



The Arrangements for Parish Safeguarding Audits

Introduction

The Church of England commissioned an independent audit of every diocese during 2016 and 2017, and as part of this initiative, the Diocese of Coventry was audited in December 2016. This was a positive experience for the diocese, and the Diocesan Operational Safeguarding Team (DOST) hopes that parishes will also recognise the benefits of a safeguarding audit.

It is important to emphasise that an audit is not the same as an investigation. The purpose of an audit is to highlight the safeguarding provisions that are working well, and to identify any areas of further development. It is intended to be a positive learning experience.

This paper summarises the arrangements for parish safeguarding audits within the Diocese of Coventry.

Who initiates a parish safeguarding audit?

There are five possible reasons why a parish safeguarding audit might be initiated:

1. **Random selection.** The aim is for every parish to be audited eventually, but this is a huge undertaking that will take some time. Until then, DOST will choose a category of parish (eg large churches, or small rural churches) and a diocesan administrator will randomly select one or more parishes within that category.
2. **At the request of a parish.** The PCC or the Incumbent¹ may want reassurance that their safeguarding procedures are robust, or advice about how they can be improved.
3. **At the request of the Bishop of Coventry.** The bishop has overall responsibility for ensuring robust safeguarding arrangements are in place across the diocese, from time to time the bishop may request a parish safeguarding audit in line with his responsibilities.
4. **At the request of a safeguarding Core Group.** A Core Group, which comprises both diocesan and parish representatives, is convened whenever there is a serious safeguarding issue. This group oversees any investigation, ensures that people receive appropriate pastoral care, and recommends any appropriate actions. One such action might be to request a parish safeguarding audit.
5. **At the request of DOST.** If DOST has any concerns regarding the safeguarding arrangements within a parish, they may seek reassurance by requesting a parish audit.

The reason for initiating a parish safeguarding audit is not made public; however, more than half of all audits will be initiated by random selection.

¹ The word 'Incumbent' in this paper also includes Priest-in-Charge where appropriate.

What does an audit involve?

A parish safeguarding audit has four stages.

Preparation Stage

The preparation stage may take up to three months and comprises:

- **Notification of audit.** The Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser (DSA) notifies the Incumbent and the Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) that they have been selected for an audit. They will also be given the contact details of their Auditor.
- **Agreeing the date of the audit visit.** A mutually convenient date will be agreed by the Incumbent, Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) and the Auditor. This visit must take place within three months of the Incumbent and PSO being notified of the audit.
- **Arranging times of meetings during the audit visit.** This is the responsibility of the Incumbent.
- **Sending pre-visit documents.** The Auditor will ask for a small number of documents to be submitted by the parish at least seven days before the audit visit. This will include the names and responsibilities of those attending the church focus group meeting (see below).

Audit Visit

All elements of the audit visit must be completed on the same day. The Auditor will be available for meetings any time between 9:00 am and 9:00 pm.

The audit visit comprises:

- **Inspection of documents.** The Auditor will give the parish a list of documents that need to be available for inspection during the audit visit.
- **Meeting with the PSO.** A one-to-one meeting between the Auditor and the PSO for one hour.
- **Meeting with the Incumbent.** A one-to-one meeting between the Auditor and the Incumbent for one hour. Ideally, this should take place after the meeting with the PSO.²
- **Meeting with other individuals,** as appropriate.
- **Meeting with a church focus group.** A group meeting between the Auditor and eight lay representatives from the church. If possible, this group should include at least one person from each of the following representatives:
 - ✓ A Churchwarden;
 - ✓ A Reader (if any);
 - ✓ A PCC member who is not a Churchwarden or Reader;
 - ✓ A leader of a church activity for children (if any);
 - ✓ A leader of a church activity for teenagers (if any);
 - ✓ A leader of a church activity for vulnerable adults (if any);
 - ✓ A member of the congregation that does not have any of the above roles.

The PSO and clergy will not attend the focus group.

If it is more convenient for the parish representatives, two smaller meetings may replace the single church focus meeting (eg one during the day and one in the evening).

- **Feedback meeting with the Incumbent and PSO.** This will be the final meeting of the visit.

² During an interregnum, this role will be covered by an ordained minister who is licensed to the benefice, or else by one or more churchwardens.

Audit Reporting

The audit reporting stage comprises the following steps:

1. The Auditor drafts the audit report and sends it to the Incumbent and PSO within two weeks of the audit visit. The audit report includes the following sections:
 - ✓ Factual information about which documents were audited and who the auditor talked to;
 - ✓ The main findings of the audit;
 - ✓ A summary of what is working well;
 - ✓ Recommended areas for further development by the PCC.
2. The Incumbent and PSO notify the Auditor of any factual errors, or any other disagreement about the draft report, within two weeks of receipt.
3. The Auditor issues a second draft within one week of receiving any comments.
4. The Incumbent and PSO respond to the second draft within one week of receipt.
5. The Auditor issues the final report within one week of receiving the second set of comments. The final report is issued to:
 - ✓ The Incumbent;
 - ✓ The PSO;
 - ✓ The Bishop of Coventry;
 - ✓ The DSA;
 - ✓ The Diocesan Secretary;
 - ✓ The Archdeacon Pastor;
 - ✓ The Director of Communications.
6. The Incumbent shares the final report with the PCC.

There is no requirement for the PCC to publish the report of its first Parish Safeguarding Audit. However, final report of any subsequent audits must be published on the parish website within two months of receipt. Alternatively, it can be published on the diocesan website.

Action Plan

The PCC approves an action plan which acknowledges the areas for further development that have been identified within the audit report.

The action plan explains how these areas will be addressed during the next two years.

This action plan is published on the parish (or diocesan) website within three months of receipt of the final report. A progress report is then published every six months until the actions are complete.