

Congregation of Servants of Mary (London)

Baseline Audit Report
November 2025

Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Methodology	4
3. Audit grading.....	6
4. Audit findings against each standard.....	7
5. Summary of overall findings	18
6. Recommendations	18
7. Arrangements for follow-up.....	19

1. Introduction

1.1 This is the baseline audit of the safeguarding arrangements of the Congregation of Servants of Mary (London) also known as Servite Sisters. The Servite Sisters are a religious Congregation within the larger Servite Order, tracing their origins back to 13th century Florence, Italy where seven wealthy merchants, known as the Seven Holy Founders, withdrew from society to live lives of prayer and penance, eventually forming the Servite Order. The Servite Sisters formed a distinct branch focused on serving the Blessed Virgin Mary through service, missionary work, education, and aid for the sick, poor, and those in crisis. This charism was described by the Prioress as “wherever someone is in need, we try to be present in whatever way we can”. The community in London was established in 1864 and the Servite Sisters became actively involved in education, managing schools and providing religious instruction. They also undertook work such as caring for the sick, the elderly and orphans. More recently, as the sisters are gradually retiring from full time active ministry, the Servite Sisters have focused on social and pastoral works, including family support, and chaplaincy in various settings.

1.2 The community of Servite Sisters in the UK is led by a Prioress who is supported by an Assistant Prioress and the Head of Trustees with three other sisters who are Trustees forming the leadership group. The current Prioress and her assistant have been in post since February 2025, and their term of office will be until the Congregational Chapter meeting in 2029 providing continuity in oversight and governance. There are four Trustees for the charity who meet at least quarterly throughout the year. The Servite Sisters in the UK number 21. Five sisters live in St Mary’s Convent in London which is also the site of the Servite Sisters’ registered charity offices. Three sisters live together in Chelmsford, Essex and eight sisters live independently across London, Bishops Stortford and Bognor Regis. In addition, there are five Servite Sisters who reside in a privately run Care Quality Commission (CQC)¹ registered care home in Littlehampton. Most of the sisters are now fully retired, however four remain active in ministry on a part time basis providing chaplaincy

¹ [Care Quality Commission](#)

to a school, one sister works in facilitation of international religious groups, working as a school governor and providing chaplaincy for Great Ormond Street Hospital in London once per week. The Prioress works as the archivist for the Congregation.

1.3 The CSSA assess Religious Life Groups against a categorisation scheme based on the safeguarding risk that is likely to be associated with their activities and size, from Level 1, a small community with minimal outreach and no known safeguarding concerns known as an Apostolic or an Enclosed Order, Level 2, a medium sized community with some outreach with vulnerable populations and/or providing some Diocesan activities such as a Parish Priest and Level 3 a large community and/or one with significant outreach with vulnerable populations and/or a disproportionately high number of open safeguarding cases. The Servite Sisters were graded as Level 1 Apostolic for the purpose of this audit.

1.4 The CSSA recognises the rich diversity of the Religious and acknowledges that the Religious Life Groups within any category may vary significantly in terms of size, ministry and safeguarding practice. Consequently, CSSA analysts may use professional judgement to ensure that Religious Life Groups are graded against the eight National Safeguarding Standards² in such a way that reflects their uniqueness.

2. Methodology

2.1 The CSSA notified the Servite Sisters of their intention to audit on 31 March 2025. An information request was made the same day that included the provision of a self-assessment document with an agreed completion date of 2 June 2025. An initial pre-audit meeting was held between the CSSA analyst, the head Trustee and the safeguarding lead on 31 March 2025 to discuss the audit requirements and a scheduled date for the audit of 1 July 2025 was agreed. A further email confirming

² Full details of the eight standards and underpinning sub standards are available here: [The Eight National Safeguarding Standards](#)

the arrangements was sent by the CSSA analyst to the safeguarding lead on the 27 June 2025.

2.2 In advance of the audit week the Servite Sisters were asked to submit a self-assessment tool providing information and supporting evidence about their compliance with the eight National Safeguarding Standards and their progress in the implementation of them.

2.3 Information provided within the self-assessment was analysed by the CSSA, alongside additional documentary evidence provided by the community leaders and Trustees. Further confirmation of engagement was sought from the Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS)³. This evidence was assessed against a bespoke Level 1 Apostolic Maturity Matrix⁴ to arrive at ratings for each standard and a combined overall grade.

2.4 The following sources of information were utilised in this audit:

2.4.1 Interviews

Interviews were held with the following individuals on 1 July 2025

- The Prioress
- The Assistant Prioress
- The Head of Trustees
- The Designated Safeguarding Lead
- The Trustees
- A focus group made up of members of the Servite Sisters community.

2.4.2 A document review was undertaken on the following:

- Safeguarding Policy
- Roles and responsibilities for the Designated Safeguarding Lead

³ The Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS) is an independent team of safeguarding professionals offering safeguarding services to the Religious of the Catholic Church in England and Wales.

⁴ [APPENDIX-5-LEVEL-1-APOSTOLIC-MATURITY-MATRIX-February-2025.docx](#)

- Minutes of Leadership meetings and Trustee meetings.
- Training records
- Safer recruitment records
- The community Safeguarding Information Pack
- Additional policies including Complaints and Whistleblowing policies
- Safeguarding Development Plan

2.4.3 Casework review

No new allegations or concerns have been reported to, or about, the Servite Sisters within the previous 12 months therefore it was not possible to examine casework during this audit or assess some aspects of direct safeguarding practices.

3. Audit grading

3.1 Practice was assessed against the eight National Safeguarding Standards adopted by the Catholic Church in England and Wales and graded in accordance with the CSSA Maturity Matrix for Level 1 Apostolic Religious Life Groups.

3.2 Potential audit ratings against each standard, and the final overall ratings, are: Met, Met with recommendations and Not Met.

Overall grading	Met
Standard 1 – Safeguarding is embedded in the Church body’s leadership, governance, ministry and culture	Met
Standard 2 – Communicating the Church’s safeguarding message	Met
Standard 3 – Engaging with and caring for those who report having been harmed	Met

Standard 4 – Effective management of allegations and concerns	Met
Standard 5 – Management and support of subjects of allegations and concerns (respondents)	Met
Standard 6 – Robust human resource management	Met
Standard 7 – Training and support for safeguarding	Met with recommendations
Standard 8 – Quality assurance and continuous Improvement	Met

4. Audit findings against each standard

4.1 Standard 1 Safeguarding is embedded in the Church body's leadership, governance, ministry and culture

4.1.1 The Servite Sisters have a comprehensive safeguarding policy that clearly sets out the roles and responsibilities for all in relation to safeguarding practice. It was updated using the RLSS templates in 2024 and is reviewed annually. The policy sets out a One Church Approach⁵ to safeguarding and applies to all workers within the Servite Sisters including Religious, lay, voluntary or employees regardless of their role or the activities they undertake. The Servite Sisters have a Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), a voluntary role undertaken by a lay person with a significant amount of experience in safeguarding. There are clearly defined roles, responsibilities and expectations for the DSL who provides independent scrutiny

⁵ [K.3: Embedding a culture of safeguarding and the 'One Church' approach | IICSA Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#)

and support for the Servite Sisters in their discussions and decision-making processes on safeguarding practice. The DSL has been delegated decision-making powers which are clearly set out in the memorandum of understanding between the two parties.

4.1.2 The Servite Sisters' leadership is provided by the Prioress and Assistant Prioress who meet monthly. The Leadership and Trustees are responsible amongst other things for driving forward the safeguarding agenda for the community. Trustees meetings are attended by the DSL who provides additional expertise and who has responsibility for the oversight and implementation of the safeguarding plan. There are four Trustees for the charity, with Trustees' meetings taking place at least quarterly. The Head of Trustees is also the Safeguarding Trustee who works very closely with the DSL to support and enable the implementation of the safeguarding plan. Council members have completed safeguarding training with the RLSS. In addition, the Trustees have completed safeguarding training as well as Trustee training. The DSL has completed safeguarding lead training with RLSS. All Council and Trustee meetings are recorded, and the minutes showed safeguarding as a standing agenda item with records of decisions and follow up included.

4.1.3 There is a safeguarding plan in place that includes the sharing of Integrity in Ministry⁶ with the community. The document has been shared with the sisters via email but is also available in hard copy format for those who prefer this. To help the sisters understand how both Integrity in Ministry and the eight National Safeguarding Standards relate to their roles and responsibilities the DSL discusses their relevance with them individually as part of her visit schedule, which is an integral part of the safeguarding plan. Other elements of the safeguarding plan include the communication of current safeguarding messages to the sisters and ensuring that all are up to date with any changes in legislation or policy that will affect safeguarding practice.

⁶ Integrity in Ministry is a code of conduct of Religious engaged in ministry in the Catholic Church in England and Wales

4.1.4 A further element is the provision and maintenance of a safe environment for the sisters. The Prioress has undertaken a programme of meeting individually with sisters to hear from them about how they see their future and their current situation regarding their health and wellbeing. The transition into retirement has been a challenge for some of the sisters and these meetings are designed to help them to plan for a fulfilling retirement as well as for later life care. This has included the introduction of living wills that set out the sister's wishes regarding end-of-life care and funeral arrangements. Sisters who have been unable to live independently have been supported to move into a CQC registered care home and are visited regularly to maintain their contact with the wider community. The five sisters living in St Mary's Convent are supported by the wider community to remain there through the identification of risk and the instigation of mitigations including security measures for the house and ensuring that vulnerable sisters are not left alone at the premises. Risk assessments are completed annually, monitored throughout the year and updated as required. One of the main risks identified is the dispersal of the sisters across the country. Considering this, and in addition to the measures put in place for the convent, the DSL regularly contacts all the sisters living independently regarding safeguarding, checking how they are and if there are any issues or concerns that need to be shared with the senior leadership. The Prioress visits the sisters in the care home monthly and those in the community every three months. All sisters in the care home have an advocate who is the Servite safeguarding Trustee who proactively engages with the management of the declining health of the individuals to ensure their needs and wishes are met.

4.1.5 The Servite Sisters have contracts with both the RLSS and the CSSA and have evidence of proactively engaging with both. Sisters have attended training and the RLSS conferences and all spoken to were aware of how to contact RLSS if they needed clarification or support with anything. Evidence showed that the sisters contacted RLSS for advice about updating the policies and procedures which are now based on the RLSS templates and with their support these now meet the requirements of the eight National Safeguarding Standards. The Servite Sisters also

use RLSS to support them with their Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)⁷ checks and the provision of training and there was evidence of interaction between the DSL and RLSS to facilitate these things.

Graded: Met

4.2 Standard 2 Communicating the Church's safeguarding message

4.2.1 The safeguarding plan includes a communication plan that sets out the priorities for the leadership of the Servite Sisters to ensure that all safeguarding messages are shared with the community. The stated aim of the communications plan is to continually highlight the importance of safeguarding in the daily life of the community and actions describe how this will be achieved. As part of this process, periodically, the Council and Trustees share the RLSS priority at the time via email with the whole community and this is followed up with discussions at community meetings. Part of the current communication plan is looking at appropriate ways to communicate to the sisters the revised safeguarding policies and procedures once these have had their annual review in July 2025.

4.2.2 Safeguarding messages are on display in the form of posters at St Mary's Convent and are included in the safeguarding folder that all sisters have a copy of in their individual places of residence. This folder contains the safeguarding policy, the complaints and whistleblowing policies, templates for reporting and recording safeguarding concerns as well as the contact details for the DSL and for RLSS. Every house also has an RLSS fridge magnet with information and contact details on it for ease of access for the sisters and any visitors to their homes. In addition to the safeguarding statement and contact details of the DSL and RLSS, the convent (which is also the registered Charity offices of the Servites in the UK) has

⁷ DBS [Disclosure and Barring Service - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service)

information on display about the services provided by Safe Spaces⁸, an organisation that works with the victims and survivors of abuse by the church.

4.2.3 The Servite Sisters have been proactive in working with other organisations to promote safeguarding and improve awareness and practice. As well as established links with RLSS, they have developed relationships and have direct links with the Conference of Religious⁹, CSSA, Age UK¹⁰, Silverline¹¹, ensure regular attendance at the Catholic Charity Conference¹² and work with specific safeguarding leads and agencies in their parish ministry, chaplaincy and education roles which includes being aware of the responsibilities in PREVENT¹³.

Graded: Met

4.3 Standard 3 Engaging with and caring for those who report having been harmed

4.3.1 The Servite Sisters spoken to at audit demonstrated a good understanding of the need to engage with and listen with compassion to those that report harm and the importance of reassuring them that their disclosure will be passed on to the correct person using the procedures outlined in their safeguarding policy. All were aware that it is not their role to investigate or make judgements but to act with compassion and to ensure that advice is sought from the RLSS as soon as practicably possible on the next steps to be taken. As part of this process an RLSS

⁸ Safe Spaces Safe Spaces is a free and independent support service, providing a confidential, personal, and safe space for anyone who has been abused by someone in the Church or as a result of their relationship with the Church of England, the Catholic Church in England and Wales or the Church in Wales

⁹ [Conference of Religious](#)

¹⁰ [Age UK | The UK's leading charity helping every older person who needs us](#)

¹¹ [The Silver Line Helpline | Age UK](#)

¹² [Charity Conference | Catholic Charity Conference](#)

¹³ [Prevent duty training: Learn how to support people susceptible to radicalisation | Prevent duty training](#)

information leaflet would be provided to the individual making the disclosure or raising the concern.

4.3.2 The procedure for responding to a concern is clearly set out in the safeguarding policy including the need to engage with external organisations for advice and to secure the necessary care for the person making the disclosure. If an individual was at immediate risk of harm relevant statutory agencies would be contacted dependent on the situation, ensuring a record is kept of any actions taken which would be passed to the DSL. For all who disclose harm, the RLSS would be contacted to assist the Servite Sisters to source professional counselling and to plan their response to ensure the best outcome for the individual concerned. For those Servite Sisters still in active ministry, if a disclosure was made to them in this context, they would follow the policies and procedures of the organisation they were working within. There was also an awareness demonstrated at all interviews undertaken that disclosures can have an impact on the person receiving them and support and pastoral care may be required and would be facilitated as needed.

4.3.3 The Servite Sisters have not had any recent (within the last 12 months) experience of engaging with those who report being harmed. The experiences of those who have reported harm has been learned from the communications from the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales¹⁴, the RLSS Conference and CSSA communications, as well as from input and networking at safeguarding Conferences. This learning is shared with the sisters reinforcing the rationale behind the policy and processes in place and the need to learn from victims and survivors.

Graded: Met

¹⁴ [Catholic Church in England and Wales – Catholic Bishops' Conference](#)

4.4 Standard 4 Effective management of allegations and concerns

4.4.1 The Servite Sisters' safeguarding policy clearly sets out the processes to be followed should a sister witness a safeguarding concern or direct harm, or if an incident of harm was reported to them. The safeguarding folder has within it a document describing the actions to be taken and a form to be completed to ensure that any report made has the basic information needed for the DSL to be able to refer to RLSS for advice and support or to be able to report to statutory authorities if required. All sisters have undertaken basic safeguarding training so are able to identify safeguarding concerns and those that are in active ministry have in addition completed advanced safeguarding training to further enhance their knowledge. All sisters have access to the DSL for advice and support in recording and transferring a safeguarding concern to RLSS or to statutory authorities, and all reported that the DSL would be their first point of contact. In the absence of the DSL all sisters would contact RLSS directly if required and would also notify the Congregational Prioress, the Prioress and the Safeguarding Trustee. Any safeguarding allegations and concerns would be reported to and discussed at the Council and Trustees meetings, and they would maintain the oversight of the management of the issue and outcomes. Sisters working for other organisations would follow their reporting procedures if they witnessed an incident or received a disclosure during their ministry.

4.4.2 There is an awareness in the senior leadership of the increasing risk of harm being reported by the more vulnerable sisters with additional physical or health needs who may be the victim of or who may witness harm in a care setting. The policy and procedures for reporting would be followed in the same way with the DSL taking the lead on information gathering and referrals as well as liaison with RLSS. All incidences would again be reported to the Community Prioress and Trustees.

4.4.3 The Servite Sisters have not had to manage any reports of harm or allegations in the past 12 months, nor have they had the need to report to statutory authorities. The safeguarding policy is clear on how this should be done and with it having been

developed with the advice of RLSS, this is consistent with both the requirements of civil and canon law.

4.4.4 The reporting template and policy have been written to support the sisters to make accurate, appropriate and objective records of any safeguarding concern or allegation raised. This documentation would be given to the DSL and would be kept and stored in a locked cabinet within the Charity offices in line with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)¹⁵ requirements. The sisters demonstrated an understanding of the need to take only basic information down and to report the concern using the words of the person raising it in order not to misinterpret or misrepresent their allegation or to jeopardise any statutory investigation. The sisters have received training in reporting an allegation from RLSS and this process is re-enforced in their discussions and updates when they meet one-to-one with the DSL.

Graded: Met

4.5 Standard 5 Management and support of subjects of allegations and concerns (respondents)

4.5.1 The Prioress, the assistant Prioress and the Trustees demonstrated an understanding of the need for any members of the community who are the subject of an allegation to receive emotional, physical and spiritual support and have access to financial and legal resources. If a sister was the subject of an allegation they would be asked to voluntarily step back from their ministry (where applicable) and the Council would find a safe space for them to live whilst any investigation was active. The RLSS would be informed and would complete a risk assessment and provide management, monitoring and support advice for the respondent. This would inform the Congregational Prioress, the Prioress, the Assistant Prioress and the Trustees of the need for any additional psychological support and legal

¹⁵ GDPR governs how the personal data of individuals may be processed and transferred

representation as well as inform them of further actions they may need to take such as informing their insurers and reporting to the Charity Commission.¹⁶ In addition to contacting the RLSS the Congregational Prioress, the Prioress, Assistant Prioress and the Trustees would liaise with the relevant diocesan safeguarding lead if required through the DSL to inform them of the situation and management plan.

4.5.2 The Servite Sisters have access to alternative accommodation for a respondent in one of the small community houses owned by the order. Support for the respondent would be provided by a named sister who would accompany them pending investigation. The Servite Sisters have one sister who is trained in Canon Law and following the update of their constitution in 2016 they also have links with Canon Lawyers in Rome through the Congregational Prioress. The Servite Sisters also have civil lawyers who could be approached if required.

Graded: Met

4.6 Standard 6 Robust human resource management

4.6.1 The Servite Sisters have a robust safer recruitment policy for lay staff and volunteers that requires that all are subject to the appropriate DBS checks in line with both statutory and Catholic Church requirements. Any appointment will only be made after a successful interview and the provision of two references along with a satisfactory DBS check. The DSL takes responsibility for the management of DBS checks for the Servite Sisters including those required for the sisters in active ministry. In addition, sisters providing ministry in other organisations are subject to their safer recruitment requirements resulting in some sisters having multiple DBS certificates which they keep in their personal possession. The Servite Sisters do not at present have any employees and have one volunteer, the DSL. A register of DBS checks is maintained by the DSL, and all were current at the time of audit. The Trustees maintain oversight of safer recruitment processes and any issues

¹⁶ [The Charity Commission - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/the-charity-commission)

reported to them by the DSL regarding DBS checks and requirements. RLSS support the Servite Sisters to complete DBS checks through uCheck¹⁷ when required. The employment of the DSL was completed using these safer recruitment policies and records showed that she has a current DBS certificate in place. Any blemishes following a DBS check would be discussed with RLSS and actions taken following their advice.

4.6.2 The Servite Sisters can no longer accommodate anyone seeking to explore a vocation to join the Congregation in the UK. The Servite Sisters in the UK instead provide funding for the formation to Servite Religious Life of women in Europe and Africa. The Servite Sisters do not have visiting clergy as most sisters either attend Mass in person at local churches or join an online Mass.

4.6.3 The Servite Sisters have a complaints policy which has been taken from the RLSS template and adapted to suit the requirements of the community. There is also a whistleblowing policy in place. If the sisters received a complaint from an external source they would contact RLSS for advice on how to proceed. The DSL has been given the overall authority to report to RLSS any Sister in the Congregation who is causing a concern, including the Leadership Team members and the Trustees.

Graded: Met

4.7 Standard 7 Training and support for safeguarding

4.7.1 The safeguarding policy clearly sets out the training requirements for those in positions of leadership, the DSL and for the community. Training records showed that all sisters are up to date with their safeguarding training. In addition, the Prioress and Safeguarding Trustee have attended the RLSS conferences and shared their learning from this with the sisters. All sisters have access to RLSS training and new opportunities for training are shared with them as they arise. The

¹⁷ [uCheck – Online Background Checks – Rapid, Trusted, Secure](#)

Prioress and Trustees have oversight of the training compliance which is reported to them by the DSL.

4.7.2 There is currently no mechanism for evaluating the effectiveness of the training provided to the sisters other than that undertaken by the training provider RLSS. An internal analysis of the effectiveness of the training provided would help inform the Prioress and Trustees of any areas for development and any additional training needs the sisters might have. These could be actioned through further training from RLSS or other accredited safeguarding training providers.

Graded: Met with recommendations

4.8 Standard 8 Quality assurance and continuous improvement

4.8.1 There is a culture of 'safeguarding as everyone's business' that drives the leadership of the Servite Sisters as is evident in their safeguarding plan which has identified areas for improvement following the annual evaluation of safeguarding practice. They have aligned themselves with safeguarding organisations including RLSS and the CSSA and have engaged with them to get the support they need to develop strategies and actions that meet the requirements of the eight National Safeguarding Standards. There is a culture of continuous learning from the experiences of others through their engagement with church organisations including the Conference of Religious and the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

4.8.2 The Servite Sisters have a robust governance structure in place that provides oversight of compliance with the policies and procedures put in place to promote good safeguarding practice. Safeguarding practice is reviewed on an annual basis, and the safeguarding plan is updated to reflect any changes that might be required. The DSL works individually with the sisters to support them to understand and implement the changes and reports any issues back to the Trustees. The leadership of the Servite Sisters understand the importance of hearing the voice of the victim survivor and have proactively sought opportunities to learn from the

experiences of others. The Prioress and Trustees all understand their reporting responsibilities and actively seek advice from the RLSS as required.

Graded: Met

5. Summary of overall findings

5.1 The Servite Sisters have shown at audit that they have fully engaged with the requirements of the eight National Safeguarding Standards and have put in place robust policies and procedures to ensure that they can comply with these. They have sought the advice and support of the RLSS and CSSA to achieve this and have welcomed review of their current practice engaging well in the audit process. Due to the lack of any need arising the application of their policies has not been tested however, the leadership, the DSL and community members are all clear on their roles and responsibilities which they take very seriously. The Congregational Leadership of the Servite Sisters demonstrated a commitment to ensuring that safeguarding is everyone's business and work hard to raise and maintain the awareness of the sisters. The Prioress, Council and Trustees understand the need for continuous review and evaluation of their practice to drive improvement.

6. Recommendations

To support improvement, the following recommendations are made:

Within 6 months

- The safeguarding folder should be reviewed by the sisters to evaluate its effectiveness and to identify any additional material or information that would improve it.
- The leadership of the Servite Sisters should evaluate the training received by the sisters to identify its effectiveness and any additional training requirements. Consideration should be given to sourcing any bespoke training from alternative accredited training providers.

Within 12 months

- An internal self-assessment completed annually using the CSSA self-assessment tool would provide assurance for the Servite Sisters that they are maintaining the standards achieved at this audit.

7. Arrangements for follow-up

7.1 In line with this overall rating of Met a re-audit of the Group by the CSSA should not normally take place for a minimum three-year period, subject to no indicators of a raised safeguarding risk arising.