had a specific action plan in place to address these. This COO was responsible for implementing the plan, communicating with relevant departments, discussing progress at weekly Chapter Executive meetings, and reporting to Chapter. While the majority of actions have been completed, some remain ongoing. These include extending PREVENT training to more Cathedral staff, implementing wider anti-terrorism policies, and embedding new policies into working practices.
- 11.3 No action plan was developed in response to PCR2, as there was only one recommendation concerning the Cathedral. This related to the swift completion of DBS checks for staff and volunteers, with the primary concern relating to volunteers. The Cathedral has since appointed a volunteer coordinator in place to manage this, and clear procedures are now in place for processing DBS checks, with regular compliance reports being submitted to the Chapter.
- 11.4 A Bishop’s Special Visitation was initiated in 2023 after the SCIE report was leaked to the media. This has been described as an ‘open process’ that was delivered sensitively and ultimately resulted in the formation of a new leadership team. Triangulated data indicates a positive trajectory regarding improvements in the safeguarding culture. This is addressed in more detail in Part Two: Culture, Leadership, and Capacity.

## 12 Culture, Leadership and Capacity

### Culture

- 12.1 Feedback from surveys and written submissions, coupled with insights from one-to-one discussions and focus groups, indicate a positive trend in what has been widely described as an improving safeguarding culture across the Cathedral. Significant majorities within both the Cathedral workforce and the worshipping community reported improvements in safeguarding, characterising the culture as welcoming, respectful, inclusive, and supportive. Although a small number within the worshipping community were less positive, the evidence strongly suggests that the majority of those who work at or worship in the Cathedral now perceive safeguarding as becoming embedded. Reassuringly, most survey respondents reported feeling that they could raise concerns without fear of reprisal.
- 12.2 The Audit heard a range of views suggesting that in the past, there was a lack of consultation, with individuals rarely asked for their input on decision-making. The Audit were told that staff often felt disempowered from taking on responsibilities, and a prevailing sentiment suggested that people felt unable to speak out.
- 12.3 The Audit saw and heard evidence of how current leaders had responded to negative legacy issues. This included staff consultation lunches; annual staff reviews; clear objective setting; leadership hot-desking to build relationships; responding to all staff survey feedback; addressing key themes like training; and introducing a delivery plan with clear responsibilities. This is good practice and should continue.
- 12.4 Many of those consulted by the Audit attributed the recent improvements in culture to the approach of the new Dean. The Dean, however, stated that the ongoing cultural transformation is a team effort, crediting others, including staff, volunteers, virgers, the

Cathedral Leadership Team (CLT), Chapter, and the Diocesan Bishop, for their contributions.

12.5 While acknowledging the significant progress that has been made, the Dean recognises there is still a need to consolidate the transformation of culture by maintaining approachability, open communication, and listening to more 'safeguarding experienced' external voices. While it was clear to the Audit that significant change has been delivered, the Audit concurs with this assessment and makes the following recommendation to ensure ongoing consolidation and growth.

**Recommendation C1:** The Cathedral should continue to invest in and build on a stronger, safer, and more inclusive community by addressing past issues, empowering shared responsibility for safeguarding, improving communication, seeking external guidance, and monitoring progress by:

- a) Proactively supporting those affected by negative legacy issues and implement strategies to help build a more inclusive community.
- b) Empowering all levels (staff, volunteers, virgers, CLT, Chapter and Dean) to champion and integrate safeguarding principles throughout Cathedral life.
- c) Actively soliciting and responding to feedback from all stakeholders, ensuring visible and approachable leadership to encourage open communication.
- d) Formalising regular engagement with external safeguarding professionals for independent oversight and continuous improvement.
- e) Implementing ongoing feedback mechanisms (e.g., surveys) to track the sustained integration of a positive safeguarding culture and identify areas for development.

12.6 As the Cathedral develops bespoke opportunities to engage the wider community, they should ensure that each project is initially considered, and once agreed, constructed

through a safeguarding first lens. A good example of this type of outreach can be seen in their innovative approach to the Vicars Close Project.

- 12.7 Any space where people can live, learn, work, worship and thrive in a faith-based environment must be built on a foundation that puts safeguarding first.

### **The Vicars Close Project and Safeguarding**

- 12.8 The Vicars Close project represents a transformative initiative at Wells Cathedral aimed at expanding community engagement, challenging traditional perceptions of church institutions, and creating new opportunities through apprenticeships and outreach programs.

- 12.9 By recruiting dedicated community engagement staff and developing apprenticeship pathways, the project seeks to broaden the Cathedral's social impact and connect with previously underserved populations. However, this ambitious expansion brings significant safeguarding considerations, including the need for comprehensive risk assessments for young apprentices, potential on-site living arrangements, robust DBS checking processes, and clear multi-agency safeguarding protocols.

- 12.10 The project's success will depend on carefully embedding this work within the existing safeguarding framework, thereby balancing the exciting opportunities for skills training and community connection with safeguarding measures that protect vulnerable participants. This will help to ensure that the Cathedral's enthusiasm for growth is matched by an equally rigorous commitment to safety and protection.

- 12.11 The Audit makes the following recommendations.

**Recommendation C2: Comprehensive Risk Assessments for Young Apprentices:**

The Cathedral should develop and implement detailed, project-specific risk assessments for all apprenticeship roles involving individuals those under 18 years of age. These assessments should consider the specific tasks, working environments, and potential interactions with other individuals, both within the Cathedral precinct and during outreach activities.

The Cathedral should ensure that these risk assessments are regularly reviewed and updated, particularly as the apprentices' roles and responsibilities evolve or if there are changes to the project's scope.

The Cathedral should implement clear mitigation strategies for all identified risks, with designated individuals responsible for their implementation and monitoring.

**Recommendation C3: Safeguarding Protocols for Potential On-Site Living Arrangements:**

- a) If on-site living arrangements for apprentices or community engagement staff are considered in the future, the Cathedral should develop specific and robust safeguarding policies and procedures for these residential settings. This should include clear guidelines on supervision, access control, and reporting mechanisms for any concerns.

**Recommendation C4: Enhanced and Consistent DBS Checking Processes:**

- a) The Cathedral should continue to implement a rigorous and consistent DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checking process for all individuals involved in the Vicars Close

project, including community engagement staff, apprentices (where eligible), volunteers, and any other individuals who will have contact with vulnerable adults or children.

- b) The Cathedral should ensure that the level of DBS check is appropriate to the individual's role and the level of contact they will have with vulnerable groups.
- c) The Cathedral should continue to ensure the regular renewal of DBS checks in line with best practice and Cathedral safeguarding policy, maintaining accurate records of all DBS checks and ensuring that any concerns raised are addressed promptly and appropriately.

#### **Recommendation C5: Clear Safeguarding Protocols:**

- a) Notwithstanding the Cathedral's existing policies and practices and their overarching application, additional reassurance should test that such policies provide clear and documented safeguarding protocols focused on apprentices or community members engaged through the Vicars Close project.
- b) The Cathedral should provide comprehensive training to all project staff and relevant volunteers on these protocols, ensuring they understand their roles and responsibilities in safeguarding and know how to escalate concerns appropriately within and beyond the Cathedral.

#### **Recommendation C6: Dedicated Safeguarding Oversight and Training:**

- a) The Cathedral should designate a specific individual or role within the Vicars Close project team with clear responsibility for overseeing all safeguarding matters related to the initiative. This individual should have relevant safeguarding expertise (agreed by the CSO) and be the point of contact for any concerns.



- b) The Cathedral develop and deliver tailored safeguarding training for all individuals involved in the project, including community engagement staff, apprentices, and volunteers. This training should build on existing provisions but be specific to the risks and opportunities presented by the Vicars Close project.
- c) Where appropriate the Cathedral should ensure that apprentices receive age-appropriate safeguarding information and know who to contact if they have any concerns.

#### **Recommendation C7: Monitoring and Evaluation of Safeguarding Measures:**

- a) The Vicars Close project board should implement a robust system for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the safeguarding measures put in place for the Vicars Close project. This should include regular reviews of risk assessments, incident logs, and feedback from participants and staff. This should be reviewed by an agreed panel (potentially CSAP) at least annually.
- b) The Vicars Close project board should reassure themselves that reports relating to any safeguarding incidents or concerns that arise during the project are dealt with in accordance with Cathedral safeguarding policy and local statutory requirements.
- c) The Cathedral should use the findings from monitoring and evaluation to continuously improve safeguarding practices within the Vicars Close project and to inform future community engagement initiatives.

#### **Recommendation C8: Use and Safeguarding Responsibilities for Contractors.**

The Cathedral should mandate and ensure that all contractors and subcontractors engaged in the Vicars Close project formally agree to adhere to the Cathedral's relevant safeguarding

policies and procedures. This agreement should be documented within contractual arrangements and include provision of the Cathedral's safeguarding policy; a requirement for contractors to confirm their understanding and compliance; and outlining expectations regarding DBS checks (as appropriate to their role and potential contact with vulnerable individuals), reporting concerns, and adherence to site-specific safeguarding protocols. Evidence of this formal agreement should be obtained and retained prior to the commencement of any work.

## Leadership

- 12.12 The Dean holds ultimate responsibility for safeguarding at the Cathedral and unequivocally acknowledged his accountability in this regard. He maintains a mutually respectful and constructive working relationship with the Diocesan Bishop, and together they ensure alignment on safeguarding policy and practice across both the DBF and the Cathedral.
- 12.13 The Audit saw evidence of his positive leadership approach and noted his active engagement in addressing significant pre-existing challenges. This was evidenced, amongst other initiatives, by the development of a new senior team and a comprehensive strategy aimed at creating a safer and more welcoming environment, ultimately marking a fresh start.
- 12.14 The team at the Cathedral is well supported by a motivated and safeguarding-aware Cannon Precentor who is the Chapter CSL. During the Audit, he demonstrated a clear vision for his department, recognising the high-risk roles and areas of responsibility, and was able to differentiate his roles and accountabilities between operational and governance perspectives.
- 12.15 The Chief Operating Officer (COO), who has previous experience as a trustee and a school governor, is an asset to the CLT. The Audit viewed their risk-aware approach and

knowledge positively, noting the numerous initiatives they have instigated since their appointment to further empower staff and improve organisational culture.

12.16 Notwithstanding the progress made, the Audit welcomes the fact that the Dean, his senior team, and Chapter do not underestimate the residual legacy issues and the impact these have had upon some staff and volunteers.

## **Governance**

12.17 The Cathedral's governance and oversight meetings currently meet the expectations of the CofE and relevant regulatory bodies, including the Charity Commission.

12.18 The Audit acknowledges the strengths and potential within the new Chapter and the positive impact they are having. Their ambition to become more agile and adaptive is a sound approach, particularly as the Audit's engagement with staff and volunteers confirms the existence of a strong foundational base. This is further evidenced by the effective and mature shared leadership of the governing body through joint chairing with the non-executive member, which the Audit considers good practice.

12.19 Furthermore, the Audit found a clear acceptance within Chapter of the need for a professional safeguarding advisor to provide critical challenge; a point considered especially pertinent while awaiting the appointment of a CSO. The CSL and others highlighted Chapter's positive development of the Cathedral Safeguarding Advisory Panel (CSAP), including the appointment of an independent chair and the potential for their involvement in Chapter as a critical friend.

12.20 The Audit supports this direction and, recognising the CSAP as a formal committee of Chapter, sees significant potential in aligning its meetings to better inform Chapter on key safeguarding themes and ongoing issues.

## The Cathedral Safeguarding Advisory Panel (CSAP)

12.21 The Cathedral Safeguarding Advisory Panel (CSAP) is currently in transition and presents an opportunity for significant enhancement in its structure, governance, and strategic approach to safeguarding. While the interim Chair provided valuable temporary support, their acknowledged lack of full independence highlighted the need for more robust ongoing scrutiny and oversight.

12.22 A new, independent interim Chair has now been appointed, pending permanent recruitment. This individual should build upon previous work by establishing a clear vision for the CSAP, refining its membership, and ensuring meetings are well-structured and agendas directly support effective oversight. Furthermore, engagement with the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP) should be prioritised, potentially through an annual joint meeting.

12.23 To expedite progress, the formation of time-bound task and finish groups is recommended to address specific areas. Going forward, once a Cathedral Safeguarding Officer (CSO) is in post, establishing an operational sub-group will be beneficial in distinguishing strategic matters from operational details, thereby improving the Chapter's line of sight on frontline safeguarding practices.

**Recommendation C9:** To ensure the Cathedral Safeguarding Advisory Panel (CSAP) operates effectively and provides robust oversight, the Cathedral should:

- a) Articulate a shared understanding of the CSAP's role, responsibilities, and strategic goals within the Cathedral's safeguarding framework.
- b) Ensure CSAP comprises individuals with the necessary expertise, experience, and crucially, demonstrable independence for effective scrutiny and oversight. This work should include a skills, diversity and inclusion audit.

- c) Establish clear thematic meeting agendas, reporting formats, scrutiny and decision-making processes to maximise efficiency and ensure focused challenge and assurance sessions.
- d) Design meeting agendas and reporting mechanisms that directly address the information needs of the Chapter, enabling them to effectively monitor safeguarding progress and challenges.
- e) Formalise regular communication and collaboration with the DSAP, potentially including an annual joint meeting to ensure alignment, complimentary priorities and shared learning.
- f) Create focused, short-term (task and finish) working groups with specific remits to accelerate progress on identified priority areas for improvement.
- g) Establish a sub-group to manage the operational aspects of safeguarding (once a Cathedral Safeguarding Officer is in post). This will allow the CSAP to focus on strategic direction and oversight, and improve the Chapter's understanding of frontline activities.

## Capacity CSO / A

12.24 The Audit proposes a strategic restructuring of safeguarding across the Diocese to consolidate resources and enhance the authority and influence of the overarching safeguarding team. This would involve establishing a dedicated Safeguarding Directorate, led by a professional Director of Safeguarding. See *relevant commentary and recommendations within Part One of this report*.<sup>5</sup>

12.25 Within the Cathedral's context, this would mean that the CSO / A (once appointed) would be based at the Cathedral, providing a visible presence and becoming the authoritative

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<sup>5</sup> For more on the Safeguarding Directorate recommendation see The Independent Safeguarding Audit Annual Report 2024, <https://ineqe.com/churchofengland/>

voice on safeguarding matters relating to the workforce, worshippers, and visitors. However, they would be line managed and professionally supervised by the DSO / Safeguarding Manager. While the CSO / A would develop specialist knowledge of safeguarding within the Cathedral's settings, they would also be available to support broader safeguarding responsibilities in response to unforeseen operational needs or other contingencies. To this end the Audit makes the following recommendation.

**Recommendation C10:** The new CSO should be employed on a full-time basis, with three days per week dedicated to their responsibilities at the Cathedral. The remaining two days should be allocated to supporting the wider safeguarding needs of the Diocese, under the line management and professional supervision of the DSO. This arrangement will ensure a consistent and authoritative safeguarding presence at the Cathedral while also providing valuable resource and specialist knowledge to the broader Diocesan safeguarding efforts. Cost sharing should be agreed between the Cathedral and DBF.

12.26 Finally, the Audit has noted instances where the Cathedral and the DBF are effectively sharing resources, specifically in areas such as the National Safeguarding Case Management System (NSCMS). This collaborative approach is recognised as good practice.

### **Chorister Safeguarding**

12.27 The team surrounding the choristers at Wells Cathedral has undergone significant changes in recent months. While views from choristers and their parents were mixed, Cathedral and school staff expressed confidence in the existing arrangements. The team itself is viewed positively and has already started the journey towards a safer and more supportive safeguarding culture. The early signs of progress are encouraging, and with continued leadership and a commitment to listening and learning, this momentum can build a stronger safeguarding culture for all.

## Scheduling and Wellbeing

12.28 There is no doubt that being a chorister is demanding and requires a constant balancing act that can feel challenging and, at times, unreasonable. On occasion, that balance can become uncomfortably precarious for some. However, the Audit acknowledges that some good practice is already in place to manage this, including a flexible approach to time off and the cancellation of morning rehearsals when evening commitments are high.

## Parent and Chorister Views

12.29 A strong theme emerging from discussions with choristers and their parents was the need to be heard. Communication between the school and the Cathedral appears to be inconsistent at times, leaving choristers to explain their schedule to school staff who don't fully understand the demands of their role. While somewhat outside the remit of this Audit, this breakdown affects chorister wellbeing by impinging upon the fragility of their schedule. The Audit believe this can be addressed through improved collaboration.

**Recommendation C11:** The music department, working with the school, should consider the best ways to educate staff about the choristers' role. This should aim to increase awareness amongst all staff who work with these children, enabling them to better support the wellbeing of choristers given the intensity of their commitments.

12.30 Parents also voiced concerns about raising issues and not receiving feedback. A 'broken feedback loop', particularly relating to experiences before recent staffing changes, has created a legacy of mistrust. While the Audit noted clear intentions from current staff to address this, further action is needed to rebuild relationships and restore confidence. A more visible safeguarding presence, combined with a transparent mechanism for hearing and responding to parental concerns, is key.

**Recommendation C12:** The Cathedral should establish a Chorister Parent Representative Group to provide a means by which parents can be heard and consulted on safeguarding matters, and to help rebuild trust.

## Chaperoning

12.31 The Audit found that the current team of chaperones are experienced individuals who have a sound understanding of safeguarding principles. Their presence offers a valuable source of care, reassurance, and pastoral support to choristers. However, their role is neither consistently recognised nor fully understood by choristers and parents. Raising the profile of chaperones provides an opportunity to strengthen safeguarding further, particularly given the relatively small number of female staff. Many of the chaperones, who are female, are well placed to offer additional pastoral support, especially for girls who board.

**Recommendation C13:** The role of chaperones should be actively promoted to choristers and their parents, helping to build relationships and reinforce their importance as a vital source of support and protection.

## Other Safety Provisions

12.32 Dedicated toilets for choristers are available within rehearsal spaces, alongside an additional chaperoned, key-coded toilet used during services. This is good practice and demonstrates a strong approach to safeguarding. The Audit understands that staff were in the process of installing child-friendly safeguarding posters during the site visit. However, the following recommendation is made for clarity and emphasis.

**Recommendation C14:** Child-friendly safeguarding posters should be placed in the Song Room and chorister toilet areas. These should use age-appropriate colours, fonts, and imagery to support clear and accessible messaging. Consideration should also be given to placement,



such as positioning posters low on the back of toilet doors to ensure visibility for younger children.

12.33 Wells Cathedral benefits from a relatively new, purpose-built facility for choristers, designed with safeguarding in mind. Features such as windowed rehearsal spaces and key-coded access provide clear benefits for both children and staff. However, there remain areas regularly accessed by choristers where additional oversight could be strengthened.

**Recommendation C15:** To enhance visibility and ensure consistent oversight, the Cathedral should install CCTV into key areas, such as the Song Rooms, organ loft, Education Centre and other frequently used routes.

CCTV should be monitored as required, i.e., post-incident or allegation. Retention and storage of such material should be compliant with UK GDPR legislation.

## Training

12.34 Some choristers reported that poor behaviour by their peers was going unchecked, and that this was affecting their experience. That's unusual - but telling. When children themselves are asking for better boundaries, those responsible for safeguarding them, must listen. A strong behavioural culture starts with staff confidence and consistency.

12.35 That said, a number of practical steps have already been taken to improve the chorister experience and minimise risks. These include increasing the number of chaperones, refining supervision procedures (such as choristers leaving in pairs and updated risk assessments), and adjusting scheduling to reduce pressure on chorister time. These actions are a positive foundation on which to build, and should now be matched with training that ensures staff across both sites respond to behaviour with clarity and consistency.

**Recommendation C16:** Behaviour management training should be provided to those working directly with choristers, ensuring consistency and clarity in approach. This could be developed and delivered by Wells Cathedral School in order to provide a consistent approach and expectation across both sites.

## Information Sharing

12.36 The Audit found good evidence of appropriate and timely information sharing between the key staff responsible for supporting choristers. However, legacy issues (as outlined earlier) continue to have an impact, particularly regarding past inconsistencies in how information was shared. To help current staff build on the positive practices now in place, it would be beneficial to seek direct feedback from both choristers and their parents. A short survey could act as a 'pulse check', identifying any remaining concerns and informing practical steps to address them.

**Recommendation C17:** Wells Cathedral should undertake a chorister and chorister parent survey focused on communication, information sharing, and safeguarding. The results should be analysed and used to inform an action plan to address any residual concerns and enhance existing good practice.

## Policies

12.37 The Audit reviewed the range of policies supporting choristers at Wells Cathedral. The Wells Cathedral Chorister Safety Policy was found to be a detailed and structured framework for safeguarding. It demonstrates clear alignment with CofE's expectations and national standards, reflecting the Cathedral's strong intent to embed safeguarding principles into all aspects of chorister life, from daily rehearsals to off-site visits.

12.38 Emergency evacuation and lockdown procedures are clearly defined, with plans in place

to update the Major Incident Plan and to ensure that staff and choristers are appropriately trained.

## 13 Prevention

- 13.1 Safer recruitment policies and practices are a vital part of creating safer environments, discouraging unsuitable individuals from joining an organisation and preventing harm. The Cathedral has a range of measures in place to ensure the safer recruitment of individuals to various roles. Such measures include reference gathering, confidential declarations for eligible roles, the Cathedral's safeguarding commitment being specified in application packs, and criminal record checks for certain roles.
- 13.2 The Cathedral further demonstrates its commitment to good safeguarding practice through the development and adoption of a comprehensive suite of policies and procedures. The Cathedral has its own Safeguarding Policy, complemented by a Safeguarding Strategy for 2024-2026, a dedicated action plan for monitoring progress, a statement of safeguarding principles (endorsed by the Chapter), specific guidelines for chorister chaperones detailing roles and responsibilities, and a dedicated safeguarding document for bell ringing activities.
- 13.3 The sharing and embedding of good safeguarding practice within the Cathedral is achieved through various channels. Regular discussions take place among staff members who are part of the Cathedral Safeguarding Advisory Panel and anonymised case studies are discussed in departmental and team meetings to raise awareness at all levels. Safeguarding is also a key topic at the annual volunteer's reception, with the Safeguarding Handbook and related materials being prominently displayed in the Volunteer Room. The Education Department integrates safeguarding awareness into their events, as evidenced by a dedicated talk given at their Volunteers' Celebration.
- 13.4 The importance of safeguarding is further emphasised through wider Cathedral activities

and specific engagement with different groups. A dedicated Safeguarding Sunday, led by the Dean and Precentor, included a sermon explicitly addressing safeguarding, prompting follow-up conversations with the clergy.

- 13.5 For those working directly with children and young people, regular discussions are held with staff and volunteers, and the Education Team maintains close communication with schools regarding trips. The Wells Amateur Bellringing Society (WABS), which provides volunteer bellringers, has its own safeguarding lead who raises any concerns and ensures safeguarding is a standing agenda item at their meetings. Safeguarding posters are also displayed in the ringing rooms. Moreover, the WABS safeguarding lead attends the Cathedral Safeguarding Advisory Panel, ensuring bellringers' safeguarding considerations are integrated into the broader framework at the Cathedral. Finally, safeguarding posters are present in various locations throughout the Cathedral.
- 13.6 Beyond these documented procedures, the Cathedral benefits from informal arrangements built through networking and relationship building with colleagues in other areas. This collaborative approach has facilitated the sharing of valuable resources, such as templates for managing low-level concerns, role descriptions for staff, and examples of Safeguarding Handbooks.
- 13.7 The Cathedral adopts a comprehensive and multi-layered approach to promote safeguarding effectively across all audiences within its community. This is achieved through a range of methods designed to raise awareness, develop understanding, and embed safeguarding in the DNA of Cathedral life. Regular opportunities for discussion and learning are provided during departmental meetings and specific refresher talks tailored to particular roles, such as chaperones.

- 13.8 Leadership at all levels actively engages with safeguarding. This is evidenced by communication from leadership to staff and volunteers, emphasising safeguarding across the Cathedral's activities. Safeguarding is also a standing agenda item for Chapter meetings, with monthly reports being considered by its members. An annual presentation by the DST further ensures that the Cathedral's most senior leaders remain informed and reassured. To gauge the effectiveness of these measures, internal surveys are conducted to gather feedback from those within the Cathedral community.
- 13.9 The Cathedral's Education Department offers educational visits, including self-led tours, guided tours, or full day events combining tours, crafts, and curriculum-linked sessions. The booking form for these visits appropriately refers to safeguarding, special needs, access, and photography permissions. Adult-to-child ratios are specified. The education team manages all school communication and provides a secure room for full program days. Staff and volunteers supervise children, with school staff remaining ultimately responsible. Sensory backpacks and special needs training are also available. This is good practice.
- 13.10 The Cathedral places a strong emphasis on engaging with families through dedicated activities scheduled throughout the year. A key principle underpinning the family visits is the requirement for parental or guardian supervision of children. Feedback is actively encouraged and used to evaluate the success of activities and to identify areas for improvement, including those related to safety and visitor experience. Finally, the Cathedral has established procedures to address various situations that may arise during family visits. This includes training staff and volunteers to be vigilant and to respond appropriately if children are found to be unaccompanied within the Cathedral building.
- 13.11 The Cathedral is committed to being inclusive and welcoming to all visitors. In April 2024,

it introduced sensory backpacks, a valuable resource designed to support children with special educational needs and their families in having a positive, engaging, and accessible experience. The contents are carefully selected to engage different senses and provide comfort and focus, helping children to explore the Cathedral and learn about its features in a way that suits them. Relevant training has been provided to ensure staff can optimise the use of the backpacks and effectively support children with additional needs.

13.12 In terms of the feedback mechanisms in place, bespoke forms are distributed during family activities. These are specifically designed to be engaging for younger participants by incorporating child-friendly elements such as smiley faces. They include explicit questions about visitors' perceptions of safety during their experience. The data collected is then reviewed, enabling the Cathedral to promptly address any concerns and make informed improvements to their programmes and procedures. Feedback responses seen by the Audit included comments such as "wonderfully handled", "most impressed by the safe, caring environment provided" and "fantastic, love the enthusiasm".

13.13 For the purpose of maintaining a safer environment, the Cathedral carries out a range of different risk assessments. The key categories of risk assessment are: *Activity Risk*, which cover specific events; *Individual Risk*, focused on particular people; and *Home Visiting Risk*, carried out for pastoral visits to people's homes.

13.14 The Cathedral's Lone Working Policy acknowledges that working alone can introduce additional risks. To address these, the policy emphasises three key requirements: firstly, the lone worker must have a thorough understanding of the potential hazards and risks involved in their work; secondly, the lone worker must be fully informed about the task itself and the procedures to follow if any problems arise; and thirdly, a designated, suitable person must be aware of the lone worker's location and the nature of the work they are

undertaking.

13.15 The prevention agenda also links with staff and volunteers maintaining appropriate boundaries in their roles. The implementation of national guidance helps in this context, namely through the 'The Code of Safer Working Practice' and 'Safer Environment and Activities'.

13.16 Regarding the Cathedral's physical infrastructure, CCTV monitoring is crucial for enhancing its overall security. To further strengthen the Cathedral's security arrangements, the CCTV coverage could be expanded to include several areas identified as vulnerable. See **Recommendation C15**.



## 14 Recognising, Assessing and Managing Risk

- 14.1 The Audit observed a considered approach to safeguarding at the Cathedral aimed at identifying, managing and mitigating risk. This framework includes having the relevant policies, procedures and guidance in place, as well as promoting a culture where everyone is aware of and responsible for safeguarding.
- 14.2 Safeguarding is included in the Cathedral's Risk Register and the Audit saw evidence of concerns and control measures being appropriately documented with oversight applied by Chapter. The Audit believes that the register could be further strengthened by considering broader societal issues.

**Recommendation C18:** To further strengthen the Cathedral's Risk Register, it should be expanded to include a comprehensive assessment of safeguarding risks specific to the Cathedral's context and environment. This should include specific safeguarding focused consideration of:

- a) Risks arising from allegations of abuse or misconduct, mishandling of safeguarding cases, or negative publicity. This should include protocols for managing allegations, proactively searching for and addressing (open source) online criticism and media relations.
- b) Risks associated with the cost-of-living crisis, such as increased vulnerability to exploitation and abuse due to financial hardship. This could involve strategies to support vulnerable individuals and families and to prevent financial abuse.
- c) To support this approach, CSAP should develop and maintain an operational risk register. Risks identified as having strategic implications should be escalated to Chapter for their attention.

- 14.3 Safeguarding concerns are appropriately reported to the DST, with information sharing and collaborative working being maintained through the DSTs regular communication with safeguarding leads at the Cathedral. For concerns falling below the threshold for action, the DST provides advice and guidance. The DST is responsible for the management of all allegations of abuse made against church officers.
- 14.4 Cathedral cases are managed by the DST in accordance with the Service Level Agreement (SLA). All safeguarding queries are directed to the DSO, the Diocesan Safeguarding Coordinator (DSC), or a central safeguarding inbox that is accessible to both. The DSO assumes direct management of complaints involving senior clergy or those carrying a significant reputational risk. Thresholds for DST case management are determined by a "Safeguarding Criteria" document.
- 14.5 The Cathedral also utilises a low-level concern form for issues not meeting the safeguarding threshold but requiring attention. These forms are submitted to the DSC for triage and the provision of advice. Cathedral Safeguarding Leads are included in response communications and records of low-level concerns are maintained by the DSC.
- 14.6 Over the past three years, 23 concerns involving the Cathedral were recorded as safeguarding incidents and 12 related to the seeking of advice. In the last 12 months, two of the concerns raised resulted in a referral to statutory agencies. Currently, there are four open safeguarding cases that involve the Cathedral, although none of these are active at the present time.
- 14.7 As with the DBF, the Cathedral encourages the reporting of any concern, no matter how small. All staff and volunteers undergo basic and foundation-level safeguarding training, empowering them to recognise potential issues, respond appropriately to the individual,

record the issue and refer the matter to the DST, CSL, or COO.

- 14.8 Whilst the Cathedral currently has no Safety Plans in place, processes exist should the need arise.
- 14.9 The Audit was advised there have been no Core Groups or disciplinary processes at the Cathedral over the past 12 months. Aspects relating to Core Groups are outlined in Part One of this report.
- 14.10 The Cathedral is registered as a charity and has a legal requirement to submit Serious Incident Reports to the Charity Commission. The Cathedral follows the House of Bishops' guidance set out in 'Safeguarding Serious Incident Reporting to the Charity Commission'.
- 14.11 The Cathedral maintains several information-sharing agreements, which include a Data Sharing Agreement with the DBF and a Joint Safeguarding Agreement with the Wells Cathedral School. This latter agreement serves to ensure the continuity and seamless provision of care for child choristers.
- 14.12 Currently, there is no established escalation process to facilitate the management of differing opinions regarding decisions and actions taken on safeguarding cases. A recommendation has been made to the DBF to address this, and this is equally applicable to the Cathedral's safeguarding arrangements. That said, the Cathedral has already recognised this gap and has been proactively considering the development of a formal protocol.
- 14.13 The Cathedral demonstrates a commitment to compliance with UK data protection legislation and the UK General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) in its security and

storage of personal information. This is evidenced by the inclusion of both the Data Protection Policy and the Subject Access Request Policy as integral components of the induction process for all relevant individuals.

14.14 Personal information is collected through various channels, including email, face-to-face interactions, telephone conversations, neutral notification / low-level concern forms, and an online form accessible via the Diocesan website. However, it was noted that volunteers currently utilise their personal email addresses for communication, which may include the sharing of written safeguarding reports. Furthermore, a volunteer supporting the Cathedral's safeguarding function also uses a personal email address for their work.

**Recommendation C19:** The Cathedral should mandate the use of encrypted or secure email communication involving any safeguarding case.

14.15 The Audit's survey of the Cathedral's workforce found that most respondents were aware of the privacy notice regarding data protection. This is a positive indication and reflects the sustained efforts to comply with data protection requirements.

## 15 Victims and Survivors

- 15.1 The Cathedral's direct engagement with victims and survivors is somewhat limited due to the DST managing operations and serving as the primary point of contact. This arrangement is formalised through an SLA with the DBF. The SLA grants the Cathedral access to *FearFree*, an independent support and advocacy service for victims / survivors.
- 15.2 The Audit was informed that the Cathedral follows the House of Bishops' guidance as set out in 'Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse' and notes that the full guidance is directly linked on its 'Safeguarding Resources and Policies' webpage.
- 15.3 The Cathedral's Safeguarding webpage provides clear reporting pathways by providing contact information for the DST. It also links to the Diocesan website, that provides access to the online reporting form and confidential incident reporting information. Further information is made available for victims and survivors through posters, the Safeguarding Handbook, and support from the Pastoral Care Team.
- 15.4 The most frequent safeguarding concerns within the Cathedral involve the welfare of elderly volunteers or congregants, mental health issues affecting the public, and matters related to wellbeing and chaperone policy / practice. Given these concerns, the support services listed on the Cathedral's website are appropriate, such as the Mental Health Crisis and Samaritans helplines, Age UK Advice Line, and Action Fraud. Other helpful signposts include the National Domestic Abuse Helpline and the Survivors Trust.
- 15.5 The Audit heard of the impact of the Cathedral's Safeguarding Sunday service, whereby several people came forward to make disclosures of non-recent abuse / harm. The most recent service in November 2024, also saw a dedicated exhibition showcasing the Angels

Creative Project from “*If I Told You What Would You Do?*” resources created by the Diocese of Newcastle in conjunction with Safe Spaces.

- 15.6 The Cathedral offers sanctuary and support, as evidenced by meetings and discussions held with victims / survivors to ensure their voices are heard. One survivor expressed gratitude and a sense of safety due to the actions of the Dean and Virgers. Furthermore, the Cathedral's 'Support for Victims and Survivors' webpage includes an invitation to engage in improving safeguarding practices, with the DST listed as the contact for this provision. This is good practice. That said, to deepen its reach with victims and survivors (in partnership with the DBF), the following recommendation is made.

**Recommendation C20:** The Cathedral should partner with the DBF to host diocese-wide listening events, providing an additional platform to hear from a diverse range of voices to inform local practice.

## 16 Learning, Supervision and Support

- 16.1 Safeguarding learning at the Cathedral is primarily delivered by the DST, supported by two volunteers from the Cathedral who have completed the DST's 'Train the Trainer' programme. While the Cathedral does not currently have a written training strategy, it operates a defined programme which forms part of its broader approach to staff development.
- 16.2 Encouragingly, most Cathedral staff who responded to the Audit's survey reported that safeguarding training had helped them to better understand their roles and responsibilities. The Cathedral has also engaged with wider contextual learning, including two dementia awareness sessions delivered by the Wells Dementia Action Alliance. This is positive practice, particularly given the Cathedral's significant engagement with elderly visitors.
- 16.3 Compliance in relation to safeguarding training records was reviewed by the Audit and found to be largely robust, with relatively few outstanding entries. However, there is currently no routine evaluation of training to assess its impact on practice, outcomes, or behaviour. While similar recommendations have been made for the DBF, the Cathedral would benefit from undertaking its own process and / or a specific training needs analysis. This would help strengthen the feedback loop, identify areas for development, and provide a clearer picture of how safeguarding training is influencing day-to-day practice.

**Recommendation C21:** The Cathedral should carry out a training needs analysis and / or implement a formal feedback / evaluation process to assess the impact of safeguarding training and inform future learning priorities.

## Clergy Support

16.4 Induction processes were noted to have improved over the past year. Historically, there was no formal induction for Cathedral staff and volunteers, which likely contributed to nearly a quarter of the Audit's survey respondents indicating they had not been given one. A further small percentage stated that they were unsure. Among those who had completed an induction, a quarter could not recall safeguarding being covered or did not believe it had been discussed.

16.5 A new induction package has since been introduced. This requires staff and volunteers to confirm they have read the safeguarding policy prior to engagement. While this marks an improvement, safeguarding content could be strengthened and in the opinion of the Audit, included as a dedicated section. Indeed, induction should go beyond policy acknowledgment and include role-specific guidance to ensure new staff understand how safeguarding applies to their day-to-day duties.

**Recommendation C22:** The Cathedral should include safeguarding as a dedicated section within its induction processes for all staff and volunteers, including role-specific guidance to help ensure new personnel understand how safeguarding applies to their duties from the outset.

16.6 The Cathedral demonstrates a commitment to supporting the wellbeing of those engaged in safeguarding roles. Access to emotional and psychological support is available through the DBF, including confidential counselling and services provided via *FearFree*. Cathedral clergy also have access to an adviser in Counselling and Wellbeing, offering up to twelve funded sessions where needed. This is good practice.

## Supervision and Support of Safeguarding Roles

16.7 Supervision arrangements are in place for safeguarding roles through the SLA with the DBF and opportunities for professional development are provided through access to



training via the NST and Diocesan sources. Learning is further supplemented through the Cathedral Safeguarding Advisory Panel, which actively promotes reflective practice and peer learning.

- 16.8 MDRs for Cathedral clergy are coordinated through the Bishop and DBF, rather than the Cathedral directly. Evidence reviewed by the Audit indicates that safeguarding is included as a theme within MDRs, with structured opportunities to identify areas for growth and development.
- 16.9 The Cathedral benefits from wider partnership working through the DSAP, providing opportunities to engage with local safeguarding forums and multi-agency networks, which will be strengthened by recommendations relating to CSAP / DSAP alignment (highlighted earlier in the report). Support structures are also in place to promote a healthy work-life balance for safeguarding staff, supported through access to counselling and wellbeing services.

## 17 Conclusion

- 17.1 In conclusion, the Audit of Wells Cathedral demonstrates a significantly improved safeguarding culture, with individuals reporting increased confidence in raising concerns. This positive shift is underpinned by a proactive response to past issues, including active engagement with staff and volunteers, a strong emphasis on shared responsibility, and a demonstrable commitment to continuous learning and improvement. The Audit concluded that safeguarding is being integrated into both existing activities and new initiatives, embedding it as a core principle across all Cathedral operations.
- 17.2 This progress is supported by the evolving role of the new Chapter and the by strong collegiate leadership demonstrated by the Dean. He unequivocally accepts his ultimate accountability and is commitment to collective responsibility.
- 17.3 The Audit takes the view that sharing his role as Chair with the Senior Non-Executive is an example of competent, confident leadership and given the anomaly within the new measure (in which the chief executive chairs the board of trustees), the Audit acknowledges this as good practice.
- 17.4 Other positive developments evident across the Cathedral, include, but are not limited to, dedicated support for choristers, robust preventative measures (safer recruitment, comprehensive policies, and proactive awareness), and a focus on inclusivity (sensory backpacks and child-friendly feedback).
- 17.5 Safeguarding concerns are well-managed through effective reporting, communication, and training. While direct survivor support is handled by the DBF, the Cathedral facilitates access to external services, adheres to national guidance, and actively engages survivors

in improving practices.

- 17.6 That said, challenges beyond the impact of past failings remain. These include reinforcing safeguarding capacity, enhancing victim and survivor outreach and support, strengthening accountability frameworks and scrutiny functions (notably the Cathedral Safeguarding Panel), enhancing governance information pathways, addressing legacy perceptions regarding culture, and broadening external representation and inclusivity.
- 17.7 These areas, and others, are addressed in the recommendations within this Audit report, which are designed to constructively support the Cathedral as it consolidates and further strengthens its existing safeguarding arrangements.
- 17.8 Crucial to the progress made, and the potential for further advancement, is the strong collaboration, mutual respect, safeguarding focus and support evident between the Dean, the Diocesan Bishop, and their respective teams. In the opinion of the Audit, they set an outstanding example in this regard.

# Appendices

## 18 Appendix 1 – DBF Recommendations

**Recommendation D1:** The DBF should establish a rotating Lead Safeguarding Archdeacon Role. This formal position, rotating every two to three years, would enhance the presence of safeguarding in key leadership and governance meetings. This would ensure that relevant discussions are appropriately considered and communicated to other Archdeacons and their respective areas. The role would provide a clear point of contact, improve the dissemination of safeguarding information within the leadership structure, and enable a deeper understanding of safeguarding principles and procedures among all Archdeacons.

**Recommendation D2:** The focus of safeguarding during Archdeacon visits and meetings:

To build upon the existing safeguarding work undertaken during both formal and informal engagements, Archdeacons should:

- c) Implement annual safeguarding meetings: Convene yearly meetings with their area PSOs, the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP) chair, the DSO, and any other relevant individuals. This forum should serve to plan for the upcoming year, documenting key safeguarding themes and emerging issues.
- d) Integrate safeguarding into visit planning: This annual process should include identifying, recording, and planning for significant events such as conferences, workshops, and any scheduled inspections or visitations. This proactive approach will enable the DST and their support officer to effectively plan how to best inform and support the Archdeacons' safeguarding responsibilities. This support should specifically include:

- III. Pre-Visit / Inspection Briefings: The DSO should provide briefings before visits, outlining relevant issues specific to the area. This should go beyond standard checks on signage, PSOs, training, and dashboards to include, for example, the

potential for pre-visit safeguarding surveys, the number of active safety plans, any particular needs or areas for development / discussion, the impact of relevant national CofE news, and opportunities to meet with victims and survivors.

- IV. Post-Visit Debriefs:** Archdeacons should provide recorded debriefs for the DSO after each visit. These should capture identified good practices, key safeguarding themes or issues, and any necessary remedial actions, along with an action plan and timeline for implementation.

**Recommendation D3:** Develop a pool of trained Core Group chairs:

Currently, the Bishops' Chaplain chairs Core Group meetings. To mitigate potential conflicts of interest (personal, work-related, or geographic), a pool of trained individuals (typically Archdeacons) should be established. To facilitate this, the DBF (in consultation with the NST) should:

- a) **Develop chairing skills training:** A training programme should be developed to equip potential chairs with the necessary skills and abilities.
- b) **Facilitate regional training workshops:** Opportunities for annual regional training workshops should be identified to allow Archdeacons and other chairs to share best practices.

**Recommendation D4:** When sufficient capacity is available, the DSO (or Director of Safeguarding, if this role is established) should attend all Senior Leadership Team meetings. If capacity remains a concern in the interim, the DSO should be line managed by the Diocesan Secretary.

**Recommendation D5:** Secure, fireproof cabinets should be implemented for the storage of all Clergy (Blue) files.

**Recommendation D6:**

- The DBF should review its current membership across all governance (DBF), leadership, and scrutiny bodies (DSAP). This review should ensure the DSO's presence at the DBF, Bishop's Council, and any other relevant Senior Leadership Team meetings. Relevant meetings are defined as those that consider not only safeguarding in isolation but also broader aspects such as vision, growth, recruitment, housing, new projects, and outreach initiatives.
- Each governance, scrutiny, and leadership meeting (within the bounds of their legal frameworks) should undertake a skills, diversity, and inclusion audit. This audit should aim to ensure appropriate and broad representation, including informed safeguarding perspectives and a composition that reflects the diversity of the communities served.
- As part of any reflection or workshops focused on the effectiveness of governance and scrutiny, the DBF should document evidence of actual scrutiny that extends beyond briefings and observation. They should also agree on strategies to further strengthen their oversight and assurance regarding safeguarding.
- Meetings should be synchronised to ensure that they maximise appropriate safeguarding insight and oversight at each level, i.e., operational, scrutiny and governance. In this respect, one meeting will complement the other and ensure that the relevant leaders are in a position to comply with their responsibilities when reporting to the Charity Commission.

**Recommendation D7:** The DSAP should restructure its meetings to align with the forward plans of the Senior Leadership Team and Governance meetings. The DSAP agenda should complement an overarching strategy for operational oversight, safeguarding scrutiny, and governance assurance.

**Recommendation D8:** The DSAP should engage in annual meetings with the Cathedral Safeguarding Advisory Panel (CSAP), Archdeacons and the DSO (as per recommendation elsewhere in this report) to coordinate forward planning and scrutiny in a way that supports and reinforces the work of other stakeholders.

**Recommendation D9:** The DSAP should expand its representation and community involvement. This should include stronger engagement with survivors' and victims' groups, diversifying membership to include representatives from local charities, and more consistent engagement with statutory agencies (through outreach if necessary, such as the Chair holding brief, focused virtual meetings with key statutory leads twice a year, participating in Local Authority partnership groups, and sharing relevant briefings with the DSAP).

**Recommendation D10:** To enable in-depth reviews of specific areas linked to National Safeguarding Standards and action plans, a three-year meeting cycle should be implemented. This should be developed in consultation with the DBF, DSO, and senior leadership groups, taking into account the annual Archdeacons' safeguarding planning meeting to ensure complementary activities.



**Recommendation D11:** The DSAP should commission its own practice audits to move beyond simply receiving briefings. This will enable deeper insight, facilitate robust challenge, and measure the impact of safeguarding practices.

To support this, the DSAP should conduct a skills audit of its members and PSOs across the parishes. This audit would help identify the significant skills available within the workforce and volunteer body and identify individuals willing to use their skills to support short, focused audits led by the DSAP.

**Recommendation D12:** In preparation for each meeting, members should submit a brief written update report. This report should address four questions relevant to the member's area of responsibility or organisation and should be reviewed, along with other pertinent documents, before the meeting. For instance:

1. What emerging safeguarding issues are pertinent to your role / organisation and the diocese?
2. What key safeguarding risks might affect your ability to participate in the DSAP (e.g., capacity constraints, reduced organisational funding)?
3. This question will be dynamic, set at the conclusion of each meeting for the subsequent one (e.g., "what impact has the Makin report had on your stakeholders?" or, "how are you ensuring consideration of the cost-of-living crisis within your role / area / organisation?")
4. What demonstrable impact have your recent safeguarding activities had?

**Recommendation D13:** To significantly strengthen safeguarding across the Diocese, the DBF should establish an operationally autonomous Safeguarding Directorate, headed by a Director of Safeguarding.

This Directorate would consolidate all safeguarding resources, providing comprehensive and consistent support and direction to the Diocesan Bishop, DBF, parishes, and the Cathedral.

The Director of Safeguarding would have the ability, authority and autonomy to:

- a) Provide expert advice and robust oversight and ultimate direction on all safeguarding matters.
- b) Challenge senior clergy and Church bodies when necessary, ensuring accountability.
- c) Escalate concerns directly to higher authorities, including the National Director of Safeguarding at the NST without undue influence.
- d) Provide professional strategic safeguarding advice to the Diocesan Bishop to ensure compliance with policy, practice, and legal expectations.

**To ensure the effectiveness and influence of this structure, the following are required:**

- a) The Director should be a member of, and report directly to, key decision-making bodies, including the DBF, Bishop's Council, Chapter, and the Diocesan Bishop's Senior Leadership Team.
- b) A comprehensive MoU / SLA between the DBF, Parish Parochial Church Councils (PCC), and the Cathedral should clearly define the Director's agreed authority and responsibility. This includes providing safeguarding advice, support, and ultimate authoritative operational decision-making on any safeguarding-related matter across the geography of the diocese.

c) The Directorate should be adequately resourced and staffed, incorporating all professional safeguarding personnel (including those currently based at the Cathedral).

Note: This recommendation should be read in conjunction with the Safeguarding Directorate section in the [Independent Safeguarding Audits Annual Report \(2024/2025\)](#).<sup>6</sup>

**Recommendation D14:** As an immediate step towards supporting a strengthened safeguarding structure, the Diocese Board for Finance (DBF) should prioritise the recruitment of two additional Caseworkers / ADSAs. Opportunities to consolidate existing resources into one of these roles should be explored, such as reviewing the current use of non-safeguarding specialists as trainers to potentially replace that role with a safeguarding specialist capable of delivering training.

**Recommendation D15:** To fully leverage the valuable contributions and potential of the current Safeguarding Coordinator, it is recommended that their role be refocused. This may be facilitated by a targeted investment in training and professional development. This realignment would support the goal of creating a dedicated telephone point of contact for parishes, enhancing support and providing improved guidance on dashboard usage and other relevant activities. This approach would simultaneously strengthen support for parishes and streamline the core safeguarding team's operations by diverting non-safeguarding enquiries.

**Recommendation D16:** To effectively address the unique environment and risk profiles within a cathedral, the Cathedral Safeguarding Advisor should cultivate specific knowledge, skills, and abilities. To facilitate this development, the Cathedral should arrange a short

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<sup>6</sup> <https://ineqe.com/churchofengland/>

secondment to a statistically similar cathedral that already has an experienced Cathedral Safeguarding Officer / Advisor (CSO / A).

This specialist focus should not undermine the ability of the CSO to provide support when required across the dioceses to support unforeseen operational needs or other contingencies.

**Recommendation D17:** The DBF should include a statement reinforcing its commitment to safeguarding in all job adverts, application forms and job descriptions.

**Recommendation D18:** 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', this process should involve dip sampling to test the veracity of Parish Dashboard data.

**Recommendation D19:** The DBF should consider options for increasing the visibility of safeguarding content on its YouTube homepage, including, for example, featuring specific playlists.

**Recommendation D20:** The DBF should develop engagement mechanisms to consider the needs, experiences and voices of children, young people and vulnerable adults within safeguarding prevention planning. Such children and youth initiatives could be led by, and build upon the existing work of, the Youth Voice Lead / Growing Faith Adviser.

**Recommendation D21:** The DBF should develop a standalone safeguarding risk register to allow for more focus and scrutiny on safeguarding concerns. This should be reviewed and updated at a minimum cycle of quarterly.

**Recommendation D22:** As part of the triage process, the DSO should record the rationale for the risk grading, alongside specifying timescales for review.

**Recommendation D23:** Referred cases resulting in no further action and / or the provision of advice / guidance should be included as part of the supervision discussions between the DST and NST.

**Recommendation D24:** 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.

**Recommendation D25:** The DBF should reinforce to Parishes the importance of using encrypted or secure email communication involving any safeguarding case. This should be emphasised routinely in relevant training and through any other engagement undertaken by the DBF with the PSO cohort.

**Recommendation D26:** To improve the visibility of '*Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse*', the DBF should signpost directly to this guidance and utilise the helpful explainer videos contained within this national guidance.

**Recommendation D27:** The DBF's Survivor Strategy should outline a process for ensuring consistent communication with victims and survivors. This process should include:

- a) Determining the communication frequency and method in advance with the victim / survivor, respecting their preferences.

- b) Establishing and adhering to agreed check-in schedules with the DST.
- c) Maintaining planned communication with victims / survivors, even when there are no substantial updates from the DST.

**Recommendation D28:** The DBF should promote a culture of collaboration and shared decision-making throughout the Diocese's safeguarding structures, ensuring that the perspectives of victims and survivors are consistently sought and valued at every stage. For example, the DBF could look to partner with the Cathedral to host diocese-wide listening events, providing an additional platform to hear from a diverse range of voices to inform local practice.

**Recommendation D29:** The DBF should ensure that awareness of county lines is incorporated into the safeguarding training offering. Given the Diocese's proximity to the M5 corridor (a known route for such exploitation), this represents a relevant and necessary focus. Training could be rolled out in order of priority, starting with those in direct contact with children, young people, and adults at risk. This could be delivered through targeted briefings on key signs, indicators, and referral pathways, ideally in partnership with local police or statutory agencies.

**Recommendation D30:** The DBF should provide training on sex offenders that includes the development, implementation, and monitoring of Safety Plans, ensuring that clergy and lay staff understand their role in managing these appropriately within the church context.

**Recommendation D31:** The DBF should introduce the evaluation process across all training courses, covering the immediate post-course evaluation and the longer-term testing of impact.

**Recommendation D32:** The DBF should invite an experienced mental health professional to join the DSAP to help support its strategic and operational focus on mental health, including suicide prevention.

## 19 Appendix 2 – Cathedral Recommendations

**Recommendation C1:** The Cathedral should continue to invest in and build on a stronger, safer, and more inclusive community by addressing past issues, empowering shared responsibility for safeguarding, improving communication, seeking external guidance, and monitoring progress by:

- a) Proactively supporting those affected by negative legacy issues and implement strategies to help build a more inclusive community.
- b) Empowering all levels (staff, volunteers, virgers, CLT, Chapter and Dean) to champion and integrate safeguarding principles throughout Cathedral life.
- c) Actively soliciting and responding to feedback from all stakeholders, ensuring visible and approachable leadership to encourage open communication.
- d) Formalising regular engagement with external safeguarding professionals for independent oversight and continuous improvement.
- e) Implementing ongoing feedback mechanisms (e.g., surveys) to track the sustained integration of a positive safeguarding culture and identify areas for development.

**Recommendation C2: Comprehensive Risk Assessments for Young Apprentices:**

The Cathedral should develop and implement detailed, project-specific risk assessments for all apprenticeship roles involving individuals those under 18 years of age. These assessments should consider the specific tasks, working environments, and potential interactions with other individuals, both within the Cathedral precinct and during outreach activities.



The Cathedral should ensure that these risk assessments are regularly reviewed and updated, particularly as the apprentices' roles and responsibilities evolve or if there are changes to the project's scope.

The Cathedral should implement clear mitigation strategies for all identified risks, with designated individuals responsible for their implementation and monitoring.

**Recommendation C3: Safeguarding Protocols for Potential On-Site Living Arrangements:**

- a) If on-site living arrangements for apprentices or community engagement staff are considered in the future, the Cathedral should develop specific and robust safeguarding policies and procedures for these residential settings. This should include clear guidelines on supervision, access control, and reporting mechanisms for any concerns.

**Recommendation C4: Enhanced and Consistent DBS Checking Processes:**

- a) The Cathedral should continue to implement a rigorous and consistent DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checking process for all individuals involved in the Vicars Close project, including community engagement staff, apprentices (where eligible), volunteers, and any other individuals who will have contact with vulnerable adults or children.
- b) The Cathedral should ensure that the level of DBS check is appropriate to the individual's role and the level of contact they will have with vulnerable groups.
- c) The Cathedral should continue to ensure the regular renewal of DBS checks in line with best practice and Cathedral safeguarding policy, maintaining accurate records of

all DBS checks and ensuring that any concerns raised are addressed promptly and appropriately.

**Recommendation C5: Clear Safeguarding Protocols:**

- c) Notwithstanding the Cathedral's existing policies and practices and their overarching application, additional reassurance should test that such policies provide clear and documented safeguarding protocols focused on apprentices or community members engaged through the Vicars Close project.
- d) The Cathedral should provide comprehensive training to all project staff and relevant volunteers on these protocols, ensuring they understand their roles and responsibilities in safeguarding and know how to escalate concerns appropriately within and beyond the Cathedral.

**Recommendation C6: Dedicated Safeguarding Oversight and Training:**

- a) The Cathedral should designate a specific individual or role within the Vicars Close project team with clear responsibility for overseeing all safeguarding matters related to the initiative. This individual should have relevant safeguarding expertise (agreed by the CSO) and be the point of contact for any concerns.
- b) The Cathedral develop and deliver tailored safeguarding training for all individuals involved in the project, including community engagement staff, apprentices, and volunteers. This training should build on existing provisions but be specific to the risks and opportunities presented by the Vicars Close project.
- c) Where appropriate the Cathedral should ensure that apprentices receive age-appropriate safeguarding information and know who to contact if they have any concerns.

**Recommendation C7: Monitoring and Evaluation of Safeguarding Measures:**

- a) The Vicars Close project board should implement a robust system for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the safeguarding measures put in place for the Vicars Close project. This should include regular reviews of risk assessments, incident logs, and feedback from participants and staff. This should be reviewed by an agreed panel (potentially CSAP) at least annually.
- b) The Vicars Close project board should reassure themselves that reports relating to any safeguarding incidents or concerns that arise during the project are dealt with in accordance with Cathedral safeguarding policy and local statutory requirements.
- c) The Cathedral should use the findings from monitoring and evaluation to continuously improve safeguarding practices within the Vicars Close project and to inform future community engagement initiatives.

**Recommendation C8: Use and Safeguarding Responsibilities for Contractors.**

The Cathedral should mandate and ensure that all contractors and subcontractors engaged in the Vicars Close project formally agree to adhere to the Cathedral's relevant safeguarding policies and procedures. This agreement should be documented within contractual arrangements and include provision of the Cathedral's safeguarding policy; a requirement for contractors to confirm their understanding and compliance; and outlining expectations regarding DBS checks (as appropriate to their role and potential contact with vulnerable individuals), reporting concerns, and adherence to site-specific safeguarding protocols. Evidence of this formal agreement should be obtained and retained prior to the commencement of any work.

**Recommendation C9:** To ensure the Cathedral Safeguarding Advisory Panel (CSAP) operates effectively and provides robust oversight, the Cathedral should:

- a) Articulate a shared understanding of the CSAP's role, responsibilities, and strategic goals within the Cathedral's safeguarding framework.
- b) Ensure CSAP comprises individuals with the necessary expertise, experience, and crucially, demonstrable independence for effective scrutiny and oversight. This work should include a skills, diversity and inclusion audit.
- c) Establish clear thematic meeting agendas, reporting formats, scrutiny and decision-making processes to maximise efficiency and ensure focused challenge and assurance sessions.
- d) Design meeting agendas and reporting mechanisms that directly address the information needs of the Chapter, enabling them to effectively monitor safeguarding progress and challenges.
- e) Formalise regular communication and collaboration with the DSAP, potentially including an annual joint meeting to ensure alignment, complimentary priorities and shared learning.
- f) Create focused, short-term (task and finish) working groups with specific remits to accelerate progress on identified priority areas for improvement.
- g) Establish a sub-group to manage the operational aspects of safeguarding (once a Cathedral Safeguarding Officer is in post). This will allow the CSAP to focus on strategic direction and oversight, and improve the Chapter's understanding of frontline activities.

**Recommendation C10:** The new CSO should be employed on a full-time basis, with three days per week dedicated to their responsibilities at the Cathedral. The remaining two days should be allocated to supporting the wider safeguarding needs of the Diocese, under the line

management and professional supervision of the DSO. This arrangement will ensure a consistent and authoritative safeguarding presence at the Cathedral while also providing valuable resource and specialist knowledge to the broader Diocesan safeguarding efforts. Cost sharing should be agreed between the Cathedral and DBF.

**Recommendation C11:** The music department, working with the school, should consider the best ways to educate staff about the choristers' role. This should aim to increase awareness amongst all staff who work with these children, enabling them to better support the wellbeing of choristers given the intensity of their commitments.

**Recommendation C12:** The Cathedral should establish a Chorister Parent Representative Group to provide a means by which parents can be heard and consulted on safeguarding matters, and to help rebuild trust.

**Recommendation C13:** The role of chaperones should be actively promoted to choristers and their parents, helping to build relationships and reinforce their importance as a vital source of support and protection.

**Recommendation C14:** Child-friendly safeguarding posters should be placed in the Song Room and chorister toilet areas. These should use age-appropriate colours, fonts, and imagery to support clear and accessible messaging. Consideration should also be given to placement, such as positioning posters low on the back of toilet doors to ensure visibility for younger children.

**Recommendation C15:** To enhance visibility and ensure consistent oversight, the Cathedral should install CCTV into key areas, such as the Song Rooms, organ loft, Education Centre and other frequently used routes.

CCTV should be monitored as required, i.e., post-incident or allegation. Retention and storage of such material should be compliant with UK GDPR legislation.

**Recommendation C16:** Behaviour management training should be provided to those working directly with choristers, ensuring consistency and clarity in approach. This could be developed and delivered by Wells Cathedral School in order to provide a consistent approach and expectation across both sites.

**Recommendation C17:** Wells Cathedral should undertake a chorister and chorister parent survey focused on communication, information sharing, and safeguarding. The results should be analysed and used to inform an action plan to address any residual concerns and enhance existing good practice.

**Recommendation C18:** To further strengthen the Cathedral's Risk Register, it should be expanded to include a comprehensive assessment of safeguarding risks specific to the Cathedral's context and environment. This should include specific safeguarding focused consideration of:

- d) Risks arising from allegations of abuse or misconduct, mishandling of safeguarding cases, or negative publicity. This should include protocols for managing allegations, proactively searching for and addressing (open source) online criticism and media relations.
- e) Risks associated with the cost-of-living crisis, such as increased vulnerability to exploitation and abuse due to financial hardship. This could involve strategies to support vulnerable individuals and families and to prevent financial abuse.
- f) To support this approach, CSAP should develop and maintain an operational risk register. Risks identified as having strategic implications should be escalated to Chapter for their attention.

**Recommendation C19:** The Cathedral should mandate the use of encrypted or secure email communication involving any safeguarding case.

**Recommendation C20:** The Cathedral should partner with the DBF to host diocese-wide listening events, providing an additional platform to hear from a diverse range of voices to inform local practice.

**Recommendation C21:** The Cathedral should carry out a training needs analysis and / or implement a formal feedback / evaluation process to assess the impact of safeguarding training and inform future learning priorities.

**Recommendation C22:** The Cathedral should include safeguarding as a dedicated section within its induction processes for all staff and volunteers, including role-specific guidance to help ensure new personnel understand how safeguarding applies to their duties from the outset.



## 20 Appendix 3 – Glossary of Abbreviations

Abbreviations and Acronyms	Meaning
ADSA	Assistant Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser
ADSO	Assistant Diocesan Safeguarding Officer
AEC	Association of English Cathedrals
BACP	British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy
CAFA	Cathedrals Administration and Finance Association
CCSL	Clergy Current Status Letter
CCTV	Closed-circuit TV
CDM	Clergy Discipline Measure
CJSM	Criminal Justice Secure Mail
CofE	Church of England
COO	Chief Operating Officer
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CPS	Crown Prosecution Service
CSA	Cathedral Safeguarding Advisor
CSL	Cathedral Safeguarding Lead
CSMG	Cathedral Safeguarding Management Group
DBE	Diocesan Board of Education
DBF	Diocesan Board of Finance
DBS	Disclosure and Barring Service
DSA	Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor
DSAP	Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel
DSO	Diocesan Safeguarding Officer
DST	Diocesan Safeguarding Team

GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HR	Human Resources
IICSA	The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse
ISA	Information Sharing Agreement
IT	Information Technology
LADO	Local Authority Designated Officer
LLR	Learning Lessons Reviews
MDR	Ministerial Development Review
MOSOVO	Management of Sexual Offenders and Violent Offenders
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAPAC	National Association for People Abused in Childhood
NPCC	National Police Chiefs' Council
NSCMS	National Safeguarding Case Management System
NST	National Safeguarding Team
PCC	Parochial Church Council
PCR2	Past Cases Review 2
PSO	Parish Safeguarding Officer
PTO	Permission to Officiate
RSL	Regional Safeguarding Lead
SARC	Sexual Assault Referral Centre
SCIE	The Social Care Institute for Excellence
SCMG	Safeguarding Case Management Group
SEO	Search Engine Optimisation
SIR	Serious Incident Report
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SLT	Senior Leadership Team

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SMG	Safeguarding Management Group
SOG	Safeguarding Operational Group

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**Date of Publication:** 04/07/25

**Version:** 1.0

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