

CATHOLIC SAFEGUARDING STANDARDS AGENCY

Diocese of Hexham & Newcastle

Interim Review of Safeguarding in Leadership,
Governance, Ministry and Culture

September 2024

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Diocese of Hexham & Newcastle requested that the CSSA conduct a Safeguarding Review in 2022. The CSSA subsequently prepared a formal report, the outcome of which was that the Diocese was found to have an overall grade of *Early Progress* in respect of adherence to the eight national safeguarding standards.

1.2 The safeguarding review report¹ identified the following areas for development:

- Culture, leadership, and governance
- Decision-making processes
- Provision of support and pastoral care
- Clergy appointments
- Transparency

1.3 The Safeguarding Review report made a number of recommendations for the Diocese of Hexham & Newcastle to take forward, with the following being relevant to the current audit:

- The diocese should acknowledge the impact of this review on those within the diocese, and make clear its renewed commitment to safeguarding those who come in to contact with the Church. This commitment should be made by the Archbishop and trustees.
- The diocese should develop a clear pathway for engaging with survivors, making clear the role of diocesan personnel, pastoral provision and access to specialist independent agencies. Those coming in contact with survivors should be trained and adequately equipped to provide necessary support.
- Governance arrangements should be reviewed to ensure that there is sufficient lay safeguarding expertise and that all safeguarding matters are reviewed by those who have the required knowledge, understanding and training. Safeguarding professionals should be viewed as experts and their opinions duly considered. Disagreements and escalation should be clearly recorded and a written process for resolution considered for occasions when disagreements occur.

¹ The full set of recommendations are detailed within pages 45-48 of the full report, which can be found at: <https://catholicsafeguarding.org.uk/audits-and-reports/cssa-audit-reports/>

- A safeguarding communication plan should be created and implemented, setting out a public commitment to safeguarding. Key people, including survivors, should be included in developing this plan.
- A safeguarding implementation plan should be developed, outlining the safeguarding priorities of the diocese and stating what will be achieved and by when in developing and maintaining a safe environment.
- Practice around volunteers should be strengthened through introducing policies to cover safe recruitment, role expectations, and removal from role.
- Links between the education department of the diocese and the safeguarding team should be strengthened with a formal information sharing agreement. This should be applied before any appointments are made to prominent roles such as governors, foundation governors and directors. Mandatory reporting by individuals of any prior concerns relating to their suitability to work in such roles should be considered.

1.4 The Safeguarding Review report also made a number of recommendations for consideration at a national level, which will not be considered within the current report.

1.5 The overall grading of *Early Progress* determined that the Diocese of Hexham & Newcastle would follow Pathway 3 of the CSSA follow-on audit process. As such, the CSSA will conduct a full re-audit of the Diocese within circa 18 months of the original Safeguarding Review report being finalised, with an interim targeted review at the 12-month point. The current report details the methodology and findings of the interim review, which focuses on the Diocese's progress in implementing processes and procedures in respect of Standard 1 of the national safeguarding standards², which relates to culture, leadership, and governance.

² Full details of the eight standards and underpinning sub standards are available at:
<https://catholicsafeguarding.org.uk/resources/the-eight-national-safeguarding-standards/>

2. Scope & Methodology

2.1 This follow-on audit drew on a narrower methodology than that employed in the substantive Safeguarding Review, which reflected the current focus on a single national safeguarding standard; this constituted the review of a range of documentary and digital evidence, as well as interviews with key Diocesan individuals. Casework was not completed as part of the follow-on audit.

2.2 In advance of the formal audit week, the Diocese provided the CSSA with a range of material to demonstrate relevant safeguarding activity over the preceding 12 months, which was supplemented by digital material available via the Diocesan website³. The following key documents were analysed by the CSSA, along with a range of material relating to safeguarding communications and events:

- Safeguarding Committee submission & minutes x 5
- Safeguarding Committee Terms of Reference (updated September 2023)
- Board of Trustees minutes (safeguarding excerpts) x 4
- Safeguarding Action Plan x 2
- Clergy training data spreadsheet
- Employee training data spreadsheet
- Draft Safeguarding Communication Plan
- Diocesan Safeguarding Guidelines
- Diocesan Safeguarding Policy
- Internal Data-Sharing Protocol: Education & Safeguarding
- Bishop Wright's Reflection on the Listening Exercises & the Results of the Questionnaire for the Dicastery Report
- Bishop's Wright's Diocesan Synodal Vision

2.3 In-person interviews took place with the following Diocesan individuals:

- Bishop Stephen Wright

³ <https://diocesehn.org.uk/>

- Vicar General
- Chief Operating Officer
- Safeguarding Subcommittee Chair (outgoing)
- Safeguarding Subcommittee Chair (incoming)
- Safeguarding Coordinator

2.4 The substantive follow-on audit took place during w/c 27.05.24, with the single CSSA analyst spending two days within the Diocese of Hexham & Newcastle to conduct the formal audit interviews.

3. Review of Standard 1: Safeguarding is embedded in the Church body's leadership, governance, ministry, and culture.

3.1 Governance processes have undergone some key developments that are driving improvements to Diocesan safeguarding practice and wider implementation of the national safeguarding standards.

3.1.1 The Board of Trustees now has a more even balance of lay and clergy trustees, and additional lay trustees have been identified to further support the Board with expertise in education and safeguarding; this will be accompanied by an additional formal amendment to the Articles of Association. There has been a refreshing of the clergy trustees, with the Vicar General remaining to provide consistency and support to the Bishop. Interviews demonstrated that these developments have been supported by a professionalisation of Board processes, with meetings running more smoothly and productively, and the Bishop encouraging an environment of challenge and discussion where individuals feel able to speak up and contribute.

3.1.2 The Safeguarding Committee has a new interim lay Chair, who is a longstanding trustee, and arrangements to appoint a permanent Chair are in the final stages; the Committee Terms of Reference (TOR) have been updated to reflect the permanent reversion to lay chairpersonship. The former interim Chair (a Religious Clergy member) provided robust business continuity throughout the past year and has been instrumental in developing and supporting the Diocese's Safeguarding Action Plan. Minutes demonstrate that the Committee is working as its TOR dictates, and Subcommittees are being set up to complete some operational aspects of Committee work, such as casework and reviewing policy & process, and to provide for a more streamlined and strategic overview from the substantive Committee. The work of the Committee is well-supported by the leadership, with the Vicar General representing the Bishop as one of the new clergy trustee members and the Bishop now attending at least one meeting per year. The Committee now routinely uses a formal document to make case recommendations to the Bishop, and interviews demonstrated that in the unlikely

event of any deviance from Committee advice, a full written rationale would be provided for transparency and accountability.

3.1.3 The previously stalled, wider governance review is now underway and is fully supported by the Diocesan leadership. Although this is not a bespoke safeguarding activity, the leadership has discussed that it may yield further opportunities to improve existing safeguarding processes and policies.

3.2 The Diocese has made real progress towards creating and embedding a culture of safeguarding, and this is being modelled by the leadership.

3.2.1 The Bishop sends a strong message that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, as demonstrated in his homilies, Synodal Vision, and the Diocesan website. Meeting minutes and interviews clearly demonstrate that key Diocesan individuals understand their roles and responsibilities in respect of safeguarding, both individually and in relation to the roles of others; importantly, individuals were seen to be acting on these responsibilities, and doing so in an open and collaborative manner, with interviews demonstrating particularly strong working relationships between the Bishop, Safeguarding Coordinator, Chief Operating Officer, and Safeguarding Committee Chair(s). Work in this area is being supported by development of formal safeguarding role descriptors to supplement those referred to on the Diocesan website and within safeguarding policies and TOR; some key roles, such as Support Clergy⁴ and Parish Safeguarding Representative (PSR), are in the final consultation and ratification stages, with plans to produce additional descriptors for the Safeguarding Committee and the full range of Diocesan volunteers. There are also plans to update the Safeguarding Committee TOR to clarify decision-making processes on volunteer suitability, which is a good example of diverting learning from safeguarding casework to practice development. More widely, Bishop Wright has promoted the Caring Safely for Others pastoral standards to all Diocesan clergy and development of a Volunteer Code of Conduct, which will also apply to trustees, is well underway.

⁴ The role of 'Support Clergy' varies across Dioceses but refers to a member of clergy who is independent to any Diocesan investigation process, and who acts as a point of contact and support to a clergy respondent.

3.2.2 Safeguarding permeates a much broader range of Diocesan activities. It is now a standing item on the agenda of all key leadership, curial, and parish committee meetings, which will support the embedding of a culture of safeguarding and provide enhanced risk management to the Diocese. Curial departments and Diocesan charities are now more effectively integrated: collaborative working between the Safeguarding Team and Education Service is now underpinned by a formal Internal Data-Sharing Protocol and there are plans to increase education expertise and representation on the Board of Trustees; oversight of the Youth Ministry Trust (YMT) is now more robust due to a new lay trustee sitting on the Boards of both the primary Diocesan charity and that of the YMT, and the YMT Designated Safeguarding Lead sitting as a member of both the Safeguarding Committee and Lourdes Pilgrimage Core Group. There is also a concerted effort underway to encourage stronger working relationships between lay and clergy, both within the curia and more widely, such as lay trustees attending clergy meetings to introduce themselves, and clergy and lay curial staff having shared lunches; the planned streamlining of Diocesan Deaneries has also been identified as being conducive to increased Safeguarding Team presence within parishes and the possibility of a return to attaching lay staff to Deanery areas.

3.3 The Diocese has a zero-tolerance approach to abuse that is clearly articulated within Bishop Wright's introduction to the Safeguarding section of the Diocesan website; it is underpinned by formal documentation such as the Diocesan Commitment to Survivors, Diocesan Safeguarding Policy, and Diocesan Safeguarding Guidelines. Meeting minutes and safeguarding reports demonstrated that the full range of safeguarding concerns are receiving prompt and effective interventions, with efforts being made to prevent lower-level concerns developing into more complex incidents. Leadership figures also discussed the importance of attending to lower-level concerns as potential indicators of wider abuse, and it was evident that the Safeguarding Review has yielded learning in this respect. Practice in this area is being further developed by the Safeguarding Team's creation of a formal Low-Level Concerns policy, the draft version of which awaits review and ratification by the Safeguarding Subcommittee and Board of Trustees.

3.4 The Diocese has prepared a detailed Safeguarding Action Plan in response to the 2023 CSSA Audit. The document was developed by a core group including the Chief Operating Officer, Safeguarding Committee Chair, Lay Trustee, and Deputy Safeguarding Coordinator⁵, with further development from the Safeguarding Coordinator and full Safeguarding Committee. The Plan is owned by the Board of Trustees, with the Safeguarding Committee providing robust quarterly oversight of the plan's implementation and reporting progress to the full Board, and the structure of the Plan has been integrated into Committee meeting agendas to support this oversight. The Plan is a quality document that is rooted in the recommendations of the Safeguarding Review; the core group has closely scrutinised the CSSA report to draw out every developmental opportunity and the resulting actions demonstrate a deep consideration of how best to improve in these areas and meet the Diocese's specific needs. It is also apparent that the Diocese is conducting additional strands of safeguarding development work, and the longer-term goal is to bring these together within the existing Plan so that it constitutes a wider, rolling Safeguarding Implementation Plan. The current Plan is progressing well, with activity being recorded against all actions, clear and appropriate ownership of individual actions, and resources being provided to ensure that matters can be effectively progressed.

3.5 The Diocese evidently also encourages a culture of transparency in respect of safeguarding, and this is being driven by the leadership. The Diocese has made a range of public commitments to safeguarding, not least those emanating from the Bishop. An excellent example of this is Bishop Wright's introduction to the Safeguarding pages of the Diocesan website (written and audio-visual), which deals explicitly with the work being completed to improve safeguarding practice; further transparency in this area is provided by the Safeguarding Action Plan being actively promoted and available via the Diocesan website, along with a bespoke email address for members of the public to contribute their thoughts and suggestions on the Plan. More widely, parishes have been supported to demonstrate their commitment to safeguarding, with the Safeguarding Team

⁵ An experienced Safeguarding Advisor acted in the role of Safeguarding Coordinator to cover a planned sabbatical for the substantive Safeguarding Coordinator.

producing bespoke refreshed safeguarding poster packs which have been disseminated across the Diocese. The Diocese has also devised a draft Safeguarding Communication Plan which awaits review and ratification by the Trustees; once approved, the document would benefit from being made publicly available to further demonstrate the transparency of Diocesan communications and to reinforce the key messages within the Policy, such as the Diocese's zero-tolerance approach to abuse.

3.6 Significant work has been undertaken to reach out to those who report having been harmed; the leadership has taken a driving role in this, and a range of evidence was seen to indicate that people were listened to and their views were used to drive developments to policy and practice.

3.6.1 There has been a concerted effort to engage with victim-survivors within the Diocese. Bishop Wright has forged a close working relationship with LOUDfence⁶, which facilitated the significant participation of a victim-survivor in his installation Mass and supported his homily message of support to those across the Diocese who have been harmed within the Church. The Diocese of Hexham & Newcastle hosted a formal ecumenical LOUDfence event with Church of England counterparts from the Diocese of Newcastle, which was supported by Bishop Wright via promotion in the Ad Clerum and his attendance at the formal Mass at St. Mary's Cathedral. Leadership interviews demonstrated the impact of these events, both personally and on their wider ministry, and these interactions have formed the basis for ongoing engagement to accompany victim-survivors and seek their input in developing Diocesan policy and processes. The Diocese also continues to provide reactive and bespoke support to victim-survivors in relation to formal casework.

3.6.2 More widely, the Diocese has conducted a series of listening exercises with Diocesan and Religious clergy, Deacons, lay employees, and parishioners in the wake of the Safeguarding Review. Bishop Wright's formal Reflection document, as well as a range of audit interviews, demonstrated that these have yielded

⁶ 'LOUDfence' is an initiative promoted by the 'Survivors' Voices' organization, which involves people tying coloured ribbons and messages to a fence in a public show of support and solidarity with those affected by abuse.

significant learning which is being diverted to develop practice in a number of areas, and some of the impact of this on safeguarding processes will be discussed later in this brief report. Interview evidence, and Bishop Wright's Reflection document, also acknowledge the deep hurt that has been felt across the Diocese, and there was an evident understanding that much work remains to be done to regain the trust of clergy, lay employees, and parishioners. The Diocese recognises the value of these exercises, and has scheduled further events that will be reflected on in the coming year to identify further developmental opportunities. The Diocese has also provided targeted support to parishes that have been particularly impacted by aspects of the Safeguarding Review, with the Bishop pairing his visitations with additional opportunities for parishioners to meet with him and raise their concerns.

3.7 A range of actions are being taken to identify, mitigate, and manage safeguarding risks across the Diocese. Oversight of safeguarding KPIs is now supported by the Safeguarding Action Plan, which includes key risks, such as DBS⁷ and training compliance, safer recruitment processes, and casework; with regular monitoring of the Plan by the Committee, Board, Bishop, and Chief Operating Officer. The Diocese has engaged with the CSSA to ensure that a programme of in-person training has been delivered to all clergy, with the Safeguarding Team providing enhanced support to sick & retired clergy to meet their requirements. Leadership support to training sessions has been provided by the attendance of the Bishop and Chief Operating Officer at in-person sessions, and the Safeguarding Team has worked hard to promote the new CSSA online training provision⁸ to all clergy, PSRs and volunteers. DBS was a key area of risk that has seen a commendable turnaround, with the Diocese now having 100% clergy compliance and near 100% volunteer compliance; there is a process in place to ensure that the 3-yearly backlog does not repeat, including bringing checks forward and the Safeguarding Team working tenaciously to encourage a significant percentage of the volunteer workforce to sign up to the DBS online

⁷ DBS – the Disclosure and Barring Service; a government organisation which facilitates the completion of criminal records checks, as well as consulting other material and databases which might suggest that someone is unsuitable to work with children or adults at risk.

⁸ The CSSA Learning Management System (LMS) provides bespoke training packages to clergy and lay ministering, working, and volunteering in Dioceses within England & Wales.

Update Service. The Safeguarding Committee is trialling increased oversight of safeguarding casework, and a Subcommittee is being set up to review Safeguarding Team contact sheets and provide an extra layer of assurance with regards to lower-level concerns; the latter development is notable in that it arose directly from casework learning. The Safeguarding Risk Register continues to be reviewed by the Chief Operating Officer and Safeguarding Coordinator on a quarterly basis, in advance of the Safeguarding Committee and Board meetings, and there are plans for the Safeguarding Committee to take a more active role in its oversight.

3.8 There has been a significant investment in safeguarding since the CSSA Review, in terms of financial resources, human resources, and people's own personal resources. As has been drawn out above, the Diocese has ensured that funding was available for both proactive and reactive initiatives relating to victim-survivors and those who were harmed more widely by the events leading up to the Safeguarding Review and its findings. The leadership recognised that governance processes were under-resourced, and there has been good work undertaken to increase lay expertise and representation in key positions on the Board and Safeguarding Committee. Safeguarding Team capacity has been increased with the addition of a second Safeguarding Advisor, which will support both the Safeguarding Coordinator to take a more strategic role and the Team to complete a broader range of proactive and preventative safeguarding activity, as well as having a greater presence in parishes. The Safeguarding Administration Support Team is fully staffed, and efforts are ongoing to ensure that any PSR vacancies are filled or covered as they arise in the expected churn. It is also evident that people have dedicated considerable personal resources to driving improvements to safeguarding practice, governance processes, and working relationships; this was seen to be underpinned by a culture of mutual respect and gratitude for the work and ministry of others, and interviews demonstrated that people feel supported and happier in their work as a result.

3.9 The Diocese has engaged proactively with the CSSA to maximise opportunities to learn from the Safeguarding Review, and the events that led up to it, as well as to develop safeguarding practice within the Diocese and more widely. The Chief

Operating Officer, Safeguarding Coordinator, and Deputy Safeguarding Coordinator have periodically met with CSSA analysts to provide updates on the implementation of the national safeguarding standards and the development and progress of the Safeguarding Action Plan. Additionally, the Safeguarding Team has engaged with initiatives facilitated by the CSSA, such as 4-monthly Safeguarding Coordinator Conferences and a briefing on the newly formed National Tribunal Service. The Diocese also hosted a formal 'lessons learned' review meeting with key Diocesan and CSSA figures to support the development of CSSA audit processes and review national issues arising from the Safeguarding Review. Practice in this area is underpinned by the Bishop's promotion of Diocesan engagement with the CSSA, such as is evidenced in his appointment message to the whole Diocese.

4. Summary & Recommendations

4.1 The Diocese has made significant progress in developing its safeguarding practice since the 2023 CSSA Safeguarding Review. A comprehensive Safeguarding Action Plan is in place and is progressing well; governance arrangements have been developed in such a way that they oversee and drive the Plan, as well as wider implementation of the national safeguarding standards and the continuous improvement of safeguarding practice. There is strong evidence of the developing culture of safeguarding within the Diocese, with better integration of curial departments, leadership and parish committees, and subsidiary charities; safeguarding was seen to comprise a key consideration in all of these areas, and information flow between them is more effective and underpinned by policy and process. Working relationships within the Diocese are more effective, inclusive, and harmonious, and there is support and resources available to help people discharge their safeguarding duties effectively, as well as leadership gratitude for the hard work being completed across the Diocese. Importantly, the Diocese was seen to be working in a transparent manner with regards to safeguarding, and striving to welcome, engage with, and listen to those who report having been harmed within the Diocese, as well as providing them with the means to take an active role in the ongoing development and improvement of Diocesan safeguarding practice; this has been further supported by the Diocese striving to extract learning from safeguarding activity and diverting it to continuous improvement. Key to these developments has been Bishop Wright's strong leadership and public commitment to effective safeguarding, which has empowered others to make their own positive contributions to promoting a safer environment within the Diocese, and highlighted that effective leadership support is critical to the integrity of safeguarding practice and an embedding of a culture of safeguarding.

4.2 The following recommendations are made to support ongoing development in relation to Standard 1, and it is recognised that these primarily reflect the work that is ongoing or planned:

- Take forward plans to develop the Safeguarding Action Plan into a wider Safeguarding Implementation Plan that covers all activity taking place in

respect of implementing the national safeguarding standards;
consideration to including the current recommendations, where
appropriate.

- Continue to develop and ratify role descriptors for the full range of Diocesan safeguarding roles; consideration to making these publicly available via the Diocesan website.
- Ratification, dissemination, and embedding of the draft Diocesan Low Level Concerns Policy.
- Ratification, dissemination, and embedding of the draft Safeguarding Communication Policy.
- Identification of opportunities to develop safeguarding practice as part of the wider Diocesan Governance Review.
- Continue plans to develop lay expertise on the Board of Trustees, with finalising appointment of a permanent lay Safeguarding Committee Chair as a priority.
- Ongoing review of any additional planned listening exercises to maximise opportunities for learning and drive continuous improvement to safeguarding practice.