

**REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT CHAIR
OF THE SAFEGUARDING REFERENCE GROUP
TO THE DEAN & CHAPTER**

1st January 2019 – 31st December 2019

CHAPTER MEETING: February 2020

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 (SRG). It provides detail of safeguarding activity in 2019 and offers assurance on how well the Abbey is performing, drawing upon data provided by Juliette Curtin the recently appointed Abbey Safeguarding Officer (ASO). 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 third safeguarding annual report to be submitted to the Dean and Chapter and follows the same format as the first two although this structure is likely to be revised and updated for 2020 with additional data. Whilst much of the information below will not be new to the Dean and Chapter, and the data is an amalgam of that contained in the ASO's quarterly reports to that body, this is a report written for publication and demonstrates the openness and transparency of the Abbey in its approach to safeguarding.

1. Safeguarding Governance Structures and Resources

On behalf of the Dean and Chapter, the safeguarding lead (Canon Steward) continued to exercise 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 throughout 2019. He has been supported by a dedicated ASO for five months of the year, the designated safeguarding lead for the Choir School and the St Margaret's Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator. External support was provided by the Abbey Safeguarding Adviser (ASA) from the Diocese of London and the independent chair of the Abbey's SRG.

The SRG met quarterly during 2019, providing a forum for the discussion of issues, sharing of best practice as well as scrutiny, test and challenge on safeguarding matters. The ASO (three different post-holders in 2019) provided a quarterly report on key areas of performance, the data from which has been used as the basis for this annual summary of safeguarding activity. The group has considered issues such as the response to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) in respect of the Diocese of Chichester; the Church of England National Safeguarding Information Sharing Agreement; the summary of the SCIE Cathedrals' Audits and taken feedback

from the National Safeguarding Summit which I attended together with the new ASO. The group has also been the sounding board for the audit of the Abbey's safeguarding arrangements undertaken by "Thirtyone:eight" (31:8) in March and met with the review team in April for a debrief of their findings.

The most significant resource development was the departure in January of the first dedicated ASO. It was agreed that a replacement would not be identified until after the audit had reported to allow for the findings to be incorporated into the selection process. It was however unfortunate that the post could not be filled until August. The ASO responsibilities were covered in the interim by the Head of HR, supported by her colleagues, and I thank them for taking on that challenge. Nevertheless, the protracted absence of a dedicated safeguarding professional has limited the capacity and capability of the Abbey to address issues such as those highlighted in the 31:8 report as well as having a limiting effect on the numbers of concerns or issues raised during that period (see below).

I am however very reassured for the coming year in that the Abbey has selected an excellent replacement with a strong background in safeguarding in both the local authority and charity sectors. She has approached the role with an energy and vigour that will substantially build upon on the work of her predecessor Lee Elliot who I want to thank here for his professionalism and commitment in laying the foundations for her to build upon.

2. Policy and Procedures

The Abbey safeguarding processes are set out in the *Policy for Safeguarding in Westminster Abbey & St Margaret's Church*. This document, along with many of the Abbey's associated HR policies and procedures, was subject to significant scrutiny as part of the external audit by 31:8. The Abbey is to be commended for inviting in an outside body at the earliest opportunity to review its safeguarding arrangements. It was a wise decision not to wait for the Cathedrals' and Diocese audit process to be completed in 2021 by SCIE to ensure its procedures are in line with other major institutions.

31:8 produced a comprehensive, 57 pages report, and made 84 recommendations to improve practice with four main over-arching observations. They identified numerous areas of good practice and acknowledged "*the work that has clearly been done to improve safeguarding arrangements over the past two years*". An action plan has been developed in response to their findings, activity prioritised and I am pleased to report that 82% of the recommendations have now been completed or are in hand. The remainder relate in the main to matters of policy rather than practice and will, I am assured, be completed in 2020. The overarching safeguarding policy and procedures document, which should have been submitted for review to Dean and Chapter in 2019, will now be revised and updated during 2020.

3. Summary of Safeguarding Preventative Activity in 2019

Safer Recruitment – These practices form part of a framework of checks and balances to minimise the possibility of appointing inappropriate individuals to work with those at risk of harm. The HR department continues to try to ensure that the Abbey adheres to the national *Practice Guidance: Risk Assessment for Individuals who may Pose a Risk to Children or Adults* and the Abbey's Recruitment Policy takes account of the Church

of England’s policy framework. Only one significant concern was raised in 2019 leading to an agency recruited member of staff being refused permission to work at the Abbey. A review of the current process is underway with a view to ensuring that a consistent approach is taken to selection of both staff and volunteers as well as increasing the number of trained staff to support the interview stage (see fig 1. below).

Vetting and Barring Checks – The Abbey has been using the company U-check for its Disclosure and Barring Service access to expedite the checking process. The following points summarise the activity in 2019:

- 176 DBS applications were submitted.
- 114 checks were at the basic level, 60 enhanced and 2 standard checks were completed.
- All but four of the applicants received satisfactory certificates, one has not been employed (see above) and the other three were subject to a risk assessment process prior to appointment.
- No DBS checks are outstanding.
- Work has now been completed to ensure that a robust process is put in place to check that all the visiting clergy, such as duty chaplains, have the correct vetting and have undergone the necessary safeguarding training.
- An inconsistency in checks was identified at St Margaret’s Church which has now been addressed.

Safeguarding Agreements – There are eight individuals on the Abbey’s ‘adults to notice’ record. Safeguarding and risk mitigation arrangements have been put in place to support them. These people have either a permanent exclusion, arrangements for additional support or a safeguarding agreement in place to ensure the safety and support of all Abbey users. This process is subject to ongoing review and a more detailed framework with revised policy and procedures will be produced in 2020.

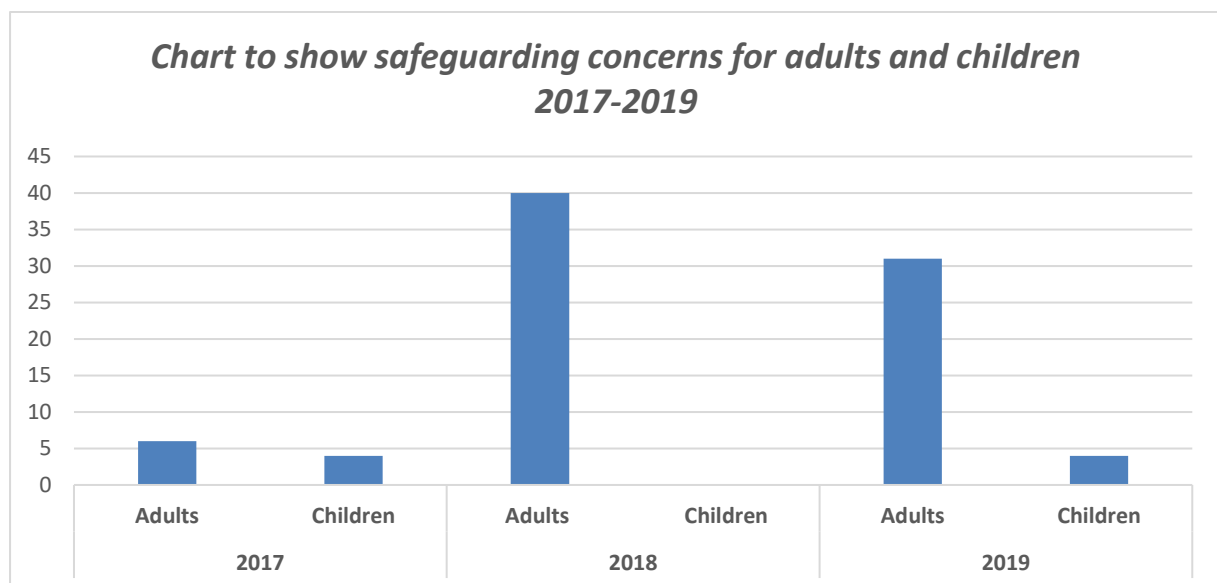
Training – The following table (fig. 1.) provides a detailed breakdown of training delivered in 2019:

Training	Departments identified to be trained	Percentage rate of staff identified to be trained	Number of people outstanding
C0/1 Basic Safeguarding Awareness	All staff All volunteers	99.2 % 94%	2 29
C2 Safeguarding Leadership Training	Selected leadership staff	%N/A 5 Staff	N/A
Mental Health Responders	Selected job roles across department	% N/A 14 staff	N/A
Safer Recruitment	Mangers with recruitment responsibilities	40%	34
Prevent; Radicalisation and Extremism	Learning Team	100%	0

Whilst getting personnel working at the Abbey fully trained was a challenge in the past, it should be noted that the completion of courses is now significantly up on the previous years. The training courses available to the Church of England (which the Abbey subscribes to) have changed during 2019 and the course titles differ from my previous reports but nevertheless this improvement is a significant achievement, helped by the appointment of an energetic volunteer co-ordinator. Additionally, a new mental health responder training programme for specific departments whose staff engage with the public has been developed and its impact is currently being evaluated.

Incident/Concern Reporting – I have already commented above on the vacancy in the dedicated ASO post for over half of the year and it is disappointing but perhaps unsurprising to note that the increase in the reporting of safeguarding concerns seen from 2017 to 2018 has not been maintained. The number of reports or concerns raised formally by staff in 2019 has dropped from 40 in 2018 to 35 in 2019. Thankfully none of these have been significant incidents or so concerning as to require a core group to be formed. Indeed, upon assessment by the ASO many do not meet the threshold for a safeguarding intervention. Further work is underway to develop bespoke “threshold of needs” guidance for the Abbey, supported by a new case management system.

We are now able to show a trend in reporting over the last three years in graphical form (fig. 2.). Adults at risk of harm remain the main focus of reporting as follows:



Multi Agency Working/Core Groups – The Abbey held one Core Group in 2019 to oversee the response to a specific past case involving an individual who had worked at the Abbey and was charged in 2017 with a number of non-recent child sexual abuse offences dating back to the mid-1980s. As previously reported, the criminal case was subsequently discontinued and the Abbey has wisely commenced an Internal Management Review of the learning from this case which I am independently chairing. We will report our findings to the Dean and Chapter in March 2020 and any learning will be used to enhance the Abbey’s future management of such matters.

4. Risk Register

The SRG has continued to manage a detailed, 16-point risk register following the Abbey's standard format for the management of risk. It is linked to the Safeguarding Action Plan and allows for cross referencing of issues between the two documents. None of the risks are judged to be 'very high' and only two score at the bottom of the 'high' category. Unfortunately, this register hasn't had the focus at SRG that I would have liked as other matters have taken priority although I remain broadly satisfied that all identified risks are being addressed appropriately and this will be focussed on in more depth in 2020 with the help of the new Safeguarding Action Group.

The deputy head of security has continued to manage a very comprehensive 20-point risk register following his review of the Abbey estate in a safeguarding context which has led to a number of improvements. He is working closely with the ASO who is now actively involved with the national cathedrals' security forum and has presented to them on the Abbey's work, bringing the safety, security and safeguarding disciplines closer than ever.

5. Safeguarding Action Plan

The Action Plan is designed to drive the business of improving safeguarding at the Abbey. It is a list of longer term activities underway and is additional to the routine actions arising from the SRG meetings. At the beginning of the year a new action plan was developed with a total of 14 actions/initiatives carried forward from 2018. Six of these have now been completed and the remaining eight 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 and will now be taken forward at the new monthly Safeguarding Action Group which has been created after a review of the safeguarding governance arrangements. The actions from the 31:8 audit are being monitored on a separate action tracker.

6. Additional Safeguarding Activity and Forward Look

There have been a number of significant safeguarding developments during 2019 worthy of bringing to the Dean and Chapter's attention:

- The Abbey has joined a London Regional Adult Safeguarding Forum to share learning and best practice with St. Paul's and Southwark Cathedrals.
- Work has begun in developing a range of multi-agency initiatives with a particular focus on adult mental health and homelessness.
- A working group has been formed to develop a suicide prevention strategy and bespoke training has been sourced for staff working in the galleries.
- The ASO has joined with the National Safeguarding Team to work on enhancing training and quality assurance processes with a particular focus on the supervision of staff involved in safeguarding.
- The Cannon Steward and I met with both the interim and new National Safeguarding Leads for the Church of England during 2019 to brief them on the Abbey's work and offer to support at a national level.

The Abbey's approach to the governance of safeguarding has been reviewed by the new ASO using the findings from the 31:8 report and in November, the Dean and Chapter approved a new and more comprehensive framework. The new Dean has taken on a far greater role in overseeing safeguarding matters and brings with him a great deal of experience from his previous role. I am satisfied that the revised structure will enhance the current arrangements internally whilst freeing up and enabling the SRG to become more of a challenge and scrutiny panel than the information sharing platform which it had evolved into.

It should be noted however that the existing safeguarding procedures are now in transition and the policy is in need of updating promptly to reflect the changes. Strategic oversight of the work of the ASO by the Abbey's Chapter lead reduced during this period of change and it will take a while for these new arrangements to bed in. The new Receiver-General is now more engaged in safeguarding matters and has taken on the line management responsibility for the ASO. I recommend these changes are reviewed by Dean and Chapter in six months' time to ensure the new process is working effectively.

Concluding Remarks

I am pleased to report that the Abbey's approach to safeguarding has continued to improve and develop throughout 2019 although not quite at the pace I would have liked. The level of activity in the final third of the year has noticeably increased with the re-appointment of a dedicated safeguarding officer who has re-energised activity. It is clear however that the Abbey is now making good progress against the audit findings, the Safeguarding Action Plan and in revising its approach thereby mitigating the risk of harm and creating a safer organisation.

I would like to conclude by thanking Canon Anthony Ball for his passion, commitment and energy in championing safeguarding at the Abbey for the last three years. His dedication and enthusiasm for safeguarding has been core to the establishment of the current safeguarding arrangements.

Peter Spindler
Independent Safeguarding Advisor
February 2020