

Archdiocese of Westminster
Safeguarding Committee of the Trustees
Internal Audit Programme

Background and Context

This report is prepared by the Audit and Enhancement subgroup of the Safeguarding Committee for both the Committee and the Trustees. This report focuses on Domain 1 “The Prevention of harm and promotion of wellbeing” and covers the year 2022. It is one of a series of internal audit reports designed to inform the Trustees and its Safeguarding Committee with objective information about the practice of safeguarding in the diocese and those charged with this work.

Topic of this Report

This domain is concerned with the culture and practice of safeguarding in the parishes of the Archdiocese. The parishes are the key communities that make up the catholic community – priests and people working together to worship God, celebrate the sacraments and create a Christian community. The Catholic Church is committed to the principle that *“caring for others is at the heart of the Church’s responsibility to safeguard all the people she encounters in the exercise of her mission, particularly those who are most at risk of abuse or exploitation of any form”*¹

This area of audit is designed to assess the level of good safeguarding practice in parish communities.

Audit Method

The original plan envisaged that a 10% sample of the parishes of the Archdiocese would be audited, a total of Twenty-one parishes. However, because of staff absences in the safeguarding team only eleven parishes were visited and this reduction of the target sample (5% of the 215 parishes in the archdiocese) was approved by the Safeguarding Committee.

Each of the randomly selected parishes was visited by a member of the safeguarding committee with a member of the safeguarding team. Prior to the visit the PP and PSR had completed a short questionnaire which formed the basis of the discussion. (see appendix). After the visit a short report was drafted by the Committee member and agreed with the PP and PSR.

These parish visits were structured around five key topics that had been identified as indicators of the presence of a culture of safeguarding. These were:

1. DBS & Safer recruitment
2. Training
3. Celebrets
4. Risk Assessments
5. Communicating Safeguarding

The style of the meeting was designed to be engaging, consultative and developmental rather than inquisitorial. It was intended to be as much an opportunity to advise and to teach as it was to audit and analyse.

Summary of Findings

This paragraph summarises the findings of each of the eleven parish visits and attempts to draw some conclusions as to the state of safeguarding practice in the Archdiocese.

Each of the individual parish reports commented that the audit visit was welcomed by the priests and parish safeguarding representatives and in many cases the opportunity was taken to discuss safeguarding principles and practice beyond that of the audit. Pastoral teams were keen to share local issues particularly in relation to recovery of parish activities after the Covid lockdown but all reported mass attendances still lower than before the pandemic. Sometimes the discussions were noted as being “robust with some scepticism” but all parishes “demonstrated clear commitment to safeguarding practices” and the auditors noted “concrete examples of the integration of safeguarding practices into parish activities and parish life”. “The importance of safeguarding was clearly understood and recognised” and “there was a clear grasp of the issues and principles” and they were all aware of their responsibilities vis a vis safeguarding in their parish communities. The auditors evidenced examples of good practice as demonstrating that reassuring words were backed up by practices such as good risk assessments, good examples of documentation, posters and ‘safeguarding corners in churches with up to date information’. In most parishes that were visited the PSR was clearly regarded by the priests as an invaluable colleague and parish officer whose role was seen as vital to the life of a modern parish.

However, two parish priests reported disquiet at the delays in DBS clearances and also concerns that “allegations that were demonstrated as false, undermined the trust in the safeguarding service”. One parish also reflected that “while child protection issues were understood, vulnerable adult work needed more input”.

DBS & Safer Recruitment

The figures for parishioners and priests who required DBS clearances varied considerably from parish to parish. Of the eleven parishes audited, one reported 48 DBS clearances with 12 at the lower end. Most parishes were up-to-date with their 3 yearly updates but others required 12, 5, 4 and 3 updates. The audit visits also highlighted differences in records between Vaughan House and parishes, not all being simple delays in information flows. The ST visits certainly assist in ensuring accurate records being maintained between the centre and parishes.

While the requirements and restrictions on who requires DBS clearances are clearly stated in CSSA and diocesan guidance, there were some examples where priests/PSRs were not clear about the rules and in two visits, discussions helped to clarify the obligations and rules. Many priests praised their PSRs for their technical knowledge of this area and their reliance on the safeguarding team for guidance. “My PSR has a firm grip on the admin and rules about DBS”, But another had reported that their previous PSR “had struggled with DBS administration”. No priests or PSR reported any failure to cooperate or serious resistance to the requirement for a DBS from any parishioner, with one priest commenting that “resistance or reluctance to DBS clearance would indicate their unsuitability for the role”. Two of the eleven parishes reported lengthy delays in getting clearances processed, in

particular they were surprised at the time required for rechecks when all the information is already recorded. There was also considerable irritation expressed at the lack of portability of DBSs between organisations such as where a catechist who is a teacher cannot use their teaching DBS for parish needs.

Safer recruitment routines had a much wider variance in practice across the eleven parishes, with one reporting “we adhere to CSSA practice of safer recruitment for all our staff” but most explaining that they thought that absolute adherence to best practice (Job descriptions, adverts, interviews, ID checks etc.) was really “only required for employed staff rather than volunteers”. “We are aware of safer recruitment standards but use a more flexible approach for volunteers such as catechists as these are parishioners who we know well – though we always get them DBS cleared”. All were aware of safer recruitment practice “we were taught it in our PSR training” ...” but why would we advertise when we know we have to ask people and why would we require ID documents when we know these people so well?” Though one parish acknowledged that “even though we think it unnecessary we are probably going to have to adopt these higher standards”

Training

This small audit of safeguarding practice showed the impact of Covid restrictions as many priests reported not participating in recent face to face training, either because of the suspension of the training or testing positive when booked on a course. The Archdiocesan training records will give a more accurate record of priests’ training but these visits reported a generally supportive and positive attitude to safeguarding training. However, one parish priest remarked that “his safeguarding training as a school governor by the Local Education Authority was delivered with enthusiasm and vigor and if diocesan training could do the same, then more clergy might engage more fully with these issues”. One religious order reported that they were not sure of the training record of their community but felt that they need to update their safeguarding training. They were reminded of the need to complete this promptly and also that the Safeguarding Team would be able to confirm the training status of each priest. Another priest “felt strongly that clergy needed training in the reality of the impact that abuse has on survivors”

All the parish priests and PSRs reported being up to date with the core Educare training modules, with one priest reporting having completed ten modules, which is well beyond the minimum required.

Celebrets

The issue of checking celebrets of visiting clergy was an uncontentious element of these visits with all clergy assuring the auditors that they knew of the rules requiring them to check these documents and that they all followed these requirements. Two priests explained that they tempered these demands if they personally knew the priests from the Archdiocese or were from their own religious order.

Risk and Risk Assessments

This topic demonstrated a wide range of practice, from those parishes who said that they had no activities that required risk assessments to those parishes where the priests and PSRs were patently well informed and used the standardized pro forma risk assessments provided on the CSSA website.

Almost all PSRs knew of the existence of the CSSA templates but not all priests. At one audit visit this topic generated a useful discussion which led to the parish team improving their understanding of what activities required risk assessing and the value of the proforma and how best to use it to make a good risk assessment. At another parish the “walkabout” at the end of the session provided an opportunity to give specific and valued advice about visibility, access and signage. At one parish, a request for a “standard risk assessment template” demonstrated their lack of knowledge of these resources.

We found one example where risk assessments had not been carried out because a parish activity was well established over many years. A lively discussion helped to move this team on to see that regular risk reviews are as useful as risk assessments for new activities.

Communicating Safeguarding

Each parish visited acknowledged the need for good communication about safeguarding and ensuring that parishioners and others had access to information and to the right people when they needed it. This was well demonstrated by every parish visited having a safeguarding poster in the porch, some also in other places such as parish centres and some parishes had safeguarding corners or dedicated safeguarding notice boards with leaflets and posters. There was also evidence in the dialogue and discussion between the PP and the PSR that they discussed safeguarding matters, some were obviously much more engaged than others, meeting regularly and approaching safeguarding systematically.

There was also a range of approaches to the use of the parish webpages to communicate safeguarding information and topics, with some being more updated and refreshed than others. We recommended the use of the diocesan micro-site as this would ensure good standards and accuracy of information.

Some parishes gave their PSRs a high profile in the parish by enabling them to address the community at Sunday mass and one parish ensured that the PSR was an ex-officio member of the parish council. We would strongly recommend that the bishops/deans consider adopting this practice across the Archdiocese.

Conclusions

This is the first internal audit report to review the culture of safeguarding in parishes for the Safeguarding Committee and Trustees of the Archdiocese. Because of staff shortages the original target audit sample was reduced from 10% to 5% of the parishes. Future audits will provide an extension of the sample group and so enhance the reliability of the data.

All of the visits were characterized by a welcoming approach from both priests and PSRs and in all cases the dialogue was respectful and engaging and gave the parish teams an opportunity to express frustration at some of the delays in processing DBS clearances and also to ask for advice on some safeguarding practices.

All the parishes visited demonstrated at the very least a working knowledge of safeguarding and no major issues were identified. The majority of parish priests and PSRs have a confident and proactive approach to safeguarding with observable good, respectful working relationships and evidence of good rapport and collaboration. In all the parishes safeguarding is taken seriously and integrated into the life of the parish, though at different levels of development and sophistication.

The best parishes were well informed and up to date. These parishes considered safeguarding as an integral part to their work and ministry and this was reflected in their conversations and in the way the parish was organized. Reassuringly every member of every parish team was clear who they

could and should turn to for safeguarding advice. As one might expect, experienced PSRs demonstrated knowledge and competence in both safeguarding principles and administration – particularly with regard to DBS checks.

From the evidence of these visits, we feel that we can be confident that these parishes have established a culture of safeguarding among the parish teams and workers which in the best parishes has been integrated into the day-to-day administration and mission of the parish. In those where it has not yet become fully integrated, they know what their responsibilities are and competence was demonstrated.

Training is an obvious area that is not up to date but we assume that this is the result of the Covid restrictions of the past and would anticipate this being resolved as the safeguarding team deliver the planned face to face training.

Three out of the eleven parish priests each commented on the impact of two recent cases where the accusations were unfounded and they were concerned that these errors would “undermine the clergy’s faith in the safeguarding service and that this ground needed to be made up”. Likewise, both priests and PSRs commented that delays in processing DBS checks are problematic and in one parish they said this “put off people volunteering”. Newer PSRs also showed less certainty about the admin detail of DBS processes.

Overall, we were impressed by the hard work and commitment of priests, PSRs and other parish workers to the integration of safeguarding into the life of the church and their acceptance of the requirements laid down by the Archdiocese. If future audits of parishes demonstrate a similar record of these standards, then the Committee and Trustees can be confident of a culture of safeguarding being rooted into the Archdiocese at parish level.

Kevin Barry

Convenor of Audit and Enhancement Group

November 2022

References

1. Caring Safely for Others Catholic Bishops Conference for England and Wales 2020

Appendices (3):

1. List of Parishes visited

NUMBER	PARISH	VISITED BY	DATE of PARISH VISIT	DATE REPORT FINALISED & FILED
1	ISLEWORTH	Arianna & Kevin Barry	23/9/2021	10/3/2022
2	NOTTING HILL	Kevin Barry	25/10/2021	10/3/2022
3	CHELSEA 2	Maria & Barbara Beese	4/11/2021	March 2022
4	SWISS COTTAGE	Maria & Barbara Beese	8/11/2021	March 2022
5	ORATORY	Arianna & Baroness Nuala O'Loan	29/3/2022	May 2022
6	ROYSTON	Maria & Fr Stephen Coker	2/9/22	Sept 2022
8	HIGHBURY	Arianna & AJ	30/3/2022	April 2022
9	CHIPPERFIELD & ABBOTS LANGLEY	Arianna & Bernadette Herbert	19/4/2022	April 2022
11	ELY PLACE	Arianna & Baroness Nuala O'Loan	15/6/2022	June 2022
12	PARSONS GREEN	Maria & Barbara Beese	28/03/2022	18/05/2022
13	SPANISH PLACE	Arianna & Kevin Barry	16/06/2022	26/6/2022

2. Survey completed by parishes prior to visit

	QUESTIONS	Yes/No & NUMBERS	SPACE FOR ANY COMMENTS YOU MAY WISH TO MAKE
1	How many of your parish volunteers require a DBS ? <i>(those who are engaged in regulated activities)</i>		
2	How many of the above have DBS checks which are over 3 years old ?		
3	How many of your parish volunteers are involved in parish work with children or adults at risk?		
4	Do you have any of the above who refuse to cooperate with DBS clearance ? How many ?		
5	The numbers of parishioners involved in parish work with children or adults at risk who have been appointed in line with the CSAS safer recruitment policy and procedures: <i>The CSAS procedure i.e.:</i> <i>Written role descriptions; Personal details recorded;</i> <i>References taken up; DBS checks where required under</i> <i>eligibility criteria; ID check where required; Formal interview;</i> <i>self-disclosure completed; signed acceptance of safeguarding</i> <i>policies & practice.</i>		
6	Have the priest(s) undergone <i>face-to-face</i> safeguarding training in the past 2 years?		
7	Please record here the E-learning Edu care modules completed by the PSR and priest(s)		
8	Has the PSR undergone <i>face-to-face</i> safeguarding training in the past 2 years ?		
9	Has your parish organised or participated in any other safeguarding training?		
10	Do you always ensure that a visiting priest or religious who is engaged in any public ministry have either a celebret or testimonial of suitability?		
11	How many written risk assessments for activities would you say the parish completes each year ?		
12	Do you have your own risk assessment forms or do you use the CSAS national template ?		
13	If you use your own risk assessment forms, are they in line with national CSAS guidance ? Please attach copies.		
14	Do you have an up-to-date safeguarding poster on display in the church(es) with the correct information as to who to contact?		
15	If you have a parish specific safeguarding page on the parish website, is it up to date ?		
16	What are your sources/where do you go to access information and documents relating to all aspects of safeguarding ?	-	
17	How often do you as PP and PSR access your RCDOW email accounts ? (The safeguarding team send updates on safeguarding matters to these for you)	PP: PSR:	

Structure of dialogue on parish visits:

Many thanks for finding the time for this meeting on safeguarding issues.

(Safeguarding Committee and Team members introduce themselves and ask PP and PSR to say a little about their parish and themselves)

Outline why we are having this meeting (sampling parishes, Committee wants to know the reality on the ground and meeting people is important etc) This is not an inspection and your parish was not picked because of any known problems but one of 20 chosen for this review.

We basically want to get a sense of how safeguarding is working in the parishes so we have structured the meeting so that we can be consistent with all the parishes and priests and PSRs and to ensure that we make the best use of your valuable time. So we are following up some of the questions from the questionnaire and thank you for compiling it and sending it to us.

Any questions so far ?

Can you give us a pen picture of your parish please – its population, mass attendance, organisations, number of children and adults at risk, activities communities make up and so on.

We would now like to run through the questionnaire that you completed to clarify any issues and also to discuss any matters from the “comments column”

PARISH
How many of your parish volunteers require a DBS ? <i>(those who are engaged in regulated activities)</i>
How many of the above have DBS checks which are over 3 years old ?
How many of your parish volunteers are involved in parish work with children or adults at risk?
Do you have any of the above who refuse to cooperate with DBS clearance ? or are difficult with the process? How many ?
The numbers of parishioners involved in parish work with children or adults at risk who have been appointed in line with the CSAS safer recruitment policy and procedures: <i>The CSAS procedure i.e.:</i> <i>Written role descriptions; Personal details recorded; References taken up; DBS checks where required under eligibility criteria; ID check where required; Formal interview; self-disclosure completed; signed acceptance of safeguarding policies & practice.</i>
Have the priest(s) undergone <i>face-to-face</i> safeguarding training in the past 2 years?
Please record here the E-learning Edu care modules completed by the PSR and priest(s)
Has the PSR undergone <i>face-to-face</i> safeguarding training in the past 2 years ?
Has your parish organised or participated in any other safeguarding training?
Do you always ensure that a visiting priest or religious who is engaged in any public ministry have either a celebret or testimonial of suitability?
How many written risk assessments for activities would you say the parish completes each year ?
Do you have your own risk assessment forms or do you use the CSAS national template ?

If you use your own risk assessment forms, are they in line with national CSAS guidance ? Please attach copies.

Do you have an up-to-date safeguarding poster on display in the church(es) with the correct information as to who to contact?

If you have a parish specific safeguarding page on the parish website, is it up to date ?

What are your sources/where do you go to access information and documents relating to all aspects of safeguarding ?

How often do you as PP and PSR access your RCDOW email accounts ? (The safeguarding team send updates on safeguarding matters to these for you)

Thank you.

- **What would you say is working well in Safeguarding in your parish ?**
- **What are you most concerned/worried about ?**
- **How would you say that we in the Safeguarding Team/Committee can help ?**
- **Can you give us some examples of how parish activities and events are organised in a way that prevent opportunities for abuse to occur**
- **How widespread would you say is the understanding in your parish about what is expected of everyone if they become concerned about the welfare of a child or adult at risk?**
- **Would people know how to respond and who to contact?**

Thank You.

Before we go we would like to look at your website and parish notice board and church to view the safeguarding information available there.

Thank you for your cooperation and help in this discussion. Is there anything else that you would like to mention while we are here ?

We will draft a short report for the Safeguarding Committee. When we have a first draft we will send you a copy for you to correct any factual errors or misrepresentations, we like to get these finished as quickly as possible after our visit so when you get it please can you respond with any comments within a fortnight. If we don't hear back from you we will assume that it is an agreed paper.

Thanks for your time