Trustee's Safeguarding Committee

# Annual Safeguarding Report 2024

Diocese of Westminster



# Introduction

This third Annual Report of the Diocese of Westminster's Trustee's Safeguarding Committee covers the period from January - December 2024.

# Safeguarding

Safeguarding is a fundamental part of the mission of the Diocese of Westminster. We are all called to fulfil the Gospel imperative to protect those who are vulnerable and to uphold the dignity of every human being. This mission is supported by the Diocese's Safeguarding Service, whose professional staff are responsible for delivering safeguarding functions across the Diocese.

The Diocese seeks to ensure that all those who come into contact with the Safeguarding Service experience a service which is caring, accountable, fair, impartial, and professional. The Trustee's Safeguarding Committee is responsible for overseeing the effectiveness of the Safeguarding Service, ensuring that it:

1. takes the lead in the promotion of the culture of safeguarding, working across the Diocese and with the Trust Board;
2. ensures open and transparent processes for the receipt and handling of concerns, information and allegations of abuse within the Diocese;
3. co-ordinates, trains, promotes and supports clergy, curia staff, parish employees and volunteers who work within the Diocese to safeguard and protect from harm, or the risk of harm, those who come into contact with the Diocese;
4. ensures that those who report allegations of abuse or raise safeguarding concerns and those who are the subject of such concerns or allegations are provided with and / or signposted to appropriate guidance and support; and
5. identifies and disseminates safeguarding learning and continuous improvement opportunities and good practice.

Safeguarding is, and must be, at the heart of all everyone does every day – we do this by ensuring a culture and practice of safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults in all our activities and responding with respect and compassion to those who report having suffered harm.

# The work of the Committee

The work of the Trustee's Safeguarding Committee is extensive and includes:

1. ensuring that there is zero tolerance of the abuse of children and vulnerable adults in the Diocese;
2. ensuring that allegations, complaints, and concerns about abuse of children and vulnerable adults can be reported and are responded to by the Safeguarding Service in a compassionate, supportive, timely and effective manner;
3. ensuring that those against whom allegations are made (respondents) are provided with as much information as possible and are treated by the Safeguarding Service in a respectful and compassionate and supportive way;
4. providing a case advisory function supporting the Head of Safeguarding's[1] management of cases through advice, scrutiny, support and quality assurance of risk assessment, case management and safeguarding plans, ensuring that the learning from the work of the Safeguarding Service always improves practice;
5. ensuring the support of victims and survivors within the financial limits set by the Trust Board and seeking feedback on their experience with the Safeguarding Service to inform future practice; and
6. ensuring that appropriate professional advice is accessible from organisations such as the police, probation service, local authority and healthcare providers, either through Committee members themselves, or through contact with relevant representatives of these organisations.

It also:

7. commissions and advises on the development of policy and procedures, informed by the perspective of complainants, victims and survivors and respondents as appropriate, in compliance with national policies;
8. reports quarterly on its work to the Westminster Diocese Trust Board;
9. contributes to the development of a culture of safeguarding across the Diocese;
10. ensures that the Safeguarding Service has an adequate budget; and

[1] The former Coordinator of Safeguarding post was amended on the appointment of a new head of Safeguarding in September 2024.

11. produces this annual public safeguarding report.

**The Committee's Terms of Reference** are to be found at:

Microsoft Word - Safeguarding Committee_TOR_14 March 2025_FINAL

**The Safeguarding Service Budget for 2024 was £440,000**



## The Diocesan Landscape

The safeguarding service provided by the Diocese is extensive and provides for safeguarding in the context of a huge number of people, parishes, parish and other venues. The scale and breadth of this context is illustrated by the figures that follow:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Number of Catholics:** | **430,000 (approx)** |
| **Number of parishes:** | **207** |
| **Number of Diocesan Priests:** | **295** |
| **Number of Permanent Deacons:** | **43** |
| **Number of ethnic chaplains:** | **54** |
| **People who attended Mass.** | **111,130** |

- ★ Many religious orders work in the Diocese. 214 priests of religious orders worked or were based in Westminster Diocese. Some, such as the Mill Hill Missionaries and the Jesuits, run parishes.
- ★ Chaplains work among our ethnic communities and in schools, hospitals, prisons and young offenders' centres.
- ★ Caritas Westminster[2] offers many services and offers expertise, network links and project management support to help our parishes and schools start or grow charitable initiatives that address the needs of their local communities. It serves individuals with particular needs or those who find themselves in circumstances where they need some support.
- ★ 50,755 people were supported by 500 social action projects run by diocesan parishes and schools.
- ★ 4,500 individuals attended the Westminster Youth Ministry's Retreat Centre.
- ★ 30 women escaping human trafficking, sexual exploitation and slavery were accommodated safely and supported at Caritas Bakhita House, in addition to the 186 guests who were supported in that venue over the years. 3 babies were born to women staying in Bakhita House.
- ★ 128 therapists and counselling professionals were trained by Caritas Safe in Faith;
- ★ 50 businesses were supported by Seeds Hub - The Caritas Community Development team;
- ★ 11,000+ people were supported by parish and school food projects;
- ★ 2,965 miles were travelled by the Caritas Deaf Service which provides support for deaf, hard of hearing and deafblind people to participate in their parishes and to give of their talents;
- ★ 204 students were enrolled at Caritas St Joseph's which works with individuals with intellectual disabilities to enable them to participate fully in their communities and in church life;

[2] See all the work of Caritas during 2024 in the Annual Report Annual Review 2024 - Caritas Westminster

- ★ 21,248 estimated volunteers support the work of our Parishes.

***There are also:***

- ♦ pilgrimages, especially the annual Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes; and
- ♦ the work of organisations like the St Vincent de Paul Society and so many other voluntary groups whose members seek to live the Gospel message through their lives and work.

The Safeguarding Service works very hard to support all those who minister, work and volunteer in our Parishes and all the associated activities, so that the culture of safeguarding pervades all these activities.

## The Regulation of and Responsibility for Safeguarding

In all its work the Diocese, must comply with English law and its Trust Deed, and is regulated as a registered charity by the Charity Commission and the Information Commissioner. The Diocese must also comply with the Canon Law of the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (CSSA) has created national safeguarding standards and reviews and monitors the Diocese's compliance with those standards.

The Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS) offers safeguarding services to members of religious orders. RLSS is subject to audit by the CSSA.

## The Trustee's Safeguarding Committee

The Committee is a Sub-Committee of the Diocesan Trust Board of Directors. It supports, assists and advises the Directors of the Diocesan Trust Board (Trustees) in all safeguarding matters.

The Committee is chaired by a Trustee and reports quarterly to the Board. Trustees can respond to reports and direct the Committee to provide additional information, explanations or guidance and take any necessary action.

Committee Members can serve for a maximum of 2 terms of three years each. There have been 6 meeting of the Committee in 2024. There is generally a high level of attendance by Committee members at meetings.

New members of the Committee were recruited using an open and extensive appointment process during the year, and all received formal induction, and were assigned existing Committee members as mentors to assist them during their early days as Committee members.

From January 2024, the Deputy Safeguarding Coordinator Monawara Bakht acted up as Safeguarding Coordinator, following the sudden departure of the then Safeguarding Coordinator in November 2023. The Committee is grateful to her for all her work. A new Head of Safeguarding, Catherine Edginton, was appointed in September 2024. Notes of the meetings of the Committee can be found on the diocesan website at Trustee's safeguarding committee – Diocese of Westminster

## *The membership of the Trustee's Safeguarding Committee 2024*

- Baroness Nuala O'Loan (Trustee and Chair)
- Mr Kevin Barry (to July 2024)
- Ms Barbara Bease (to February 2024)
- Fr Stephen Coker,
- Bishop Jim Currie (Trustee; From July 2024)
- Ms Mary Coller,
- Mrs Bernadette Herbert (Vice-Chair)
- Deacon Paul Hewitt (from July 2024)
- Dr Ed Morgan,
- Ms Nicola O'Brien (from July 2024)
- Mgr. Seamus O'Boyle (to July 2024)
- Mrs Rachel O'Driscoll
- Mr Andrzej Wdowiak
- Ms Victoria Wilson
- Ms Susie Worthington (from July 2024)

Members have a variety of experience including Law, Regulatory Matters, Midwifery/Nursing, Policing, Probation, Social Work and Youth Work.

## Resignations

Two very long-serving members of the former Safeguarding Commission, who were appointed to the Committee, Barbara Beese and Kevin Barry, resigned from the Committee during the year. Mgr. Seamus O'Boyle, the Episcopal Vicar, also resigned from the Committee and from the Trust Board in July after many years of service as a Trustee and to safeguarding. They all made significant and lengthy contributions to the Committee for which they are thanked.

## The Committee's Policing Advisor

The Committee was very pleased when Commander Kevin Southworth of the Metropolitan Police Service agreed to act as an advisor to the Committee, attending meetings and assisting the Safeguarding Service where necessary.

## The Sub-Committees of the Trustee's Safeguarding Committee

The Committee revised its Sub-Committee structure in July 2024 and now has four Sub-Committees whose Chairs were appointed by Cardinal Nichols: the Casework and Case Closure Sub- Committee, chaired by Deacon Paul Hewitt, former Director of Children's and Adult Services, currently a registered social worker; the Quality Enhancement and Assurance Sub-Committee, chaired by Rachel O'Driscoll, who has over 30 years' experience in the legal services sector, including on regulatory and standards issues and was lay Vice Chair of the National Catholic Safeguarding Commission; the Practice Development and Training Subcommittee chaired by Andrzej Wdowiak, Director of Youth Ministry in the Diocese, who has committed his working life to charities in different countries and in different fields, including work with asylum seekers and refugees, homeless people, vulnerable adults, young offenders and people suffering from drug and alcohol addiction, and the Blemished DBS Sub-Committee, chaired by Baroness O'Loan, Member of the House of Lords, first Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and chair or member or various Commissions of Inquiry and Boards over many years.

The Committee conducts much of its work through its four Sub-Committees. The members of those Sub-Committees are as follows:

***The Audit and Quality Enhancement Sub-Committee to July 2024/ The Quality Enhancement and Assurance Sub-Committee from July 2024***

- Mr Kevin Barry (Chair) (to July 2024)
- Ms Barbara Beese (to February 2024)

- Mrs Bernadette Herbert
- Ms Rachel O'Driscoll, (Chair from July 2024)
- Ms Nicola O'Brien (from July 2024)
- Ms Susie Worthington (from July 2024)

There were 4 meetings of the Sub-Committee.

***The Blemished DBS Sub-Committee***

- Baroness Nuala O'Loan (Chair from February 2024)
- Ms Barbara Beese (to February 2024)
- Ms Mary Coller
- Fr Stephen Coker

The Blemished DBS Sub-Committee considered 2 blemished DBS reports in 2024.

***The Casework and Case Closure Sub-Committee***

- Ms Barbara Beese (Acting Chair to February 2024)
- Deacon Paul Hewitt (chair from July 2024)
- Ms Mary Coller
- Mgr. Seamus O'Boyle (Chair from March 2024 to July 2024)
- Baroness Nuala O'Loan

There were 11 meetings of the Sub-Committee.

***The Practice Development and Training Sub-Committee (established September2024)***

- Mr Andrzej Wdowiak
- Ms Victoria Wilson
- Fr Stephen Coker

There was 1 meeting of the Sub-Committee.

Terms of reference for each Sub-Committee were reviewed and revised, as necessary, during the year.

Two further structures support the delivery of safeguarding across the Diocese via promoting regular and effective communication between its various constituent parts, and ensuring that safeguarding considerations are embedded within Diocesan life and decision making. In so doing, they contribute to the development and maintenance of a strong culture of safeguarding in the Diocese:

### 1. The Vicar General Information Sharing Meeting

This meeting occurs approximately every six weeks to facilitate the sharing of information between the Vicar General, who is responsible for matters relating to clergy appointments and conduct, and the Safeguarding Service. This is important as safeguarding matters can also involve clergy conduct issues. Its membership is:

- Ms Monawara Bakht (Deputy Safeguarding Coordinator, and Interim Safeguarding Coordinator from January 2024)
- Ms Barbara Beese (Acting Chair) (to February 2024)
- Ms Catherine Edginton (Head of Safeguarding) from September 2024)
- Mgr. Martin Hayes, (Trustee, Vicar General)
- Mgr. Seamus O'Boyle (Trustee, Episcopal Vicar for Safeguarding)(to July 2024)
- Baroness Nuala O'Loan (Trustee, Chair of the Trustee's Safeguarding Committee)

There were 8 Vicar General Information Sharing Meetings during 2024, where discussions included matters such as arrangements for priests coming to serve in the diocese from other dioceses, visiting priests from elsewhere, arrangements for handling matters which may involve both safeguarding and conduct issues, and welfare issues.

### 2. The Cross Curia Safeguarding Meeting

Those in leadership roles in the Curia (the diocesan administration) meet quarterly to ensure that safeguarding issues are discussed by all. Meetings strengthen the culture of safeguarding throughout the Diocese and provide an arena for the agreement of policies, practices and procedures applicable across or to different parts of the Diocese, or to different Diocesan functions.

Its membership is:

- Bishop John Sherrington (Trustee and Chair)
- Ms Monawara Bakht (Interim Safeguarding Coordinator to September 2024)
- Mr Paolo Camoletto (Chief Operating Officer)

- Mgr. John Conneely (Judicial Vicar)
- Deacon Adrian Cullen
- Mr Matthew D'Souza (Data Protection Officer)
- Ms Catherine Edginton (Head of Safeguarding) from September 2024)
- Mgr. Martin Hayes (Trustee, Vicar General)
- Mgr. Seamus O'Boyle (Trustee, Episcopal Vicar for Safeguarding, member of Trustee's Safeguarding Committee)(to July 2024)
- Baroness Nuala O'Loan, (Trustee, Chair of Trustee's Safeguarding Committee)
- Ms Marie Saba (Director of Communications)
- Mr Peter Sweeney (Director of Education)
- Mr Richard Harries (Director of Caritas)
- Mr Robert Walker (Director of Human Resources)
- Mr Andrzej Wdowiak (Director of Youth Ministry, member of Trustee's Safeguarding Committee)

There were 5 Cross Curia Safeguarding meetings in 2024. At those meetings matters discussed included:

- the Diocesan response to the recommendations contained in the CSSA Baseline Audit Report;
- the work of RLSS and the migration of religious orders from affiliation to the Diocese to affiliation to RLSS and the associated revision of various agreements with religious orders;
- the work of the Ethnic Chaplaincies;
- the administration of DBS applications and the results of such applications; and
- training matters.

Other necessary meetings, such as those with CSSA, and between the Cardinal Archbishop, the Council of Deans, the Head of Safeguarding and the Chair of the Trustee's Safeguarding Committee, took place during the year.

# The Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (CSSA)

A new Chair of the CSSA, Mr Mike Cunningham CBE QPM, was appointed during 2024. The remit of the CSSA is changing and in future it will provide only an audit function and a process for dealing with unresolved complaints about diocesan handling of complaints against the Safeguarding Service.

***Strategic Planning***

For three years the Committee has reported to the Trust Board on the progress of implementation of the new safeguarding arrangements created by the CBCEW after the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse. The Diocese has now completed its Implementation Plan for the transition from the previous systems and processes to the new CSSA systems, and all other reforms including the establishment of the RLSS, and the Implementation Plan has therefore now been merged with the strategic planning process, in accordance with CSSA provisions.

***The 8 National Safeguarding Standards***

The Committee oversaw Safeguarding Service compliance with the eight national safeguarding standards published by the CSSA (see The Eight National Safeguarding Standards (catholicsafeguarding.org.uk) and with all other published policies and guidance. The Committee and the Safeguarding Service developed and reviewed diocesan policies, procedures, documents and guidance which reflect all identified CSSA requirements. They were then presented to the Trust Board for approval.

In September 2024, the CSSA consulted on proposed changes to the 8 standards. Members of the Safeguarding Committee provided input which was collated by the Head of Safeguarding and fed back to the CSSA. The proposed changes were generally considered to be an improvement, with language being simplified and made more straight forward.

***CSSA review of all its policies and procedures***

The CSSA began a review of all its national policies and procedures during 2023. That work continues.

***The CSSA Audit of Safeguarding***

Diocesan safeguarding policies, procedures and work were audited by CSSA during 2024. The report was published by CSSA in September 2024, and a grading of "Firm Progress" was received. A committee was appointed by Cardinal Nichols to oversee the work of responding to the audit,

providing an appropriate and specific response. This work is ongoing. Some of it awaits the new policies and procedures, and the new training proposals being prepared by CSSA.

CSSA has advised that in June 2025, there will be an audit of cases dealt with between June 2024 to June 2025 onwards. A further full audit will be conducted in May 2026.

## The Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS) and Religious Orders operating in the Diocese

***The role of RLSS***

Some religious orders are based in the Diocese, but do not run parishes. Others own and run parishes in the Diocese. Some run parishes on behalf of the Diocese. It is a complex and varied situation.

During the year, the RLSS continued to develop its understanding of its role and its contractual arrangements with the various religious orders which operate within England and Wales. Work continued on the transitional processes required for religious orders which run, or run and own parishes in the Diocese, from affiliation to the Diocese for safeguarding purposes, to affiliation with the RLSS. Most religious life groups have chosen to affiliate to the RLSS, which has responsibility only for safeguarding matters relating to members of religious life groups, not volunteers and others. A few religious orders have yet to sign up to RLSS and this situation continues to be monitored by the Diocese to ensure compliance with all safeguarding requirements. All those active in regulated Church activities in the Diocese must work in compliance with our safeguarding policies and procedures.

***Transfer of live cases to RLSS***

All live religious order safeguarding cases and safeguarding plans have now been transferred to the RLSS where a religious order has opted to affiliate with the RLSS. A summary of some 250 historic cases was also made available to RLSS. This brings to an end a very significant area of work which has been carefully and successfully undertaken by the Safeguarding Service.

## The Strategic Council for Catholic Safeguarding (the SCCS)

A new Strategic Council for Catholic Safeguarding is being established by the Catholic Bishops Conference for England and Wales. The Council will assume responsibility for determining the national safeguarding strategy and overseeing safeguarding support functions for the Catholic church in England and Wales, including: training, policy and procedure and guidance. It is chaired by Bishop Paul Mason.



# The Work of Safeguarding

## *The Development of Policy and Practice in Safeguarding*

Policies and procedures developed, approved, or amended by the Committee in conjunction with the Safeguarding Service in 2024 included:

- Parish Safeguarding Representative Procedures & Guidance
- Volunteer Code of Conduct

- Home visiting guidance for adults (2024 Version 2)
- Home visiting guidance for families (2024 Version 2)
- An Information Sharing Agreement and Protocol for the conduct of Joint Investigations between the RC Dioceses of Westminster and the Church of England Diocese of London
- Sub Committee Terms of Reference.

The Safeguarding Service and the Trustee's Safeguarding Committee also updated the Safeguarding Risk Register.

***Providing a safe environment***

The provision of a safe environment and regulating access to roles within the Church is an enormously important part of the work of the Diocese. Training is provided to enable risk assessment of locations in which Church activities take place. Such assessments inform procedures about how, when and where children and vulnerable adults may be engaged in the huge range of activities from liturgy and worship to, for example, attendance at mother and toddler groups.

***Parish Safeguarding Representatives (PSRs) and priests working together in safeguarding***

Much work is undertaken to promote the culture of safeguarding throughout the Diocese. The Parish Support Team is a vital part of the Safeguarding Service, it supports parishes in embedding a culture of safeguarding throughout the Church community.

In all the work that goes on in the Diocese which involves children or vulnerable adults, whether on pilgrimage, during sacramental preparation, in our seminaries, during special events or just every day activities, the Diocese operates robust systems to create a safe environment for all.

Working with the Parish Priest, the PSRs are carefully selected and trained volunteers who play a key role in supporting the Diocese's safeguarding arrangements. They may receive reports or allegations of abuse and assist parish volunteers who may wish to work with children and vulnerable adults, to understand their safeguarding responsibilities.

In 2024, 195 Parish Reports were sent to parishes (2023, 101) containing information about DBS matters including renewal dates and safeguarding training records, and facilitating the collection of any further necessary information for the Diocese.

***Diocese of Westminster Lourdes Pilgrimage***

During 2024, the Lourdes Pilgrimage Committee met four times. Chaired by Bishop John Sherrington, the Committee oversees the governance of the pilgrimage and develops the pilgrimage strategy, reporting to the Trustee Board. Members include the Chief Operating Officer, representation from Clergy, the Pilgrimage Director and Pilgrimage President of Hospitalité, the Pilgrimage Co-ordinator, the Pilgrimage Safeguarding Representative (Bernadette Herbert, who is a PSR and member of the Trustee's Safeguarding Committee) and Pilgrimage volunteers.

Chaired by the Chief Operating Officer, the Pilgrimage Safeguarding working group met six times, before and after the 2024 pilgrimage. The purpose of the Group is to review and develop policies and guidelines for the Pilgrimage and oversee operational safeguarding, including risk management, for the Pilgrimage.

Membership includes the Safeguarding Service and Pilgrimage volunteers. A lessons learned meeting was held after the pilgrimage in order to evaluate systems and plan for the next Pilgrimage.



The Pilgrimage Executive group (which includes the Safeguarding Service), is the operational management group of the Pilgrimage, and met a minimum of eight times and additionally joined the February planning meeting in Lourdes and the Lourdes Pilgrimage in July 2024. Pilgrimage policies were reviewed, updated and approved by the Safeguarding Committee prior to the Pilgrimage.

In January 2024, the Pilgrimage team contributed to the audit of the Diocese undertaken by the CSSA.

The Westminster Lourdes Pilgrimage took place in July 2024. Prior to the pilgrimage the Safeguarding service and Pilgrimage team processed 183 DBS checks for volunteers. During the pilgrimage any

safeguarding concerns were reported to the PSR and reported to the Safeguarding service with appropriate follow up with relevant authorities.

Planning for the 2025 pilgrimage began in September 2024, with the lessons learned incorporated into the planning process.

**Checks for suitability for ministry, employment or volunteering**

Disclosure and Barring (DBS) checks are carried out for Trustees, clergy, retired priests, permanent deacons, transitional deacons, seminarians, Curia employees, parish employees, and parish and chaplaincy volunteers whose work is with children and vulnerable adults, and pilgrimage volunteers. Newly ordained clergy, those who move into Westminster from other dioceses, and visiting clergy from other dioceses and overseas who come to work in the Diocese, are also subject to detailed processes.

The purpose is to ensure that nobody who presents a risk to others is allowed to be involved in ministry, volunteer work or employment in parishes or the Diocese more widely. Every 3 years the DBS checks are repeated. Trustees, clergy, staff and volunteers are reminded by the Safeguarding Service when their DBS expires.

***DBS certificates***

During 2024 approximately 1408 (2023 – 983) DBS certificates were issued to people ministering, working and volunteering in the Diocese. A further 201 (2023 101) DBS Update Certificates were issued.

***Blemished DBS Certificates***

During the year two 'blemished' DBS certificates were received, containing information about a conviction or other police information in relation to someone wanting to minister, work or volunteer in the Diocese. The implications of these "blemished" DBS certificates were considered and responded to with recommendations by the Committee's Blemished DBS Sub-Committee.

***Training***

Safeguarding training is essential to those involved in the ministry and work of the Church whether they are ordained, in religious life, employees or volunteers.

A significant volume of training is provided for a wide range of people. Everyone who ministers, and anybody who works or volunteers in the regulated areas (children and vulnerable adults), and every employee of the Diocese must complete initial basic safeguarding training, and refresher training every two years. Specialist training is also delivered to enable the work of different categories of people.

Some of the training is online, but much of it is tailored training delivered face to face by the Safeguarding Service. During 2024, in-person Clergy training sessions were provided for over 151 priests. Safeguarding training is also provided for seminarians throughout their formation and for deacons in formation. In 2025, given the interlinking roles of priest and deacon, deacons will be invited to attend the in-person Clergy training. To demonstrate and reinforce best practice, the Safeguarding Service use real examples and learning from casework during training. Feedback is generally positive and constructive and will help shape the 2025 In Clergy Training programme.

Training is made available on varying days and times, and the Safeguarding Service promotes a "One Stop Shop", approach, combining the training sessions with DBS surgeries to help with DBS issues and compliance. This has proved to be a very successful initiative.

**Reporting concerns, information and allegations of abuse**

Abuse can be physical, sexual, psychological, financial or emotional and can happen in person or online through telephone, electronic or mobile devices. Neglect of a child or a vulnerable adult by lack of love, care and attention also constitutes abuse.

To report a safeguarding concern please contact the Safeguarding Service on:

- Email: safeguarding@rcdow.org.uk
- Phone: 020 7798 9352, and choose option 1

The Safeguarding Service operates Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm only. Emails and phone calls are not monitored outside these times.

Anyone who brings concerns or allegations to the Safeguarding Service will be responded to sensitively, respectfully and seriously.

**If you are concerned about the welfare of a child or a vulnerable adult at risk, do not delay in contacting the police, using 999 if a child or adult is believed to be in immediate danger.**

***Responding to reported concerns, information and allegations of abuse***

Those who minister and work in the Diocese are trained to forward all allegations to the Safeguarding Service within 24 Hours. In turn, the Safeguarding Service must notify the police and the Local Authority Designated Officer (for children) or Adult Social Services (for vulnerable adults) of all allegations within 24 hours. If the police, Children or Adult Social Services are told about an allegation against somebody in the Diocese, they normally inform the Diocese.

The Committee through its work seeks to ensure that matters reported are dealt with properly and in accordance with all laws and procedures.

***Advice on safeguarding concerns***

The Safeguarding Service provides an advice service to the parishes and others. The number of people contacting the Service seeking help, advice and support on a huge range of safeguarding matters and concerns generally has grown very rapidly.

***Safeguarding cases and consultations 2024***

During the year 172 safeguarding cases and consultations were received, in which somebody sought advice or raised a concern (2023, 165). This indicates enhanced understanding of the work of the Safeguarding Service, and growing awareness that the Service will readily respond to clarify uncertainties or explain issues.

***Cases opened during 2024 after receipt of an allegation of abuse.***

If an allegation of the abuse of a child or vulnerable adult is received it must be reported to the police and to the local authority designated safeguarding officer (the LADO), and a case file will be opened.

During 2024, 18 allegations were received, and appropriate action was taken:

5 Allegations against diocesan priests

- 2 Allegations against members of religious orders
- 11 Allegations against lay people

***Cases closed during 2024 after an allegation of abuse.***

42 cases were closed during 2024 after any necessary action had been taken:

- 20 allegations against diocesan priests

- 5 allegations against members of religious orders
- 17 allegations against lay people

***Safeguarding Plans 2024***

Those under investigation, or those who have been convicted in a criminal court, or by a canonical court (collectively identified as 'respondents') are normally subject to Safeguarding Plans. These are entered into by agreement between the respondent and the Cardinal Archbishop in the case of priests, the Religious Order Superior in the case of religious order members, or the Parish Priest in the case of lay people. Plans are based on a clear and shared assessment by the Safeguarding Service of the risk posed by the person and of the agreed measures necessary to manage or mitigate any such risk. Such measures may include not wearing clerical dress or religious habits and not engaging in public ministry (in the case of clergy and religious), avoiding contact with individuals of a particular age group, and provisions as to when, where and in what circumstances worship is to occur. Safeguarding Plans continue to apply until they are either closed because a complaint is not substantiated, they are no longer necessary, or the individual subject to the plan dies. The Committee reviews all Safeguarding Plans bi-annually to ensure that all necessary reviews have occurred, and that Safeguarding Plans have been closed where necessary.

In December 2024, the Safeguarding Service was managing 14 safeguarding plans (2023, 20):

- 3 related to clergy (None of these individuals were in ministry).
- 10 related to lay people
- 1 related to a member of a religious order

2 Parish Safeguarding Plans had been created to manage the possible risk presented by an individual who may represent a safeguarding risk but were unwilling or unable to sign a safeguarding plan.

**The Review of Historic Cases and Consultations**

The review of historic cases and allegation was completed during 2024: 680 cases dating between 2002 and 2020 were reviewed and closed with the scrutiny and oversight of the Casework and Case Closure Sub-Committee. In addition to this, 873 consultations where advice was sought were reviewed and closed.

A small number of cases were found to require additional work – for example, a case in which there had been a police investigation, and an individual had been stepped down but the matter had not been concluded. The Police were contacted and the matter concluded.

**The care of those who report abuse – a trauma informed response**

In all cases where someone reports abuse, great care is taken to support and assist the person through the process which follows the making of the report. The care of those who have suffered abuse by anyone in the Church is of the utmost importance. The caseworkers are trained to deliver trauma informed services through person-centred processes, and to assist people in accessing appropriate therapeutic support services both during and after their contact with the Service. These processes are monitored by the Casework and Case Closure Sub-Committee at its monthly meetings. Where appropriate, counselling support is provided in accordance with policy.

***Learning from and listening to those who report abuse***

The Diocese seeks always to learn from those who have suffered abuse through various processes such as consultation with those who have reported abuse about their experiences in engaging with the Safeguarding Service, lessons learning exercises conducted within the Safeguarding Service and a requirement for the inclusion of a record of any lessons learned in the closure report for any case.

The Audit and Quality Enhancement Sub-Committee is endeavouring to improve the experience of those victim-survivors to whom the Diocese provides services and support. It examines the processes through which the Safeguarding Service formally and regularly reviews its casework, meeting as a team to identify good practice to share and to identify learning points to enhance future casework.

A questionnaire is sent to each person who has reported abuse or each victim/survivor when the case is being dealt with. Where they respond, subsequent questionnaires are sent every six months until the case is closed. This is designed to provide direct and contemporaneous feedback from those in receipt of casework support.

When a case is closed, anyone who has reported abuse is invited to a private (carefully designed and structured) exit interview to seek their considered reflection on the support that they have received from the Safeguarding Service. Questionnaires have been sent out since 2021, but none have been returned. The questionnaire was revised in January 2023 in conjunction with survivors from "Survivor Training – Beyond Words". However, there has still been no response.

Victim-survivors whose cases are completed have also been offered a meeting with two members of the Committee. To date, none have taken up the opportunity of this meeting.

The Committee is seeking to arrange a healing and hope service in the Cathedral for all those harmed by abuse. It is intended that this will include a Loud-Fence arrangement. The necessary budget has been approved and it is hoped that a suitable date can be found in April or May 2025 to coincide with the National Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors.

***Responding to an allegation of abuse***

Everyone who works in the Diocese is regularly trained in safeguarding matters and is given opportunities to understand the processes involved when a complaint is received. However, when a complaint is received, the operation of those processes can cause concern to anybody who may be implicated in an allegation. For example, any person against whom a complaint is made (a respondent) may be asked to participate in a risk assessment to identify any safeguarding risk attaching to their presence at Church services and events. Where risk is identified, this may be followed by a request to enter into a safeguarding plan which will provide proportionate protection for those who may be at risk. This applies equally to members of the laity and of the clergy.

A lay person will normally be able to remain in their home during any period of investigation unless the local authority and/or the police decide that that is not safe and take any necessary action to remove the person from their home. They will be able to remain in familiar surroundings with all the support attaching to that environment. They may be able to continue working or they may be asked to step aside from their role in the Church, depending on the nature and circumstances of the allegation. However, if the person implicated is a member of the clergy they may have to move to different accommodation while allegations are investigated. They will, in most cases, have to stop work immediately either voluntarily in response to a request to do so, or they may be ordered to do so. It is important to listen not only to the voices of those who report abuse, but also to the voices of respondents, clerical and lay, and the Committee seeks to do so through the work of its Sub-Committees.

***The care of those against whom allegations are made***

The care of all those alleged to have perpetrated abuse is profoundly important. It is acknowledged that the period of investigation is a period of very significant stress and pressure, and the Diocese is working to develop more timely internal procedures and to enhance its support mechanisms for all those who are accused, including the development of a process for establishing what more can be done to support any respondent. Cases are discussed at the Casework and Case Closure Sub-

Committee meeting and there is always consideration of the welfare not only of the person reporting abuse, but also of any respondent. The Safeguarding Service will seek to ensure that any support which can be offered by the Church is made available.

The Committee's proposal for the introduction of a training programme for support persons for those against whom allegations are made and to encourage individuals to become involved and train as support persons has moved forward. Cardinal Nichols has appointed five priests who have generously agreed to provide support to clergy respondents. The Practice Development and Training Sub-Committee is leading the work to develop this new support system which it is hoped will be in place during 2025.

***After an investigation***

Where an allegation is substantiated, the outcome will depend on what has happened and whether there has been a conviction and sentencing. The Safeguarding Service works with the statutory authorities: the police, probation, the prison service, local authority social services to ensure that all appropriate action is taken. The Committee must be satisfied that all necessary action has been taken and that support has been provided before any case is closed, and that ongoing therapeutic needs are considered, whether or not an allegation has been substantiated. If an allegation is not substantiated, the person who was accused will be offered help and support in returning to ministry, work or voluntary activity.



## Conclusion

The work of safeguarding children and vulnerable adults is vital to the mission of the Church. Everybody within the Diocese can contribute to this work, led by Cardinal Nichols and the auxiliary bishops, through their ministry, their employment, as a volunteer or as a member of the Church. Parish priests, ethnic chaplains and PSRs lead the day-to-day work of safeguarding within parishes and ethnic chaplaincies. The Committee is most grateful to everyone who participates in this work. Despite some of the difficulties which are the inevitable consequence of changes within the Safeguarding Service this year, much valuable work has been done by the staff and by all those with whom they work in the Diocese. Much work has been done also by those who volunteer as members of the Trustee's Safeguarding Committee. They are generous in giving of their time and working to provide governance of the Safeguarding Service in the Diocese. Much remains to be done.

Baroness Nuala O'Loan

Chair, The Trustee's Safeguarding Committee