

Annual report of the Diocesan Safeguarding Panel to Diocesan Synod

11TH JUNE 2022



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Introduction

Where we are now

The Diocese of Oxford is continually working to make the church a safe place. It has a Safeguarding Panel to oversee and scrutinize its work, which has a chair independent from the Diocese.

The Safeguarding Panel has been developing how it makes its work more transparent and accountable within the Diocese. The Panel is accountable to Synod and Bishop's Council. It considers itself to be accountable to Parishes, particularly to the volunteers who lead safeguarding and to people who have been harmed or feel unsafe within the church

As part of this commitment, we have looked at how we report on our work. We reviewed the annual reports across statutory agencies, charities and guidance for charity trustees. This format reflects our view of best practice in how agencies report their work.

Challenges ahead

We would welcome feedback on the ease of reading and understanding this report. We would welcome ideas for how to report to improve transparency and accountability.

This report summarizes our work so that Synod has an overview. We welcome questions and suggestions for where you would want further detail.

We want to become better at producing evidence about the impact we are making including developing this style of annual reporting.

National context

It is acknowledged that the pandemic has placed further pressures upon family life and people. All the indicators show higher levels of mental distress, domestic violence and harm. Important supports to people, such as the work of churches with parents and families, have not been available.

The national review into the tragic deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson are due to be published in May 2022. There is also an independent review of children's social care.

The independent inquiry into child sexual abuse has concluded its investigations, with its final report reviewing all its work still awaited. There is [ongoing monitoring of the recommendations](#) made to the Church of England.

There is increased awareness of spiritual abuse within the church with publications of learning reviews concerning Emanuel Church, Wimbledon and the Titus Trust.

The work of the church in many places especially in the large rural areas of our Diocese is increasingly with older people. As well as learning from the past, we have to adapt and learn about safeguarding today.

In 2020, the Independent Safeguarding Panel set itself these aims:



LEADERSHIP OF THE IMPORTANT PLACE OF SAFEGUARDING IN PRACTICE AND THROUGH STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT



WORKING TO KEEP SAFEGUARDING WITHIN THE CULTURE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH



PROMOTING ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY THROUGH LEARNING, AUDIT AND INDEPENDENT SCRUTINY



DEVELOPING AN APPROACH TO COPRODUCTION WITH SURVIVORS



IMPROVING COLLABORATION – WITHIN A COMPLEX DIOCESE AND WITH THE STATUTORY SECTOR

Values and Culture In Oxford Diocese

“Just as you did it to the least of these sisters and brothers of mine, you did it to me” Matthew 25:40

Where we are now

Our values as a Diocese – to be compassionate and contemplative and courageous are core to what we do. They derive from the character of Jesus Christ.

Safeguarding is served by sound policy and careful processes but must stem from our conviction that everyone is precious to God, and all must be safe within the Body of Christ.

Key values running through our work - relational and proportionate.

Challenges ahead

We seek culture change around safeguarding at all levels within the church, so that it is never seen as a chore but celebrated as an expression of who we are.

We long for a Church in which all can feel safe and valued; where honesty and integrity abound; where all are committed to transparency and positive challenge as we care for each other. A Church which has moved beyond anxiety and fear about getting it wrong, to one which rejoices in a shared commitment to safeguard the wellbeing of all.

Priorities: making safeguarding integral to our vision and mission

The Diocese has set three strategic priorities for safeguarding work in 2022/3:

1. A strong safeguarding team: professional support; a learning culture; supervision.
2. Working with survivors and respondents: timely and person focused support; adopting survivor led approaches and creating a pool of link people for respondents; building relational forms of practice.
3. Integrated working across the Diocese: putting the needs of parishes at the forefront; improving integration and working relationships.

Safeguarding Structures in the Oxford Diocese

Where we are now

During 2021 there was further evidence of the large workload faced by the team. Further investment was made by the Diocese to improve capacity: each episcopal area now has its own caseworker with the Head of Safeguarding adding a Diocesan strategic perspective.

Induction has paid more attention to developing the contextual knowledge of the team.

The team is managed within Church House, reporting to Poli Shajko Director of HR and Safeguarding.

The safeguarding work of the Diocese is overseen by a Panel, which was reviewed in 2020. We completed a 360 review; revisited the national terms of reference and spent time considering the Panel's future aims. We revised Panel membership so that it is more representative of the wider Diocese than Church House and brings in wider professional expertise. We put all this in place over 2021. The Panel continues to be independently chaired.

Challenges ahead

We will want to see how the new structure establishes itself over time and ensure that capacity for casework and strategic engagement has increased.

The new Panel members are now getting the chance to meet face to face and complete working through how to work successfully as a group.

Continue to create a culture of learning and development within the safeguarding team.

Safeguarding activity

Where we are now

During 2021 we responded to 198 safeguarding concerns.

36 cases involving church officers were open (on-going or opened) during 2021.

29 Safeguarding agreements (on-going or opened) were in place during 2021.

During 2021 approx. 300 PSOs attended area meetings.

Challenges ahead

Migration of data to a new “case management” system to commence summer/autumn 2022.

Trialing drop-in sessions for PSOs during summer 2022.

As our new structure settles in, we want to build upon our links to other agencies.

Past Case Reviews (PCR 2)

Where we are now

Oxford submitted a report of its review into past cases. The National Board has approved our report as having met the requirements of the church

We invested additional resource to have three staff independent of the Diocese complete this work.

The national publication of the work is scheduled for this summer.

We want to establish a clear baseline for the Diocese and the Church about past referrals.

Challenges ahead

PCR2 has confirmed that we have further work to do to strengthen working with survivors.

We have already created an action plan based on the Diocesan findings and will add actions from the national review.

Training activity

Where we are now

- Delivered Training for 4,901 participants, through 96 training modules and online training across the Diocese.
- Supported 20 volunteer safeguarding trainers.
- Run 3 Safer Recruitment and People Management workshops where 126 Parish Safeguarding Officers (PSOs), Incumbents and Churchwardens attended.
- The Panel knows that the safeguarding team has a comprehensive view of people's training requirements.

Challenges ahead

- Managing training expectations at a parish level and finding the right blend of on-line and in person training that supports everyone.

Turning training into impact: what people have said after learning from training

'One of the main things I took away from the course which I hadn't considered before, was the need to provide a congregation with help and support in recovering from a safeguarding issue.'

'I became much more aware of the importance of DBS checks, and indeed since the course I have taken a much more active role in making sure that our church has this up-to-date.'

'I have the confidence to be more dynamic. I really want to encourage an atmosphere of openness in which people can challenge, disagree and ask difficult questions.'

'All of us then must be proactive in providing a safe and loving environment for all those who come through our doors for whatever reason.'

'I feel much more confident to challenge people about their behaviour or attitude and to instigate reports than I did before'

'I have asked to attend the PCC meetings of all 7 churches; to get safeguarding on the agenda and to introduce myself to them.'

'I would also like to make some of the information for survivors more visible in our churches detailing ways in which people can access support.'

Survivor Voice(s)

Where we are now

Oxford was one of the first Independent Panels to have a survivor representative who retired in 2020.

We have been supporting survivors including through the funding of counselling services and the use of Authorised Listeners.

We have learnt from a mistake we made in PCR2 where we did not engage with a survivor in the way they had asked us to. We have acknowledged that, and our learning has led to further contributions from the survivor.

We are in the process of setting up a group with survivors to work together through co-production to strengthen the voice of survivors in our system.

Challenges ahead

During 2022/3 we want to see the Survivor group establish itself, set out its terms of reference and ways of working.

Working in coproduction with survivors will be a distinct change.

We want to make sure that all survivors who wish to have their voices heard feel able to do so within the Oxford Diocese.

We will welcome the ideas and plans of survivors for how they see working with with the Diocesan Safeguarding Panel.

Support to the safeguarding work of Parishes

Where we are now

There is still a way to go towards full take up of the Safeguarding dashboard at parish level (c40% have yet to go live) and we are working to support take up.

As this an important way for understanding the safeguarding in place at a parish level, further resources are being dedicated to a specific action plan supporting parishes to sign up.

Challenges ahead

Increasing understanding within parishes of the benefits of using the dashboard.

Lack of capacity within some parishes to use the dashboard.

Linking with Parish Safeguarding Officers

Where we are now

We appreciate the vital work of PSOs and how they are central to a safe Diocese.

Using technology for meetings between the Diocese and PSOs has worked well during lockdown. We want to continue that support.

A key message from our recent survey was the extent to which PSOs as volunteers felt overburdened – particularly by unrealistic expectations.

Challenges ahead

We will want to find ways of changing the sense of burden on PSOs.

How to tailor our support to PSOs in differing contexts.

Quality and Audit

Where we are now

In 2021 the Panel set up a new approach to Quality and Audit, as a subgroup.

The majority on the group are independent (not Diocese employees).

The group is given access to full anonymized material to look at key themes which have included:

- Safeguarding risk assessments and agreements
- Safeguarding referrals
- Safeguarding planning meeting minutes
- Current safeguarding agreements
- The experience of survivors

The group has seen good practice in all areas and identified areas where improvements could be made in practice and policy.

The meeting also creates a space where feedback is given from the lead Bishop and other senior staff.

Challenges ahead

The assurance systems revolves round transparency and honesty, which requires working in ways which develop trust.

We want to start to track impact, so that we can show what has changed as result of this process.

We would like to be able to show that impact in future reports.

Some of the impact from Quality Assurance Reference Group (QARG)

Some areas of good practice identified

We saw a risk agreement that used “I” statements about the offender’s commitments. We thought this drew out the responsibilities that the offender took to manage risk.

We have seen some good work with other agencies: when reaching safeguarding agreements with people it made real impact when they could see the agencies working together with the church.

We saw good use of the referral form by an incumbent who used it to collate all the information received.

Some areas where policy and practice needs to improve

Our survivor policy document is outdated and needs to be revised – it is now marked up for review on the website.

Referral recording systems were not geared up for people who self refer themselves due to their own past abusive behaviours.

We know that with risk assessments on convicted past offenders, the Church is often the only “agency” involved, so we need to reflect upon this in our support and skill development.

Learning Reviews

Where we are now

In 2020 we published in full two learning lessons reviews. Each was accompanied by one page 'seven-minute briefing' aimed at supporting actions particularly for Parishes.

The Diocesan Secretary led a working group on the action plan and reported back to Panel on the actions completed against every recommendation in these reports.

This year we have introduced a new format for "action learning": 1: related to past abuse where the perpetrator has died ; 2: information sharing in relation to a safeguarding investigation in 2021. The emphasis on these is to work with survivors and others who want to see the learning that has already taken place and who don't need or want a full review .

We have Learning Reviews pending related to matters at Christ Church (led by the National Panel) and on a matter of past abuse at Tylers Green.

Challenges ahead

Although we have completed the actions from each of our learning reviews, some themes remain for us to absorb into our work (responding to spiritual abuse and inclusivity etc.)

The link between a safe church with openness and transparency in systems of Parish governance asked for by the Stowe review needs continual improvement.

We want to see how the work we have done on making reviews accessible and in being accountable for the action plan adds to the value of this work.

Panel membership

Peter Hay – Independent Chair

The Rt Rev Olivia Graham, Bishop of Reading; Lead Bishop on Safeguarding

Anne Lee - Co-opted independent member with safeguarding expertise and Universities and Oxford Archdeaconry representative

Rachel Argent - Co-opted member representing Parish Safeguarding Officers and Berkshire Archdeaconry

Miranda Marsh -Co-opted member representing survivors

The Ven Guy Elsmore – Archdeacon of Buckingham

The Revd Cassa Messervy - Co-opted member representing Ordained Leaders and Buckingham Archdeaconry

Janet Worroll – Co-opted member representing Lay Leaders and Dorchester Archdeaconry

Carol Lister - Co-opted independent member

Mark Humphriss – Diocesan Secretary

Poli Shajko – Director of Human Resources and Safeguarding