

Diocese of Worcester PCR2 Executive Summary

Foreword from the Bishop of Dudley, lead bishop for Safeguarding in the Diocese

I commend this summary of the report of our Independent Reviewing Officer into past safeguarding cases. We valued the opportunity to undertake such a detailed review and ensured that it was carried out by an independent reviewer, in our case a former Police Detective Inspector with significant experience in safeguarding matters and supporting survivors of abuse.

We received responses from all our parishes with no new cases discovered through the process, and we were pleased that the Independent Reviewing Officer wanted to highlight the good practice of our safeguarding team. We never want to be complacent and always want to improve what we do to ensure churches are safe spaces for everyone. We have already implemented all the recommendations in the Reviewer's report that were for the diocese to action, based on an action plan which is monitored regularly by our Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel. We seek to ensure the survivor's voice continues to be heard in all that we do.

Please do read the Executive Summary below from Geoff Taylor-Smith, the Independent Chair of the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel. As a diocese, we remain committed to doing everything possible to ensure the safety and well-being of children, young people and adults.

Introduction

In 2018, an Independent Scrutiny Team recommended that all dioceses undertook a second in-depth review of safeguarding cases following concerns raised about the inadequacy of an initial national Past Cases Review (PCR) conducted across the Church of England in 2007-2009. The purpose of this was to identify both good practice and institutional failings in relation to how allegations of abuse have been handled, and to provide recommendations to the Church of England that would lead to improvements in its response to allegations of abuse and in its overall safeguarding working practices; thereby ensuring a safer environment for all.

The Diocese of Worcester undertook this audit process, known as Past Cases Review 2 (PCR2), from October 2019. Two independent reviewing officers (IROs) were appointed, with a third starting in March 2020. They looked at files from the original review as well as all other cases from 1990 up to the present time where there had been safeguarding concerns about the behaviour of clergy or church officers, against a child or adult within the Diocese. In addition, all available personnel files on living clergy, lay ministers and diocesan employees were reviewed.

The review was completed in November 2020 and was overseen by the independent Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP).

A total number of 1,127 files were examined by the IROs, comprising:

- 248 Safeguarding case files
- 525 Clergy blue files
- 269 Licensed Lay Minister files
- 52 Diocesan and parish lay employee files
- 33 archived particularly complex case files re Church Officers

All parishes were asked to examine their own records and complete a form confirming that all known instances of concern relating to any abusive behaviour by clergy or church officers, had been reported to the DSA. 100% of parishes responded and no new potential safeguarding concerns were identified.

All cases and allegations were examined for gaps or outstanding issues. The diocesan safeguarding team took action to address the issues and reported back to the IRO. The IRO was able to confirm that by the end of the review there were no outstanding issues arising from any of the files examined.

Reflections and recommendations of the Independent Reviewing Officer

- 1) The Lead independent reviewer (IRO) commented on the consistent high standard of communication, record keeping and support from the Diocesan Safeguarding Team to all with whom they work. He also commented on the complexity of the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser (DSA) role as one which can be stressful and demanding and continues to expand and evolve. The IRO raised concerns about the safeguarding team's current resource level and recommended a review of the safeguarding budget and staffing to ensure resilience and compliance with IICSA recommendations
- 2) The IRO reviewed the current way the diocesan Authorised Lay Ministry (ALM) scheme was administered and made a number of recommendations. He recommended that parishes should own, recruit and process applications to become ALMs and the Diocese should return to having an overarching responsibility to receive, retain and quality assure applications electronically.
- 3) The IRO recommended that DSA's should become an important part of the process of clergy moving in and out of the Diocese, rather than relying on potential blemishes being noticed and reported by others. He recommended that DSAs should be requested to check safeguarding files when clergy move as matter of course, liaise with their DSA counterparts in other dioceses and update the safeguarding Bishop where appropriate.
- 4) The IRO made recommendations for the National Safeguarding Team (NST) including the suggestion of a national list of accredited musicians and consideration of a 'PCR2-Plus' to include a review of non-church officer case files. He endorsed the steps already being taken by the NST which includes the creation of formal information sharing agreements with statutory partners and steps to ensure independence in all processes. This, he pointed out, "could indemnify future costs both financially and reputationally but also vitally demonstrate to the victim/survivor the churches commitment to their support and needs".
- 5) The Lead IRO also endorsed the decision as set out in recommendations 1 and 8 of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) report to create regional safeguarding support posts to provide independent and consistent supervision to the DSAs when they become DSOs (Diocesan Safeguarding Officers)

In his final conclusion the IRO wrote:

"The IRO fully acknowledges the hard work, professionalism and commitment of the safeguarding team and associated Diocese of Worcester staff, especially during this challenging period of uncertainty.

It is evident that an independent review was required as some elements of PCR1 not only left the Diocese vulnerable but more importantly, did not demonstrate the absolute importance of victim/survivor focus.

The actions raised are there to prove due diligence, transparency, and where appropriate, auditable information sharing.

PCR2 has identified, actioned, and will have addressed cases where there remained risk, information requiring sharing or where person's ability to safeguard was in doubt.

In the opinion of the IRO, the Diocese is in a very good position, exclusively down to the ability, hard work and dedication of the safeguarding team and diocesan support. The IRO does not make these remarks lightly. Since 2015, a clear change can be seen in recording, communication, knowledge, and the willingness to create independence in the safeguarding responsibility and role.

- *Is the Diocese of Worcester in a good place? In the IRO's opinion - Yes.*
- *Is the Safeguarding Team 'Smart'? Yes, they are.*
- *Can the Safeguarding Team get 'Smarter'? Yes, they can, and there is a natural desire to learn, develop and deliver the best they can, with what is a relatively small team, that in the opinion of the IRO lacks resilience.*

With the assistance of the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisers, the IRO has been able to identify 'Known Case List' files that clearly should have been dealt at the time and in any event identified at PCR1. Such files have been addressed with appropriate actions that have or will be completed. The risk and vulnerability remain but due diligence, pro-activeness and importantly victim/survivor focus actions are recorded and/or shared with other agencies.

Post PCR1 and during the current period (2015 onwards), the safeguarding team has embraced PCR2, welcomed new learning, has increased relationships with other agencies and taken on and used advice readily and constructively."

Implementation of recommendations

Since the completion of PCR2:

- a. Improvements have been made in the safe recruitment of Authorised Lay Ministers and a monitoring system has been implemented.
- b. The Diocesan Safeguarding Team has been increased by a further part-time member of staff and now consists of the equivalent of two full-time Advisers.
- c. The files of all clergy moving in or out of the Diocese are now reviewed by the DSA for any potential safeguarding concerns.
- d. The Diocese has become one of the pilot Pathways to implement the new Regional Model in line with IICSA's recommendations.

The implementation of the review recommendations is overseen by the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel and progress is reviewed regularly.

Survivor Strategy

Survivors of abuse were invited to contribute to the review process bringing new information or insights into how abuse could be better identified and support for victims improved. The review process focussed on the voice of the survivor.

Two victims/ survivors initially agreed to be directly involved, but only one chose to contribute to the review. The survivor spoke openly about his/her experiences. Due to potential safeguarding concerns the matter was passed back to the Police for their assessment and potential reinvestigation.

The survivor was complimentary of the Police and the current Diocesan Safeguarding Team, in whom s/he has confidence. They were less complimentary about the way things were handled previously. The survivor was appreciative of the opportunity to talk to the IRO and contribute to the review process.

Role of the independent Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel

The Independent Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP) appointed a working group to monitor the Past Cases Review process. This working group was responsible for overseeing the work of the IRO and was satisfied with the process. DSAP examined the final PCR2 report and recommended it to the Bishop of Worcester who approved it and forwarded it to the National PCR2 Project Board in January 2021.

Geoff Taylor-Smith
Chair of the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel