

Diocese of Oxford Safeguarding Strategy

A safer church is a more Christ-like church

Safeguarding is rooted in the gospel. It is a Christian imperative to take care of the young, the vulnerable and most in need. As every person is made in the image of God, this begins with valuing all God's people.

The diocesan approach aims to make churches safe for all and aligns to the Church of England's National Safeguarding Standards, alongside using insight from other audit and review recommendations, such as the Oxford and National PCR 2 recommendations, the 2017 diocesan Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) audit and internal learning reviews. There are five strategic objectives;

- 1) Prevention
- 2) Culture, Leadership and Capacity
- 3) Recognising, Assessing and Managing Risk
- 4) Victims and Survivors
- 5) Learning, Supervision and Support

While the current strategy is anticipated to cover a three-year period from 2024 to 2026, there is an implementation plan for a shorter period, the first one focusing on 2024/2025. The five strategic objectives have been split out into key action points that we believe are achievable over the coming twelve to eighteen months. These follow the indicators of "what good looks like" articulated in the national Quality Assurance Framework. This provides us with a consistent structure for classifying, prioritising and evaluating our safeguarding activities.

Key assumptions in developing our strategy

Wider organisational Safeguarding activity

A key assumption within the strategy is that the staffing and delivery model of diocesan safeguarding will remain stable over the current operating period (2024/2025.) However, the strategy has been developed to be flexible, dynamic, and responsive to new information and external developments.

In the current operating period, we expect to see the results/impact of a number of significant safeguarding initiatives, driven by wider Church of England activity:

- The Future of Church Safeguarding review: in July 2023, the Archbishops commissioned Professor Alexis Jay to develop proposals for a fully independent structure for safeguarding scrutiny in the Church of England. Professor Jay is anticipated to publish her report in February 2024.
- Independent Safeguarding Audit: in August 2023, INEQE Safeguarding Group was appointed by the Archbishops' Council to carry out a round of independent external audits of Church of England dioceses and cathedrals. The independent audit programme will run from 2023-2028, with the Diocese of Oxford due to be audited in June 2024.

- Christ Church Review: a review group has been appointed to oversee an independent review process of the handling of alleged safeguarding issues regarding the former Dean of Christ Church, Oxford. The review has been commissioned by the Archbishops' Council and the Diocese of Oxford, with the report expected to be published in 2024.

The diocesan safeguarding strategy will be reviewed and updated as required, in response to these initiatives and their findings. Where necessary, operational priorities will be re-established. This may occur outside the normal strategic review cycle (usually annually) and will require continuing consultation with Diocese of Oxford Safeguarding Panel members and other stakeholders.

One plan, many stakeholders

This strategic plan has been developed by the Head of Safeguarding, having engaged with our main stakeholders, including survivors and Parish Safeguarding Officers (PSOs). Realising our strategy will depend on the ongoing commitment and involvement of parishes, senior leaders and all staff and volunteers across the diocese.

Shaping good practice

In setting out our strategic ambitions, it is important to recognise that there are (a) behavioural/cultural and (b) process/practice changes that must be realised in order to achieve our goals. Our safeguarding strategy not only sets out to implement the necessary activity from the safeguarding team, but also covers the necessary process, behaviour and cultural changes required to ensure that safeguarding practice develops in cohesive, sustainable and effective way across the diocese. This type of cultural change will take time to develop. Therefore, we are seeking to build a community of diocesan practice, underpinned by the support, processes and expertise of our safeguarding team.

Diocese of Oxford Strategic Safeguarding Objectives

Objective 1	Culture, Leadership, and Capacity: High quality safeguarding practices and outcomes are achieved across the diocese through safe and healthy cultures, effective leadership, sufficient resourcing and robust scrutiny.
Objective 2	Prevention: The Diocese effectively enables preventative safeguarding alongside reacting to safeguarding situations.
Objective 3	Recognising, Assessing and Managing Risk: Risk assessments, safeguarding agreements and associated processes are of a high quality and are underpinned by effective partnership working.
Objective 4	Victims and Survivors: Victims and survivors experience a positive and timely response to disclosures and their subsequent support needs are met.
Objective 5	Learning, Supervision and Support: All those engaged in safeguarding receive appropriate learning, professional development, support and supervision to respond to safeguarding situations, victims and survivors, and respondents effectively.

Objective 1 Culture, Leadership, and Capacity

High quality safeguarding practices and outcomes are achieved across the diocese through safe and healthy cultures, effective leadership, sufficient resourcing and robust scrutiny.¹

1.1 Culture

- Stronger links between the Safeguarding team and other teams, i.e. Area teams and Mission and Ministry.
- Safeguarding element present in Ministerial Development Reviews (MDRs).
- Awareness raising at a parish level of the need for culture change where safeguarding is seen as everyone's responsibility.

1.2 Leadership

- Safeguarding Team has a high level of visibility and priority at a senior level across the diocese.
- Senior leaders in the diocese demonstrate commitment to and prioritise safeguarding.

1.3 Capacity

- Annual review of safeguarding resources by Diocese of Oxford Safeguarding Panel

Indicators of success

- Evidence of inter-departmental working.
- Evidence that safeguarding is able to influence at a senior level within the diocese, such as regular inclusion of safeguarding as agenda item in Bishop's Staff Meetings and senior leaders prioritising safeguarding.

¹ Links to: NATIONAL STANDARD 2

- Better understanding at a parish level of positive safeguarding cultures.

Objective 2 Prevention

The Diocese effectively enables preventative safeguarding alongside reacting to safeguarding situations.²

2.1 Recruitment and People Management

- Continue to encourage and support parishes to use the Safeguarding Dashboard/Hub and continue to promote safer recruitment.

2.2 Messaging

- Raise the profile of PSOs and safeguarding within parishes.

2.3 Activities

- Make sure all activities are safely carried out.
- PSOs are supported and feel valued within their role.
- Effective preventive work in parishes

Indicators of success

- Preventative safeguarding activity is adequately resourced.
- Survey data from PSOs demonstrates they are feeling supported.
- Parishes have effective safeguarding measures in place.
- Higher take up of Safeguarding Hub and Dashboard and PSOs in post in more areas.

Objective 3 Recognising, Assessing and Managing Risk

Risk assessments, safeguarding agreements and associated processes are of a high quality and are underpinned by effective partnership working.³

3.1 Recognising Risk

- Effective triage process in place with Human Resources and Safeguarding teams at point of referral.
- Data systems to be synchronised.

3.2 GDPR

- Parishes understand compliance with data protection and GDPR

3.3 Risk Assessments

- Best practice risk assessment and safeguarding processes.

² Links to: NATIONAL STANDARD 1

National PCR 2 recommendation 17: Dioceses to ensure that parish safeguarding officers (PSOs) are provided with the correct training and support to enable them to perform their role effectively
National PRCR 2 recommendation 24: The Diocese to continue to build links with TEIs and religious communities

³ Links to: NATIONAL STANDARD 3

3.4 Safeguarding Agreements

- Safeguarding agreements are in place which effectively manage risk and are regularly reviewed.
- Parishes receive support to actively manage the risk of Safeguarding offenders who are classed medium or high risk

3.5 Partnership Working

- Strong links with statutory authorities
- Strong links with TEIs and Religious Communities

Indicators of success

- Feedback from respondents at the end of a core group process.
- Improved quality of risk assessments and safeguarding agreements.

Objective 4 Victims and Survivors

Victims and survivors experience a positive and timely response to disclosures and their subsequent support needs are met.⁴

4.1 Engagement

- Church bodies proactively engage and establish good working partnerships with victims and survivors in the delivery of safeguarding activities and developments.

4.2 Disclosure

- Support parishes to create environments more conducive to reporting harm.

4.3 Support

- Victims and survivors are able to work with the church to decide what support they need.

Indicators of success

- Feedback from victims/survivors

Objective 5 Learning, Supervision and Support

All those engaged in safeguarding engage with appropriate learning, professional development, support and supervision to respond to safeguarding situations, victims and survivors, and respondents effectively.⁵

5.1 Safeguarding Learning

- Safeguarding training is undertaken by all church officers, ordained and lay.

⁴ Links to: NATIONAL STANDARD 4

⁵ Links to: NATIONAL STANDARD 5

5.2 Supervision and Support of Clergy

- Clergy are provided with the type and quantity of support that will meet their emotional and psychological needs arising from the traumatic impact of their work.
- Ordinands are prepared for the safeguarding challenges they subsequently experience in parishes.
- Ministerial Development Reviews take place regularly and explore safeguarding and identify areas for growth and development.

5.3 Supervision and Support of Safeguarding Teams

- Staff in the safeguarding team receive highly effective supervision and development

Indicators of success

- Safeguarding team understand the wider safeguarding context in the Church
- Safeguarding team have professional development plans in place.
- Safeguarding team feels supported and valued for the work that they do.
- All clergy undertake regular safeguarding training.
- Safeguarding element is present in Ministerial Development Reviews (MDRs).
- The current safeguarding element of Clergy Ministerial Development (IME2) is further developed to include building positive safeguarding cultures in churches.