**Annual Report 2023: Safeguarding Team**

The Diocese of Ely Safeguarding Team seeks to contribute to ‘People Fully Alive: Ely 2025’ in its strategic aims of developing healthy churches and serving the community. We aspire to strengthen and integrate good safeguarding practice within the culture of all those working, volunteering or worshipping across the Diocese.

**Safeguarding Team**

Rebecca Boswell - Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor (DSA)

Sharon Gage - Assistant Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor (ADSA)

Sarah King - Safeguarding Training and Parish Support Co-ordinator

Kelly Nott - Safeguarding Training Administrator

Lisa Pearson - Assistant Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor (ADSA)

Jackie Williamson - Safeguarding Administrative Support

Over 2023, Team members have continued to work in a hybrid capacity. The Team is looking forward to the move to the new Diocesan Office at Etheldreda House during 2024. The Team will have a dedicated office in the new building.

**Policy and Practice Guidance**

All safeguarding work within the Diocese is undertaken within the context of Statutory and House of Bishop’s Policy and Practice Guidance. The following Practice Guidance Documents have been published or updated during the last 12 months:

*Safeguarding Practice Reviews (July 2023) Code of Practice*

*Safeguarding Guidance for Local Ecumenical Partnerships (Sept 2023) Due Regard*

It is noted that all current safeguarding Guidance is issued either by the House of Bishops under either:

**Section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016** requires all authorised clergy, bishops, archdeacons, licensed readers and lay workers, churchwardens and parochial church councils to have **“due regard**” to safeguarding Guidance issued by the House of Bishops. A duty to have “**due regard”** to Guidance means that the person under the duty is not free to disregard it but is required to follow it unless there are cogent reasons for not doing so. ‘Cogent’ for this purpose means clear, logical and convincing.

…or…

**Safeguarding Code of Practice Measure 2021**

The Safeguarding Code of Practice Measure came into force in March 2022, it replaces and strengthens the duty to have ‘**due regard’** to House of Bishops’ safeguarding guidance with a **duty to comply** with the requirements in a new safeguarding code of practice (the Code); and expands the list of “relevant persons”, being those who must comply with the new Code’s requirements.

Failure by a member of the clergy to have **“due regard”** or follow their **duty to comply** to House of Bishops’ safeguarding Guidance is an act or omission which may constitute misconduct under the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003. Failure by a Reader or lay worker to have due regard to House of Bishops’ Safeguarding Guidance would be grounds for the revocation of that Reader’s or lay worker’s licence by the Bishop, and failure by a churchwarden or parochial church council could result in an investigation being carried out by the Charity Commission and the churchwarden or PCC members being disqualified as charity trustees.

Each piece of House of Bishops’ safeguarding guidance that was in place on 1 March 2022 remains in place with a duty to have **“due regard”** until that guidance is replaced by safeguarding Code of Practice.

**Safeguarding Referrals and Requests for Advice**

The Safeguarding Advisors provide advice, guidance, and leadership whenever concerns arise about the possible abuse of a child or adult at risk, in relation to allegations against church officers and where there are concerns in relation to adults posing a risk within congregations. Referrals include but are not limited to: disclosures from survivors of abuse (both current and non-current), allegations against an identified person, issues concerning a person who has been convicted of offences against children or adults, safeguarding and welfare concerns raised by or about a member of a congregation, conduct issues relating to a member of the clergy, laity or volunteer, information arising from DBS applications, and so on.

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| **Year** | **Number of Contacts** |
| 2016 | 109 |
| 2017 | 131 |
| 2018 | 158 |
| 2019 | 188 |
| 2020 | 177 |
| 2021 | 215 |
| 2022 | 248 |
| 2023 | 239 |

There were 239 contacts in 2023, a decrease of 4% on the previous year.

**Risk Assessments and Church Safety Plans**

The church welcomes all, including those individuals who pose a potential risk to other people. Central to all safeguarding work are the holistic assessment of risk and the development of effective strategies to manage any identified risk.  These are often complex, involving liaison with partner agencies in the community, such as probation and police.

In 2023, the National Safeguarding Team produced new practice guidance and templates to support consistent and transparent approaches to risk assessment and risk management across church bodies. Previously a variety of terms were being used when referring to worship or safeguarding agreements, but in order to ensure consistency across the church the term Church Safety Plan (CSP) has now been adopted. Developing the safety plan will utilise the risk assessment which has been undertaken by the Safeguarding Team, exploring directly “what are we worried about.” The safety plan will be formulated from “what can we do,” with common language used across the two documents, to outline what the church body will do to support safe worship and the action required by the individual.

The subject of the CSP participates in this process and the Plans are regularly reviewed and monitored. Where statutory agencies are involved, they participate in this process. The purpose of CSPs is to protect all within the church community, including the subject.  All new cases are now assessed using this template and any annual reviews of the safeguarding agreements are now being converted into the new CSP.

Of the 20 CSP in place across the Diocese at the end of 2023, 10 are subject to the new Church Safety Plans and 10 are under the old Safeguarding Agreements. These remaining 10 agreements will be updated into CPS’s when they are due for review in 2024.

**Safer Recruitment and People Management**

All church officers[[1]](#footnote-1) working with or in relation to children or adults who are vulnerable are required to be recruited in accordance with the Church of England’s Safer Recruitment and People Management Guidance (2021).

During 2023, 1558 DBS checks were undertaken across the Diocese, in comparison with 2022 where there were 2105.

The Ely Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF) has continued to fund the administrative costs for parishes undertaking DBS Disclosures. Parish costs are also met by the DBF for undertaking digital identity verification for disclosures, which was made available to parishes during 2023. Parish Safeguarding Officers are now able to undertake digital identity verification, for the purpose of verifying an individual’s identity, as part of an application for a DBS check which makes the process far simpler for both the parish and the individual for whom the check is being requested.

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| **Year** | **DBS Disclosures** |
| 2016 | 999 |
| 2017 | 1192 |
| 2018 | 1692 |
| 2019 | 1525 |
| 2020 | 1082 |
| 2021 | 1379 |
| 2022 | 2105 |
| 2023 | 1558 |

Where safeguarding information is disclosed on a DBS certificate or Confidential Declaration, this must be assessed by the Safeguarding Team who will make a recommendation regarding the individual’s appointment.

**Safeguarding Training**

The safeguarding training modules which apply mainly to employees and volunteers in our parishes are: *Basic Awareness* and *Foundations*, *Safer Recruitment and People* Managem*ent and* *Raising Awareness of Domestic Abuse* all of which are available online via the Church of England Training Portal. For individuals who have a lack of access or confidence in accessing online training, it is possible for clergy or PSOs to offer local sessions by running the online training to small groups and the Safeguarding Team offer support and materials to do this. Parishes have expressed that this has worked well in supporting volunteers to access the training.

The Safeguarding Team continue to deliver the national *Leadership* and *Parish Safeguarding Officer’s Induction* training. The training is delivered virtually or face to face. The majority of participants express that they prefer the convenience of accessing the training from home while some others have expressed a preference for face-to-face training. The Safeguarding Team will continue to deliver both virtual and face-to-face training over 2024.

Individuals who have been personally affected by safeguarding issues have reflected that they have found attending safeguarding training problematic and distressing and, in those cases, additional support has been put in place to enable the person to access the training and in circumstances where training with support has not been possible, an exemption has been given.

Ely Safeguarding Team also deliver local bespoke training, briefing and workshops including Churchwarden’s Safeguarding Briefings and DBS Workshops. Further local training is being developed in relation to supporting Church Safety Plans, case recording and risk assessment.

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| **Module** | **2021** | **2022** | **2023** |
| **Basic Awareness** | 1210 | 1507 | 1354 |
| **Foundation (online)** | 731 | 1057 | 1196 |
| **Leadership** | 344 | 386 | 419 |
| **Safer Recruitment** | 282 | 229 | 213 |
| **Domestic Abuse** | 268 | 1111 | 759 |
| **Parish Safeguarding Officer Induction** | 20 | 20 | 31 |

**Ely Cathedral**

There is a Service Level Agreement between the Diocesan Board of Finance and the Chapter of Ely Cathedral agreeing terms of the provision of safeguarding advice and support to the Cathedral by the Diocesan Safeguarding Team. Lisa Pearson works one day per week for the Cathedral as Cathedral Safeguarding Advisor.

**Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP)**

Ely DSAP has strong multi-agency and inter-departmental representation which allows robust discussion on safeguarding issues, drawing on a wide range of professional experience and expertise. It is also a supportive group, offering advice, guidance and quality assurance on policy and practice matters. Ely Safeguarding Team is very grateful for all the contributions to its work made by diocesan and partner-agency members of the DSAP.

**Support to Parishes**

The Safeguarding Team continues to provide advice and support to parishes in relation to safeguarding concerns, safer recruitment, good practice, and training. There have been four virtual Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) meetings over the year. Our PSOs have largely welcomed the convenience of a virtual meeting, and this has been reflected in high levels of attendance at these events. Ely Safeguarding Team note our appreciation for the vital contribution to safeguarding work by all PSOs.

The Safeguarding Team works with Parishes to support their compliance with House of Bishop’s Safeguarding Policy and Practice Guidance. Parishes who, for a range of reasons, are at risk of not having ‘due regard’ are offered Focussed Support. This process brings together the Safeguarding Team and Parish in a coordinated response to help parishes overcome their difficulties. Several parishes have been supported during 2023.

**Parish Safeguarding Dashboards and Hubs**

The Parish Safeguarding Dashboard software is funded by the DBF and is available free of charge to all parishes. At the end of 2023 78% of parishes were registered with the Dashboard in comparison with 74% at the end of 2022 and we continue to advocate that all parishes register for a Dashboard. This will be particularly important for parishes in the implementation of the National Safeguarding Standards and Quality Assurance Framework.

The developers of Safeguarding Dashboards have been working on a new set of tools to help parishes with safer recruitment and people management These include supporting parishes by maintain DBS and training records, developing role description, tracking safer recruitment and ongoing people management.

The Diocese of Ely was one of the first two Dioceses to launch the Safeguarding Hubs in December 2022 and 57 parishes were using the Hubs at the end of 2023.

**Looking Ahead in 2024**

**Changes to Role Titles in Safeguarding Team**

Following recommendations from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (ICCSA) the role of Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor will be changed to Diocesan Safeguarding Officer during 2024. This recommendation was because there has been variation with the Church around the distribution of safeguarding responsibilities and accountabilities, including the role of the bishop in this regard, and the overall supervision and quality assurance arrangements for the work of a safeguarding advisor. The recommendation highlighted the need to change the role from Safeguarding Advisors to Safeguarding Officers, who will have independent responsibility for and oversight of key safeguarding tasks, and whose work will be professionally supervised, and quality assured by the National Safeguarding Team (NST). The diocesan bishop will retain the responsibility for suspension of clergy and licensed lay ministers.

In Ely Safeguarding Team, Sarah King held the title of Diocesan Safeguarding Officer for some years pre-dating the IICSA. In order to avoid confusion, Sarah’s title has now been changed to Safeguarding Training and Parish Support Co-ordinator.

**National Safeguarding Standards and Quality Assurance Framework**

Implementation of the Church of England’s Safeguarding Standards and Quality Assurance Framework, October 2023[[2]](#footnote-2) (the Standards hereafter) will be the primary strategic focus of safeguarding in the Diocese of Ely and Ely Cathedral over the next three years.

Strategic planning around the Standards will also be informed by the recommendations arising from the quality assurance work already undertaken by the Diocese and Cathedral in the Survivor Care Review 2022[[3]](#footnote-3) and local and national recommendations arising from the Past Cases Review 2[[4]](#footnote-4). Planning will also contemporaneously incorporate any changes to or new legislation and statutory guidance relating to safeguarding, local Safeguarding Children’s and Adults Safeguarding Partnership Board Procedures or publication of new House of Bishop’s Safeguarding Code of Practice. Recommendations and learning arising from National and Local Safeguarding Practice Reviews during the three-year cycle will also be included where relevant.

A sub-group of the DSAP has been convened to undertake the implementation and planning in relation to the Standards.

For parishes the primary focus for implementing the Standards will be through the Parish Safeguarding Dashboards and Hubs. In order to support parishes in this work a series of Workshops are planned throughout 2024 by the Safeguarding Team and Clearly Simpler the developer of the software tools.

**Independent Safeguarding Audit Programme**

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) recommended that the Church of England continue the Independent Safeguarding Audit Programme. The Church has made a public commitment that its dioceses and cathedrals will take part in an independent safeguarding audit programme. This will enable the Church as a whole to be transparent and accountable to wider society in respect of its safeguarding activity.

The audits will provide clear, evidence-based recommendations for Church bodies to incorporate into their future planning. By implementing these recommendations, the ultimate, and most important, beneficiaries will be those children and vulnerable adults who are protected from abuse, or responded to well if abuse has taken place. The audits matter because they will help Church bodies bring their ministry of hope and healing to the vulnerable. The Diocese of Ely and Ely Cathedral’s Independent Safeguarding Audit will take place between the 2-6 February 2026.

**Future of Church Safeguarding Programme**

The Future Church Safeguarding Programme was set up to recommend how to make safeguarding within the Church of England fully independent. Professor Alexis Jay (OBE) was appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Archbishop of York with terms of reference to independently:

• provide options and recommendations for how a new independent safeguarding and scrutiny body might be formed and how it should operate

• make any recommendations for how further independence of safeguarding might be achieved

• make any other recommendations that are necessary or appropriate

Professor Jay expects to complete her report for the Archbishops of Canterbury and of York in early 2024 and will publish her report herself to ensure full transparency.

Professor Jay said:

*“The need to introduce a genuinely independent safeguarding model for the Church of England as soon as possible cannot be overstated. The views of those with recent experience of abuse, people who work or volunteer within the church, and others who have had cause to engage with the existing processes must inform this process if it is to be truly independent, fair, impartial, and effective.*

Rebecca Boswell, Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor

January 2024

1. 1 A “Church Officer” is anyone appointed/elected by or on behalf of the Church to a post or role, whether they are. ordained or lay, paid or unpaid.  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Church of England Safeguarding Standards and Quality Assurance Framework (October 2023) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Diocese of Ely - Review of Responding to and Supporting Survivors and Victims: An analysis of Strengths, Challenges and Areas for Improvement (July 2022) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Past Cases Review 2, National Report (October 2022) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)