



## Report of The Independent Chair of The Safeguarding Reference Group To The Dean & Chapter

**FOR 12 MONTHS: 1 January 2017 – 31 December 2017**

**CHAPTER MEETING: March 2018**

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### **Introduction and Outline of Report**

This report has been prepared for the Dean and Chapter by Peter Spindler, the independent chair of the Safeguarding Reference Group, and provides assurance on how well the Abbey is performing on the issue of 'safeguarding'. It draws upon data provided by Helen Averill, Head of Human Resources and the Abbey Safeguarding Officer (ASO) and summarises the work undertaken by the Abbey to safeguard the vulnerable throughout 2017. The following six sections detail how the Abbey is working to ensure the wellbeing of vulnerable groups and strive for excellence in ensuring the safety of those who may be at risk of harm. This is the first safeguarding annual report to be submitted to the Dean and Chapter and is supported by the register of risks and the up to date action plan, both of which are attached as appendices to this report.

### **Safeguarding Governance Structures and Resources**

On behalf of the Dean and Chapter, the Safeguarding Lead (Canon Steward) exercises general oversight of all safeguarding policy and its implementation across Westminster Abbey, St Margaret's Church, Westminster Abbey Choir School and the Abbey's ancillary buildings and grounds. He is supported by the ASO, the designated safeguarding lead for the Choir School and the St Margaret's Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator. External support is provided by the Abbey Safeguarding Adviser (ASA) from the Diocese of London and the independent chair of the Abbey's Safeguarding Reference Group (WASRG).

The WASRG was established in January 2017 and has been meeting quarterly throughout 2017, providing a forum for the discussion of issues, sharing of best practice as well as scrutiny, test and challenge on safeguarding matters. It has thirteen standing members representing the Abbey, church and school together with external advisors who specialise in areas of child protection and adult mental health. As well as providing a platform for sharing of information, it also drives the business of safeguarding at the Abbey through the development of the safeguarding risk register and management of an action plan. The ASO provides a quarterly report on key areas of performance and the group has developed a safeguarding incident reporting process to allow for better management and understanding of issues that may arise within the Abbey confines. The group has considered issues such as the report by Dame Moira Gibb into learning from the Diocese of Chichester and feedback from the Church of England annual Safeguarding Summit which was attended by both the ASO and the independent chair.

### **Policy and Procedures**

The Abbey safeguarding processes are set out in the *Policy for Safeguarding in Westminster Abbey & St Margaret's Church*. This document was published in a revised and updated format in June 2017 having been adopted by the Dean and Chapter at the meeting of 21 June 2017. It is a comprehensive, 40-page document with a forward by the Dean and provides in detail an explanation of what to look for and how to deal with those considered to be at risk of harm. It sets out a framework for staff and worshippers to follow that allows all to grow safely in Christ.

Access for the public to the Policy and other related safeguarding documents follows established best practice in that it is 'one click away' through the front page of the Abbey website. Reassurance of the Abbey's commitment to this issue can be found in the way in which these documents are presented. The openness and transparency of these procedures allows the reader to understand who is responsible and how safeguarding concerns are addressed. Clearly articulated standards and values, supported by flow charts including details of third party pathways for reporting leave no doubt for the reader that numerous options exist to share any concerns they may have.

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The Policy and Procedures will be reviewed in 2018 once the Church of England House of Bishops completes the process of revising the national safeguarding guidance. Additionally, it would be helpful if in future publications, safeguarding was made more explicit within the Abbey Mission and Values booklet especially with the backdrop of the current public interest in the subject driven by events at Oxfam and elsewhere in the voluntary sector.

### **Summary of Safeguarding Activity in 2017**

*Safer Recruitment* – These practices form part of a network of checks and balances which will minimise the possibility of appointing inappropriate individuals to work with vulnerable groups. The HR department has worked hard throughout 2017 to ensure they adhere to the national *Practice Guidance: Risk Assessment for Individuals who may Pose a Risk to Children or Adults*. The Abbey's Recruitment Policy takes account of the Church of England's policy framework and no incidents of concern have been raised in 2017.

*Vetting and Barring Checks* – The Abbey has been using the Disclosure and Barring Service to expedite the checking process for roles which involve working with the vulnerable. 51 applications were submitted in 2017, 46 satisfactory certificates were issued and 5 are outstanding. 13 certificates have been provided by other institutions. No one has failed a check nor has a management plan been required to address any concerns.

*Training* – In January 2017 the National Safeguarding Team provided a one day, C4 training course for all those in senior management positions at the Abbey. This was a useful springboard for the development of the risk register and the forming of an action plan as well as demonstrating the commitment of the leadership of the Abbey to this issue. A subsequent Training Plan has been developed by the ASO and work is underway to ensure all staff are appropriately trained. It is fair to say that record management on this issue has been a challenge and a temporary resource was employed to improve record keeping. In the first phase, the Visitor Experience Team, Security Team and a number of administrative staff were targeted to have their C0 (on-line awareness raising module) completed by the end of December. This has not been possible due to a number of issues including abstractions from the workplace and lack of access to IT. However, safeguarding is a feature in all induction training and all frontline staff were issued with a safeguarding aide-memoire in May 2017. I am optimistic these figures will improve in 2018.

*Incident Reporting* – A new Safeguarding Incident Report Form was developed through the SRG in the Summer of 2017. This has been a useful step in ensuring incidents and issues are brought to light and 10 incidents were formally reported last year. The ASO has now developed a confidential central record of these incidents and over time a greater understanding of vulnerability issues in the Abbey will be achieved. As staff become more familiar with this process it is likely the number of incidents identified will increase and this should be seen as a positive measure of the Abbey's activity. Incidents involving regular worshippers disturbing services began to be recorded at the end of 2017 and will be subject of future reporting by the ASO to Dean and Chapter.

*Multi Agency Working/Core Groups* – The Abbey currently has one Core Group constituted to manage a criminal case which has now been discontinued. The Abbey is also represented at the National Church Institution Core Group which is overseeing cases likely to be scrutinised by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse.

### **Risk Register**

The SRG has developed a detailed 16-point risk register following the Abbey's standard format for the management of risk (see Appx A). The SWOT analysis undertaken at the C4 training in January 2017 provided the basis for its development. The register is managed by the ASO in consultation with the Canon Steward and is reviewed at each SRG meeting to identify what mitigation can be put in place to minimise the likelihood of an incident. It is linked to the Action Plan and allows for cross referencing of issues between the two documents. Only Risk 11 relating to the resourcing of safeguarding initiatives at the Abbey is highlighted as high and will remain so until a new ASO resource is appointed.

### **Safeguarding Action Plan**

The Action Plan is designed to drive the business of safeguarding at the Abbey, it maintains a list of longer term activities underway and is additional to the routine actions arising from the SRG meetings (see Appx B). During 2017, 40 substantive actions were generated and 27 of these have already been completed. The remaining 13 are all being progressed with clearly defined leads and timescales set for completion. This is a good indicator of how much work has been undertaken by those responsible for safeguarding at the Abbey.

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### **Responding to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse**

In 2016, the Abbey commissioned a review of all its non-recent reports of child sexual abuse by a retired judge from the Court of Protection, Mr Justice Hedley to meet the request of IICSA for information. Details of relevant cases have been submitted to the Inquiry and at this stage no further requests have been forthcoming although the National Safeguarding Team are closely monitoring the situation. The first phase of the Inquiry consists of 13 separate strands, one of which is titled *'An inquiry into the extent of any institutional failures to protect children from sexual abuse with the Anglican Church'*. At this stage, there is no evidence to suggest the Abbey will feature significantly in this and no one related to the Abbey has core participant status in the inquiry. It is vital that the Abbey maintains a clear and accurate record of all its past cases as there is always the likelihood that as IICSA builds momentum new disclosures may be forthcoming.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The Dean and Chapter should be reassured that the staff and volunteers at Westminster Abbey are working hard to meet the wider national Anglican objective of 'promoting a safer church'. It is people and not policy that safeguard the vulnerable and whilst established traditions and practices are important to maintain, they do need to be flexible enough to accommodate the fast-moving developments from the world of safeguarding and public protection.

This report highlights the significant efforts made in 2017 to develop the systems and processes that underpin your commitment to identifying and safeguarding the vulnerable or those at risk of harm. As staff and volunteers become more alive to this issue, the number of reports and interventions will increase in 2018 and we will start to see innovative policies, procedures and practice emerge as new initiatives are taken. A sustained effort will be required this year to ensure everyone receives sufficient training in safeguarding and it is essential that adequate resourcing is provided to meet the demands and expectations in this critical area of work.

Peter Spindler  
February 2018

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