



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

1st January 2020 – 31st December 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 2020 and offers assurance on how well the Abbey is performing, drawing upon data provided by Louise Wilcox, the recently appointed but temporary Abbey Safeguarding Officer (ASO). The following six sections detail how the Abbey is working to ensure the wellbeing of vulnerable groups and the safety of those who may be at risk of harm. This is the fourth safeguarding annual report and 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, it is a report written for publication and demonstrates the commitment to openness and transparency by the Abbey in its approach to safeguarding.

1. Safeguarding Governance Structures and Resources

The Very Reverend Dr David Hoyle was installed as Dean in November 2019 and immediately undertook a review of the safeguarding governance at the Abbey. This has resulted in him personally taking the lead on 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. This is commendable leadership and demonstrates a strong personal commitment to the subject from the very top of the organisation. He has been supported during 2020 by a dedicated ASO for the first ten months of the year, prior to her departure on maternity leave, the designated safeguarding lead for the Choir School and the St Margaret's Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator. A pragmatic decision was taken in November to collaborate with St Paul's Cathedral in the provision of specialist safeguarding advice to cover for the absence of the ASO and whilst demand is low during the course of the current pandemic. External support was provided by the Abbey Safeguarding Adviser (ASA) from the Diocese of London and me as the independent chair of the Abbey's SRG.

A further initiative to enhance the safeguarding framework in 2020 has been the creation of two new operational meetings chaired by the ASO; a monthly Safeguarding Case Review and a bi-monthly Safeguarding Action Group to complement the work of the SRG. This approach has improved communication with and understanding for the operational leaders at the Abbey who have safeguarding as part of their core responsibilities. Furthermore, it has freed up the SRG to focus more on scrutiny of the Abbey's performance and its terms of reference have been amended accordingly. The ASO has also taken the lead on suicide prevention and mental health issues for the Abbey, thereby bringing these matters into the safeguarding remit.

The pandemic has impacted significantly on life at the Abbey which was closed for 12 weeks from mid-March, subsequently re-opening in June with an adapted admissions policy and revised accessibility arrangements for worship in accordance with government guidelines. I

am however pleased to report that the momentum of safeguarding has been maintained, helped by the fact that the ASO was not required to furlough and with the SRG meeting on four occasions. Three of those meetings were held virtually without any noticeable impact on our effectiveness.

The SRG has benefitted from a more focused membership including additional representation from the statutory sector. We have considered issues of policy and procedure such as safeguarding in a pandemic, the Abbey's response to the wider Anglican Church Past Case Review 2 initiative and the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) Investigation Report into the Anglican Church. The ASO is developing a bespoke response to the 47 issues that can be drawn from IICSA's 172 page report which has been shared with the Dean and these will be addressed during the coming year. Additionally, a detailed internal management review of the Abbey's only Core Group was commissioned in 2019 and reported to the SRG in April 2020 making eight recommendations on issues such as record keeping, core group membership and the associated processes.

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 in 2019 by 31:8 who produced a comprehensive, 57 page report and made 84 recommendations to improve practice, with four main overarching observations. The ASO has been working through an action plan which was developed in response to the findings. I can report that only 15 recommendations remain outstanding, 13 of which relate to policy matters and should be completed by the Spring of 2021.

3. Summary of Safeguarding Preventative Activity in 2020

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 work 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. Recruitment during the pandemic has been minimal and no issues or concerns have been raised. Notwithstanding this, Safer Recruitment training continued and one member of the HR team completed their Safer Recruitment update training.

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 2020:

- 61 DBS applications in total were submitted.
- 13 checks were at the basic level and 48 enhanced were completed.
- All of the applicants received satisfactory certificates,
- No DBS checks are outstanding.
- The inconsistency in checks that was identified at St Margaret's Church in 2019 has now been rectified.

Safeguarding Agreements – There remain 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.

Training – The national Church of England training framework has undergone significant review in the last year. Courses C0 and C1 are now delivered online; C2 has been expanded and comprises two sessions, additional reading and short written scenarios to underpin the online learning of C0 and C1. The C3 training has been amalgamated into C2 and the original course disbanded.

The delivery of training during 2020 has been challenging and has taken place in the main through a virtual format. One recent initiative has been the development of an in-house safeguarding input for staff with direct public contact and aims to raise confidence in identifying issues and referring concerns to statutory or other support services. It has been run as a pilot involving 10 members of staff and ensures a consistent response in the absence of the ASO who is temporarily working part-time. The ASO is also arranging for additional joint training with colleagues from St Paul’s Cathedral on specific issues such as Violence against Women and Girls.

It is important to note that the Abbey revised the allocation of training courses in September to accord more closely with the post held and staff will now refresh every three years, this new cycle is just starting. Unfortunately the number of outstanding courses at the C0 and C1 level is higher than I would have liked but understandably as many staff are on furlough, it is not currently possible to rectify this until the pandemic recedes and staff return to work.

The following table provides a detailed breakdown of training delivered in 2020:

Training	Departments identified to be trained	Total completed	Number of people outstanding
C0 Basic Safeguarding Awareness	All staff All volunteers	17	28
C1 Foundation	Selected Staff (commencing online in September 2020)	1	64
C2 Safeguarding Leadership Training	Selected leadership staff	7	4
Mental Health Responders	Selected job roles across departments	0	N/A
Safer Recruitment	Managers with recruitment responsibilities	7	0
Suicide Prevention	Selected job roles across departments	12	0
In house safeguarding and disclosure training	Selected senior roles across departments	10	0
Deputy ASO training	Selected roles	2	0
Violence against women and Girls	Selected job roles across departments	2	0

Incident/Concern Reporting –. The identification of possible safeguarding incidents, concerns or issues and bringing them formally to notice is a good indicator of the safeguarding culture of an organisation. With England being in lockdown for many weeks in 2020 we cannot make a meaningful comparison of reports with previous years. Inevitably, there has been a decrease in reporting this year with the number of reports or concerns

raised formally by staff in 2020 dropping from 35 in 2019 to 23 in 2020. Thankfully, none of these have been significant incidents or so concerning as to require a core group to be formed and only one incident required referral to statutory services. It is possible that, in addition to the full closure in the Spring, the admission measures subsequently put in place by the Abbey to ensure a Covid safe environment have created a barrier for some of those who may have previously presented as at risk of harm. Footfall has reduced significantly in 2020 and there have been far fewer educational and other formal visits than in previous years.

Multi Agency Working/Core Groups – The Abbey does not currently have any on-going core groups but has taken this opportunity to review its one significant past case which has been outlined above. I am satisfied that the learning from the handling of that case will be used to ensure an even better response to any future serious cases. The Abbey has also committed to mirroring the processes followed by the Church of England in its Past Case Review 2. A sub-group of the SRG, with a representative from the National Safeguarding Team, has been established to oversee the Abbey's response and support the ASO in identifying which files are to be sent for independent review. Whilst the Abbey was under no obligation as a Royal Peculiar to engage in this process and there are cost implications, it is the right thing to do and demonstrates the on-going commitment to external scrutiny, openness and transparency in its approach to safeguarding.

4. Risk Register

The ASO has continued to manage a detailed, 13 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.

The Head of Security has continued to develop a 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 and is now a member of the Safeguarding Action Group.

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 now managed by the ASO and delivered through the Safeguarding Action Group. Currently there are 15 actions on the plan seven of which are being actively progressed, others having been hampered by the pandemic restrictions.

6. Additional Safeguarding Activity and Forward Look

There have been a number of additional safeguarding developments during 2020 worthy of bringing to the Dean and Chapter's attention:

- The relationship with the Church of England's National Safeguarding Team (NST) has grown with the ASO joining the national working group reviewing training and continuous professional development for the Church's safeguarding advisors.
- The Abbey remains a member of the London Regional Adult Safeguarding Forum, established to share learning and best practice with St. Paul's and Southwark Cathedrals. Unfortunately the meetings were halted due to the first lockdown however all parties are hoping to re-commence the forum and Canon David Stanton will discuss involvement with Chapter.

- The NST is working to commission and establish a Church-wide safeguarding database. The ASO is a member of the working group and will keep the Dean and Chapter updated. In the interim, the ASO is considering other options for systematically storing records of safeguarding cases.
- The Safeguarding Action Group has suggested that Mental Health Responders can more usefully be referred to as Safeguarding Responders and so the in-house safeguarding training is now tailored to address this and enhance confidence in recognising and reporting all safeguarding matters.
- The ASO has worked hard to improve the relationship with local statutory partners in 2020 and this will grow in 2021. The Abbey now has a seat on the bi-borough Best Practice sub-group of the local Safeguarding Adults Board.

7. Concluding Remarks

I am pleased to report that the Abbey's approach to safeguarding has maintained focus throughout 2020 despite the challenges posed by the pandemic. There is a clear commitment from those I engage with to enhance the Abbey's safeguarding responses and ensure those most at risk of harm are safe to visit and worship at this iconic British institution. The re-organising of the governance framework to involve more operational staff has undoubtedly helped in building and embedding a culture of safeguarding across the Abbey and its associated structures.

There remain opportunities to build on the existing safeguarding arrangements throughout 2021 and I look forward to seeing the changes recommended by 31:8 completed this year as well as any learning from the Past Case Review 2 process being identified and addressed. Refresher training will also need to be prioritised as soon as practicable and I urge the Dean and Chapter to ensure the now part-time and temporary safeguarding officer is supported throughout 2021 by senior colleagues to maintain the high standards already established.

Peter Spindler
Independent Safeguarding Advisor
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