



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

1st January 2021 – 31st December 2021

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 2021 and offers assurance on how well the Abbey is performing, drawing upon data provided by Louise Wilcox, the temporary Abbey Safeguarding Officer (T/ASO). The following seven 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 fifth 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 ongoing 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 has the lead on oversight of all safeguarding policy and practice and its implementation across Westminster Abbey, St Margaret's Church, Westminster Abbey Choir School and the ancillary buildings and grounds. He has been supported throughout 2021 by the T/ASO who has been on part-time secondment from her role as Cathedral Safeguarding Officer at St Paul's Cathedral to cover for maternity leave at the Abbey. It should be noted from the outset that she has worked incredibly hard to support both institutions and has managed to achieve some significant outcomes for the Abbey during her 14 months in post.

Additional support has been provided by the Receiver General (RG) who is a key member of the SRG, and the designated safeguarding lead for the Choir School. External support is provided by the Abbey Safeguarding Adviser (ASA) from the Diocese of London and me as the independent chair of the Abbey's SRG. The pandemic continues to impact significantly on life at the Abbey, however I am pleased to report that the momentum of safeguarding has not been lost, with the SRG meeting on three occasions, in January, April and September. The T/ASO and I have been speaking on at least a fortnightly basis, and the Past Case Review (PCR2) working group (see below) met bi-monthly during 2021.

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 T/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 2022.

3. Summary of Safeguarding Preventative Activity in 2021

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. Recruitment during the pandemic has been minimal, and no issues or concerns have arisen. Notwithstanding this, safer recruitment training continued, and three members of staff completed the course in 2021.

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 the reporting year:

- 118 DBS applications in total were submitted.
- 96 of these checks were at the basic level; 20 enhanced, and 2 standard.
- All of the applicants received satisfactory certificates
- Approximately 20 DBS checks are outstanding and being processed.

Safeguarding Agreements – Eight individuals are currently on the Abbey's 'adults to notice' record. Safeguarding and risk mitigation arrangements have been put in place to support them and they 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 delivery of training during 2021 remained challenging and has taken place in the main through a virtual format. Training completion has been further restricted by furlough arrangements and the absence of volunteers. The following table provides a detailed breakdown of what training has been achieved despite these challenges:

Training	Departments identified to be trained	Total completed in 2021	Number of people outstanding
C0 Basic Safeguarding Awareness	All staff and volunteers	22	58
C1 Foundation	Selected Staff (commencing online in September 2020)	12	91
C2 Safeguarding Leadership Training	Selected leadership staff	14	3
Mental Health Responders	Selected job roles across departments	0	0
Safer Recruitment	Managers with recruitment responsibilities	3	0
Suicide Prevention	Selected job roles across departments	8	0

Training attendance was overseen by the HR department, who have faced significant staffing challenges and work pressures during the year. I am pleased to report that the ASO upon her return from maternity leave has now taken back oversight of this, and numbers should start to improve as we emerge from the pandemic restrictions. It is pleasing to note the improved partnership working with St Paul's Cathedral and a pragmatic approach to sharing training opportunities between the two institutions.

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. The pandemic has unfortunately inhibited our ability to make a meaningful comparison of reports with previous years. Footfall remained low in 2021, and there have continued to be far fewer educational and other formal visits than in previous years.

Unsurprisingly, there has been no increase in reporting this year, with the number of reports or concerns raised formally by staff in 2021 remaining static at 23 incidents recorded both in 2020 and 2021. Thankfully only one of these has been seen as significant, and a Serious Case Management Group (CSMG) has been formed to oversee the Abbey's response, with this incident - relating to possible events ca. 40 years ago - being referred to statutory services. Additionally, it has been interesting to note that with the improved sharing of information with St Paul's Cathedral, two adults at risk have been identified as attending both sites and a more co-ordinated response is now in place.

Multi Agency Working/Serious Case Management Groups – The Abbey did not have any Serious Case Management Groups (formerly known as core groups) during the last year but has opened one for 2022 as noted above. This non-recent case has been notified to the LADO and police.

Past Case Review 2 - In 2020, the Abbey committed to mirroring the processes followed by the Church of England as part of its Past Case Review 2 programme. I chaired a PCR2 sub-group of the SRG with colleagues from the Abbey and a representative from the National Safeguarding Team (NST). We met on five occasions during 2021 to enable an effective response to the wider national effort and ensure there were no gaps in the responses to previous safeguarding incidents.

After an extensive review of the available material, five cases were passed to an independent reviewer appointed by the NST for their consideration. He has recommended follow up with the police for one case and identified lessons learned from another. The ASO made a decision to additionally refer one case to the LADO that led to the opening of the SCMG detailed above.

The Abbey's approach to PCR2 attracted significant praise from the NST, who considered the Abbey had gone "*over and above what was requested – a very thorough review which reflects the aims of the board, a professional review which is fitting for the Abbey*". There remain a small number of outstanding matters to be carried forward into 2022, including a review of some choir school files which the RG has been briefed on.

4. Risk Register

There is 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. This will require greater focus in 2022 as the T/ASO has not had the capacity to update the register during 2021.

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 initiatives 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, progress against 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 2021 worthy of bringing to the Dean and Chapter's attention:

- The debate on unaccompanied minors' access to the Abbey has continued, and the ticketing policy has now come into line with the legal definition of a young person i.e. 17 and under.
- A new system of on-call cover by Deputy Safeguarding Officers has been introduced; this was trialled at Christmas and will be important in 2022 as the returning ASO will be working a three day week. I would urge Dean and Chapter to monitor the effectiveness of this approach to ensure there are no lapses in service provision.
- As the Dean has responsibility for the ministry of the Chapel of St Mary Undercroft, the T/ASO developed a working relationship with the safeguarding team at the Palace of Westminster, and they were included in the Abbey's PCR2 response.
- Additional support was provided to the Dean and Sub-Dean in their role as governors of Westminster School to assist in formulating the School's response to the Everyone's Invited initiative in April.
- A small number of issues have arisen during 2021 which have led to the need for improved information sharing arrangements with the two schools located within Dean's Yard. At a meeting chaired by the RG it was agreed that there would be the timely and effective exchange of information between the three parties where appropriate.

7. Concluding Remarks

I am pleased to report that the Abbey's approach to safeguarding has maintained focus throughout 2021 despite the challenges posed by the pandemic and staffing capacity. There remains 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.

As ever there remain opportunities to build on and enhance the existing safeguarding arrangements, and I am encouraged by the level of energy and commitment from the ASO returning after a protracted period of leave to her permanent role, albeit on a part-time basis. I would urge Dean and Chapter to ensure she is fully supported by the wider team at the Abbey, as without effective support the reduction in her availability could have an adverse effect as visitor and worshipper numbers begin to increase.

I want to conclude by once again acknowledging the commitment and professionalism displayed by T/ASO Louise Wilcox, who has supported the Abbey diligently over the past 14 months and ensured that the commitment to safeguarding has been upheld.

Peter Spindler
Independent Safeguarding Advisor
February 2022