

# Annual Diocesan Safeguarding Report - 2025

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MAY 2026

# Foreword from Andrew Bickley

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I am pleased to present to Diocesan Synod the 2025 annual safeguarding report for the Diocese of Oxford, covering the period from January to December 2025. This report outlines the safeguarding work undertaken across the diocese during the year, with a continued focus on creating safer environments and responding with care, accountability, and compassion.

As I have only been in post for a short time, having been appointed Independent Chair of the Diocesan Safeguarding Panel (DSP) in January 2026, much of this report reflects diocesan safeguarding activity led by others. In terms of the Panels contributions, I would like to express my sincere thanks to my predecessor, Peter Hay CBE, and to all independent Panel members, clergy, staff, and volunteers for their commitment and care during the reporting period. I also want to acknowledge, with gratitude, the contributions of survivors, whose experience, insight, and courage continue to inform and strengthen the diocese's work towards a safer Church.

In preparing this report, I have been reminded that safeguarding work is both complex and deeply human, and that its full reality cannot always be captured in a traditional report format. While the work can at times appear to be shaped by reviews, governance structures, and processes, its true focus is always on people- perpetrators, survivors, worshipping communities, clergy, staff, volunteers, and all those who have a right to safety, dignity, and respect within the life of the Church.

# Foreword, continued

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This report describes, in broad terms, the work carried out across the diocese to deliver the full range of safeguarding services, the structures in place to support that work, and the scale and nature of the activity undertaken. It offers insight into progress made, highlights achievements and ongoing challenges, and sets out future areas of focus. In doing so, it reflects a broader picture of safeguarding activity and data that extends beyond the Panel's formal independent scrutiny and assurance role.

Over the coming year, I will work with colleagues to build on these reporting arrangements and to develop a more nuanced account of the Panel's work, including how it has operated, what it has done, and the impact and outcomes of its contribution. This will form an important part of the Panel's accountability to survivors, stakeholders, and the wider diocese, while also supporting greater transparency, reflection, and learning in its work.

I am confident in the diocese's commitment and capacity to advance its safeguarding priorities, and in the Panel's experience and capability to provide careful, robust, and high-quality safeguarding scrutiny and assurance for the Church of England and our communities.

Andrew Bickley (BA Hons), Independent Chair  
Oxford Diocesan Safeguarding Panel, May 2026

# Introduction

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## The report

This report is an overview of safeguarding work in the diocese over the past year. We welcome your curiosity about our work and appreciate any questions or suggestions you may have.

The Safeguarding Panel has an important scrutiny role to undertake and has been developing ways to make its work more transparent and accountable to stakeholders within the diocese. The Panel is formally accountable to Diocesan Synod and the Bishop's Council. It is also accountable to Parishes particularly to the volunteers who lead safeguarding and to those who have been harmed or feel unsafe within the Church.

# National Context

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2025 marked an important period for safeguarding within the Church of England.

A significant milestone in the Church's safeguarding development came with the General Synod vote in February 2025, which approved proposals designed to strengthen independence, clarify responsibilities, and improve national safeguarding oversight. These reforms are expected to have direct implications for dioceses, particularly in relation to governance and quality assurance arrangements. In February 2026 there was unanimous endorsement of an outline structure from the General Synod and work to develop these arrangements is currently being designed and consulted upon.

A significant challenge for safeguarding within the Church followed on from publication of the Makin Review in November 2024, an independent investigation into the Church's handling of decades long abuse committed by John Smyth against children and young people. The Panel has continued to observe a substantial and sustained rise in safeguarding contacts and referrals following the reports publication. Evidence presented to both the Panel and Bishop's Council indicated that these increases reflect an ongoing systemic change rather than a short-term spike in activity.

# Safeguarding Structures in the Oxford Diocese

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The DSP scrutinises the diocese's safeguarding work to enable it to give confidence to the Bishop's Council and Diocesan Synod that sound safeguarding policies, practices and procedures are in place. The Panel offers informed and independent challenge and support. We have strengthened the DSP by being able to recruit people with both lived experience and current safeguarding experience. The current membership of the Panel is listed below.

The Panel is supported by a Quality Assurance Reference Group (QARG) which meets three times a year to examine practice issues.

The safeguarding team has a Head of Safeguarding (DSO), a Deputy DSO/Area Safeguarding Advisor (ASA) and three Area Safeguarding Advisors, a Training Officer and two part time administrative support staff member. The Head of Safeguarding professionally supervises the Cathedral Safeguarding Officer under a Service Level Agreement.

The Diocese has supervisory oversight from the National Safeguarding Team. This was a recommendation made by the Independent Inquiry in Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA).

# Panel members and attendees

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- Detective Superintendent Adrian Thomas, Independent Member representing Thames Valley Police
- Andrew Bickley, Independent Chair of the Safeguarding Panel
- Charnelle Stylianides, Director of People
- Carol Hough, Independent Member
- Carol Lister, Representing Parish Safeguarding Officers (Oxford Archdeaconry)
- Carol Older, Independent Member
- David Horrocks, Representing Parish Safeguarding Officers (Berkshire Archdeaconry)
- Eliza Wheaton, Independent Member
- Fiona Goussard, Independent Member representing Lay Leaders (LADO)
- The Ven. Jonathan Chaffey, Archdeacon of Oxford
- Louise Whitehead, Head of Safeguarding
- Mark Humphriss, Diocesan Secretary
- The Rt. Rev. Mary Gregory, Bishop of Reading, Lead Safeguarding Bishop
- Sue Newling, Representing Parish Safeguarding Officers (Buckingham Archdeaconry)

# Strategy

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In 2024, the Panel adopted a new strategic framework to underpin future work.

Five themes were identified, which align with the Church's national safeguarding standards:

**Objective 1 Prevention:** The Diocese effectively enables preventative safeguarding alongside reacting to safeguarding situations.

**Objective 2 Culture, Leadership, and Capacity:** High quality safeguarding practices and outcomes are achieved across the diocese through safe and healthy cultures, effective leadership, sufficient resourcing and robust scrutiny.

**Objective 3 Recognising, Assessing and Managing Risk:** Risk assessments, safeguarding agreements and associated processes are of a high quality and are underpinned by effective partnership working.

**Objective 4 Victims and Survivors:** Victims and survivors experience a positive and timely response to disclosures and their subsequent support needs are met.

**Objective 5 Learning, Supervision and Support:** All those engaged in safeguarding receive appropriate learning, professional development, support and supervision to respond to safeguarding situations, victims and survivors, and respondents effectively.

# Objective 1: Prevention

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## Where we are now

Regular Parish Safeguarding Officers (PSO) working group meetings to advise the Diocesan Safeguarding Team (DST) on PSO support needs.

Grant obtained from the national Church to establish a self-sustaining PSO support networks. Work to continue during 2026 with a project consultant coordinating this work.

Regular drop-in sessions held to support PSOs.

87.5% of Parishes using the Parish Safeguarding Dashboard and 28% using the Parish Safeguarding Hub.

Support sessions held with PSOs in early 2025 after the Makin review was published.

A service of Lament and Thanksgiving held at Christ Church Cathedral in November for PSOs.

Extra targeted training sessions held for PSOs which aligned to referral trends and emerging risks.

## Challenges

Capacity challenges for preventative activity due to reactive casework increasing during the year.

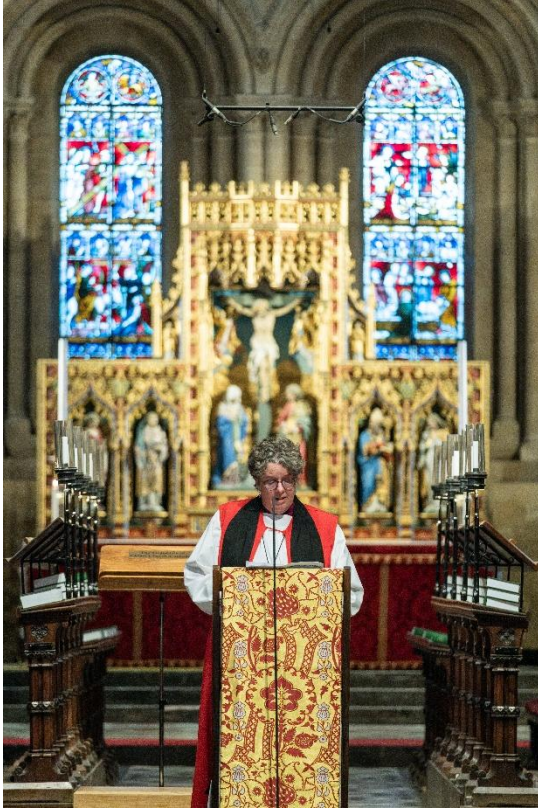
Higher-risk contexts (large churches, estates, BMOs) not receiving sufficient proactive support.

Some parishes (approx. 50) do not have a PSO in post.

Some PSOs (approx. 80) have not undertaken all of their safeguarding training.

# Objective 2: Culture, Leadership, and Capacity

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*Bishop Mary, Lead Safeguarding Bishop, leading prayers at the Safeguarding Service at Christ Church Cathedral, November 2025*

## Where we are now

Safeguarding embedded in senior forums (e.g. Bishop's Staff Meetings)

There have been excellent examples of collaborative working between Area Safeguarding Advisors and their Area Teams.

The Head of Safeguarding has undergone certification to move to the role of Diocesan Safeguarding Officer (DSO). The DSO is no longer primarily there to 'advise' the Bishop, but to have responsibility, independently of the Bishop, for safeguarding matters.

The Head of Safeguarding has led two sessions with Bishops and Archdeacons and one with leads of our larger evangelical churches which focused on and identified warning signs of unhealthy cultures and how we better support Church contexts as a response to the Makin Review.

## Looking ahead

The Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF) has agreed that it will do a review of safeguarding resources in 2026 as recommended in the INEQE audit . This will be undertaken against the backdrop of a challenging financial context.

The DBF are also considering the potential consequences on the safeguarding team of initiatives to increase the number of children and young people attending our Churches.

# Objective 3: Recognising, Assessing and Managing Risk

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## Where we are now

The diocese have continued strengthening work with risk management, particularly as it relates to managing the risk of those who have sexually offended and want to attend Church. Training sessions have been held for PSOs and incumbents to help them to manage risk locally.

The safeguarding team continues to work closely with area teams, the deliverance ministry team, the DDO team, the children and young people team, religious communities and TEs to manage risk across the diocese.

The safeguarding team respond within 24 hours to referrals and continue to respond promptly to contacts for advice.

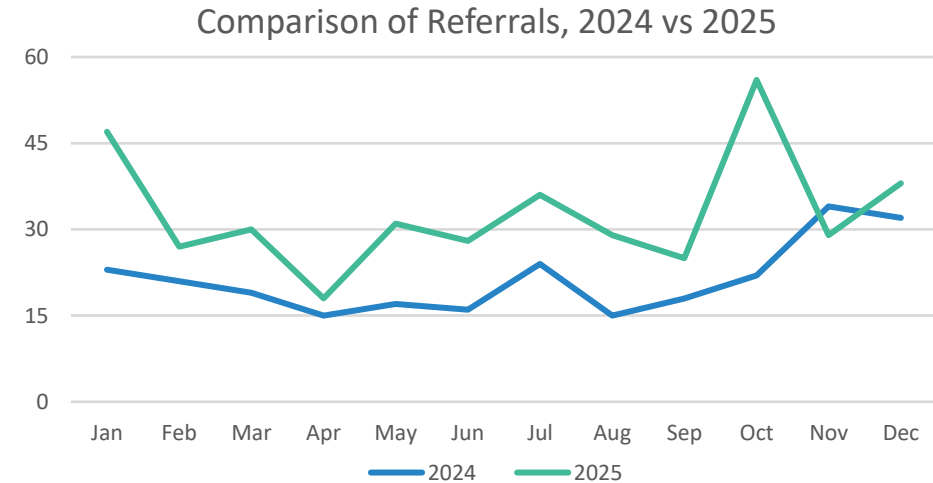
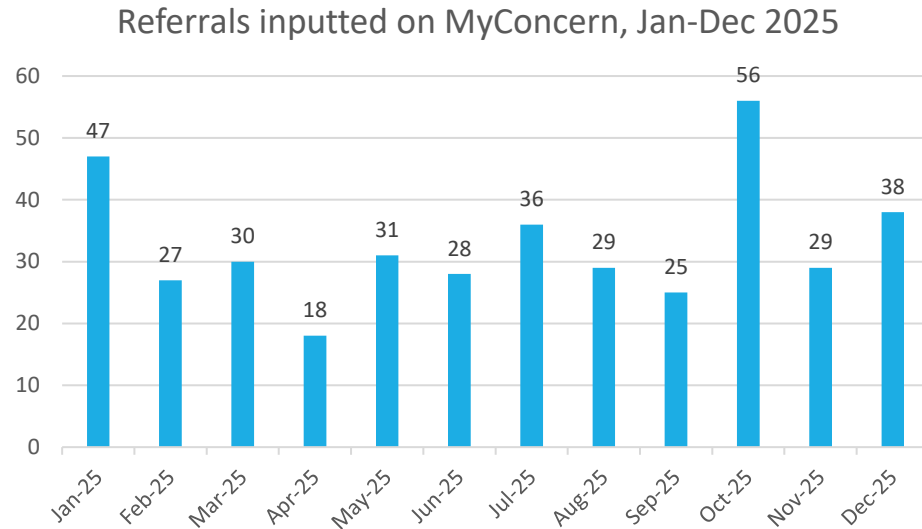
## Challenges

The demands on the team are high with an increasing number of people who have sexually offended wanting to worship in Church.

In September 2025, the Church of England's new Code of Practice on Managing and Reporting Safeguarding Concerns and Allegations came into force. The safeguarding teams continue to embed changes within practice.

The number of referrals and contacts for advice has increased annually as shown by the data on the following pages.

# Recognising, Assessing and Managing Risk

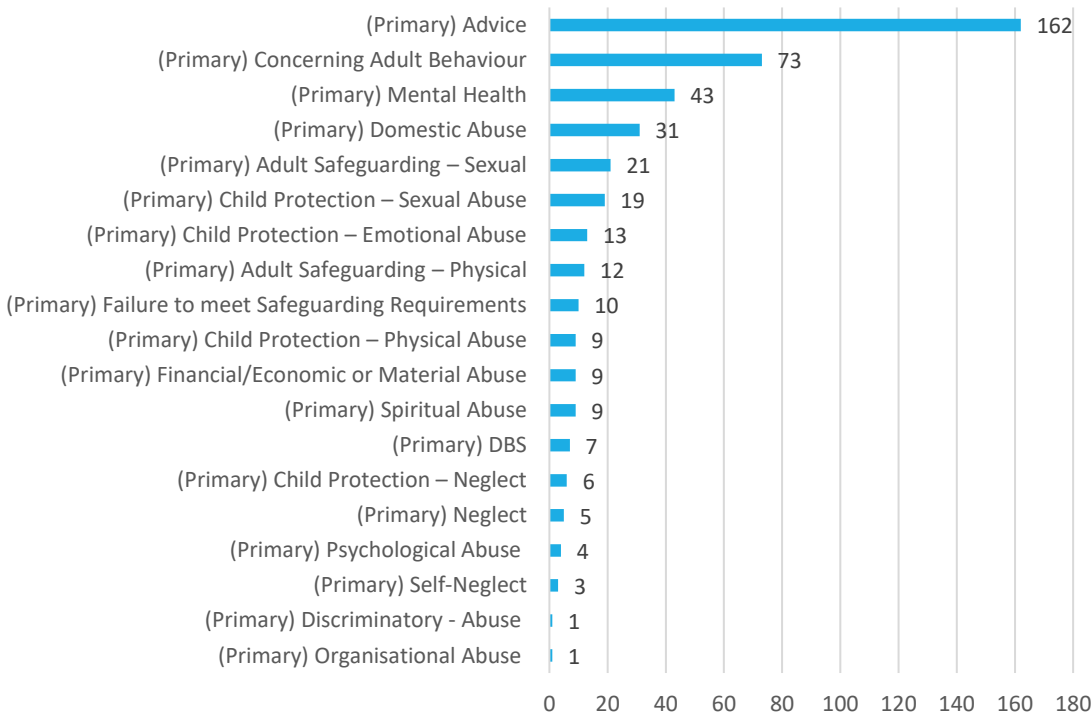


Referrals increased dramatically after the publication of the Makin Report in November 2024. However, although the number of referrals dropped after the immediate spike, the team still received a higher number of referrals than pre-Makin. October 2025 saw the highest number of referrals recorded thus far (56) and the team received more referrals in December 2025 than in December 2024 just after the report was published.

The team received an average of 31.83 referrals per month in 2025, compared with an average of 21.33 per month in 2024.

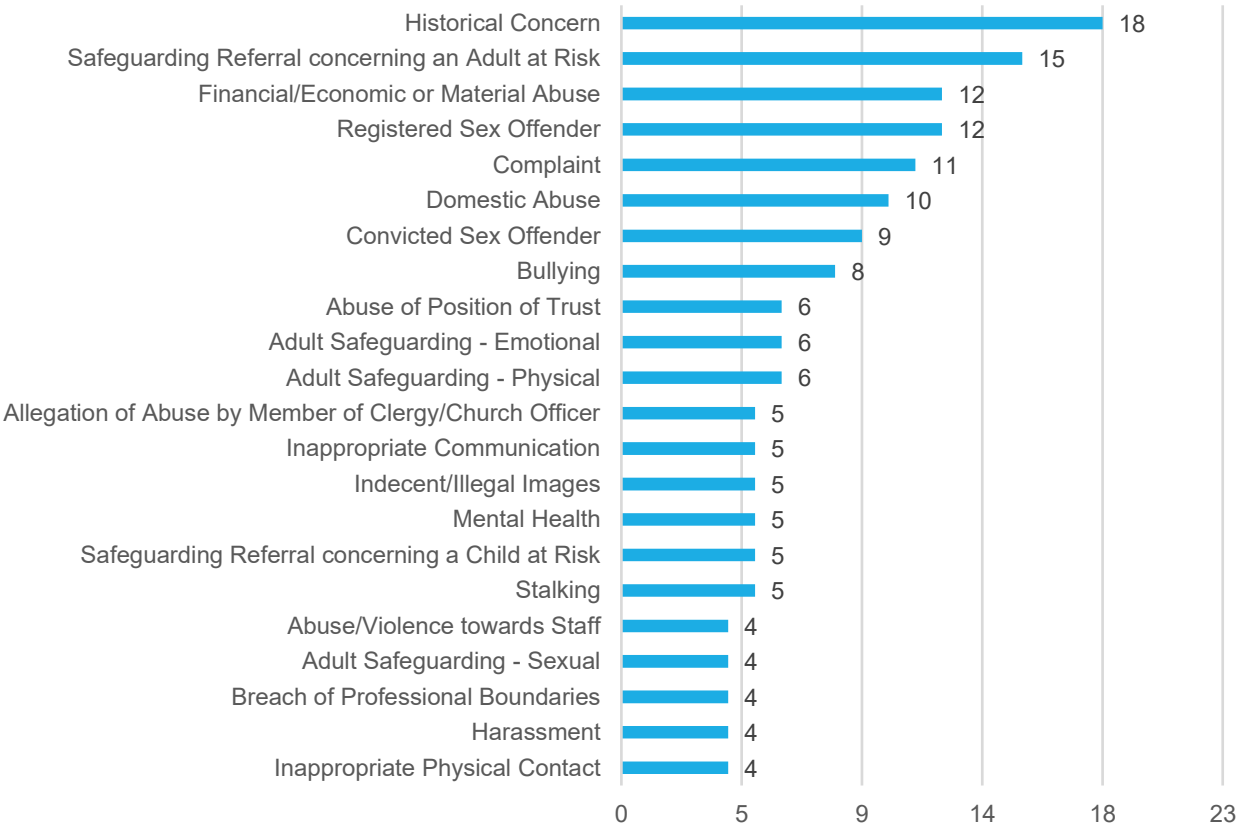
# Recognising, Assessing and Managing Risk

Primary Categories of Referrals, Jan-Dec 2025



MyConcern requires a single Primary Category per referral, but there is also the opportunity to add further categories to a concern in order to breakdown or highlight any other aspects of the case.

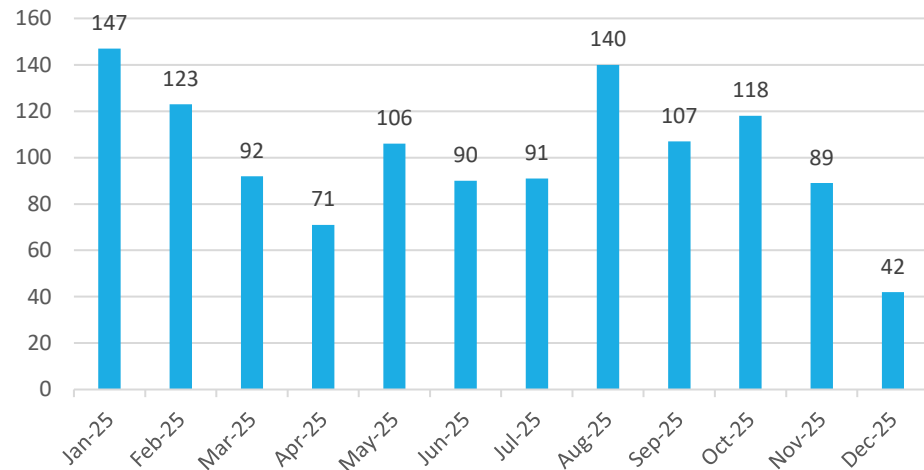
Further Breakdown of Referral Categories\*, Jan-Dec 2025



\*only categories that have been used 4+ times in 2025, for ease of understanding

# Recognising, Assessing and Managing Risk

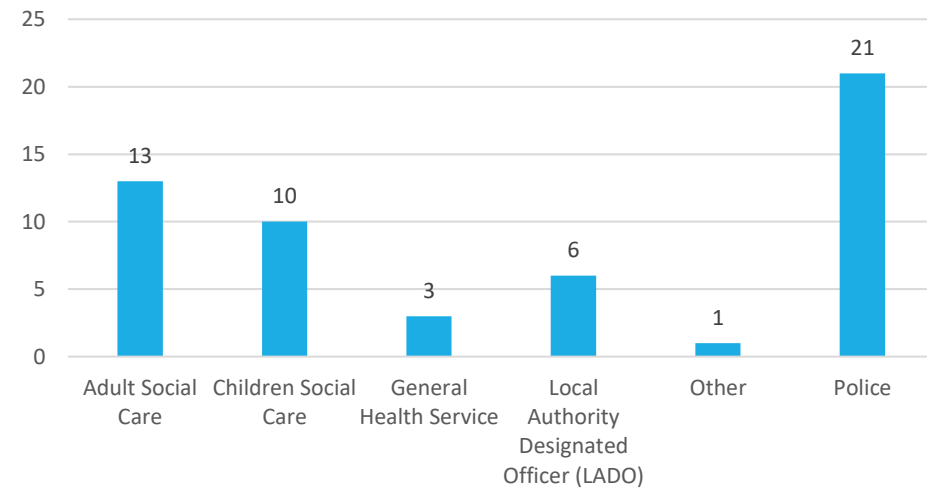
Enquiries, Jan-Dec 2025



Enquiries continued to be high, and although the levels fluctuated throughout the year there was an average of 101.33 enquiries per month in 2025.

It is important to note that these are only the safeguarding related enquiries received by the Area Safeguarding Advisers, these figures do not include DBS enquiries that go to the DBS Administrator or training enquiries that are dealt with by the Training & Policy Adviser.

Referrals to Statutory Bodies, 2025



The above graph shows how many cases have been referred to, and to which, statutory bodies in 2025.

# Objective 4: Victims and Survivors

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## Where we are now

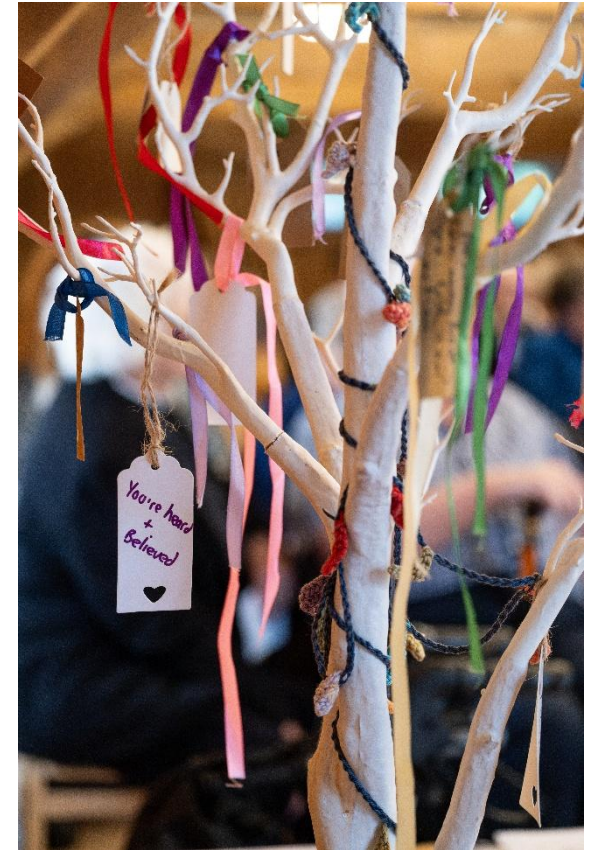
As part of our ongoing commitment to survivors, we have been providing support in various ways. This includes funding for counselling services and referral to the Survivor Chaplaincy, ensuring that survivors have the necessary resources and support.

The Survivor Group met six times in the year and ran a session on trauma informed engagement with survivors at the PSO service at Christ Church in November. It has also set out some standards for what people who have survived abuse can expect from the diocese, which can be found [here](#)

The diocese-wide chaplaincy, set up in cooperation with the survivor group has supported 3 survivors over the past year.

## Looking ahead

The safeguarding team are keen to receive feedback from victims and survivors and are working with the survivor group to work out the best trauma informed way to achieve this.



# Objective 5: Learning, Supervision and Support

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## Where are we now

Some curates have attended group supervision. Supervision is also put in place for clergy where there are safeguarding concerns raised which relate to a lack of boundaries within their practice.

The safeguarding team and Cathedral Safeguarding Officer receive professional supervision from the Head of Safeguarding and the Head of Safeguarding receives professional supervision from the Regional Safeguarding Lead.

All team safeguarding professionals can access counselling if and when needed.

## Looking ahead

The diocesan safeguarding team and area teams are exploring how to monitor the outcomes of domestic abuse awareness training and safer recruitment and people management training undertaken by clergy. It is anticipated that this will be addressed during 2026.

# Training Activity

## Where we are now

- In 2025, the diocesan team delivered 97 training sessions which, together with the e-Learning modules, trained over 7000 participants.
- The team also supported 12 volunteer safeguarding trainers, with 3 new trainers starting in 2025
- The Panel has oversight of what's needed to support people in meeting the training requirements. Effective action was taken to significantly reduce the number of roles where training was out of date.
- More administrative support has been made available to the training officer as recommended in the INEQE audit.

## Looking ahead

The diocesan safeguarding team and area teams are exploring together how to monitor domestic abuse awareness training and safer recruitment and people management training undertaken by clergy. It is hoped that this will be addressed during 2026.

Following on from the successful workshop at the Safeguarding Service in November (*right*), on managing the risks of those who have sexually harmed, a further two sessions are being run in 2026 to ensure as many incumbents and PSOs as possible are reached.



# Turning training into impact: what people have said after learning from training

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“I now feel more confident in dealing with situations that arise from casual conversations and would flag things up with my PSO sooner. I would not dismiss my own seemingly slight concerns or those of others.”

“The course was well-delivered and thought-provoking.”

“The last session was based on [a] scenario tackling how to identify health and safety in safeguarding when needed to protect young adults in our local churches. The contributions from different individuals increases my understanding and policy needs to adopt.”

“I feel I particularly benefitted from this training face-to-face and it was hugely valuable to be able to share and learn from experiences of the clergy present as well as from other PSOs.”

# Quality Assurance

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## Where we are now

- The diocese has continued to prioritise quality assurance (QA) particularly through the Panel's QA sub-group. The majority of the group members are independent (not diocesan employees) and bring professional expertise from a range of professional backgrounds.
- The group is given access to full anonymised material to explore key themes, which have included:
  - Safeguarding risk assessments
  - Current safeguarding agreements
  - Complex cases
- The group has seen good practice in all areas and identified where improvements could be made in practice and policy.
- The Panel regularly reviews the diocesan safeguarding strategic action plan, risk register and actions from the INEQE audit.

## Looking ahead

With refreshed terms of reference, the quality assurance group will be seeking to extend the time allocated to its business to enable a deeper examination of practice issues across a broader scope.

# Learning Reviews

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## Where we are now

All our [learning lessons reviews](#) can be found on the diocesan website. From 2020 onward, these include a one-page "seven-minute briefing" aimed at supporting actions, particularly for Parishes.

There have been no local issues which required a formal Learning Review in 2025.

## Looking ahead

All lessons learnt reviews have some elements which link to wider Parish governance.

An action plan supports each review, and assurance is sought on both the progress and consequential impact of individual actions.

# Risk Identification

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**The following key risks have been identified which form part of our new approach to risk identification and mitigation:**

- Workload on PSOs as essential volunteers
- The scale and complexity of the diocese
- The sustained pressure on safeguarding resources hinders preventative approaches

All these risks are being considered and responded to as part of the diocesan risk management system and will be actively monitored over the coming year.

# The Year Ahead

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The Panel's focus in supporting the collective safeguarding efforts in the diocese will be to build on good scrutiny practice and support a safer culture across the diocese by testing whether safeguarding practice is effective, timely, and centred on the needs of victims and survivors, and by recommending improvement where gaps are identified.

We will explore what aspects of safeguarding activity have improved, what still needs to improve, key learning from case scrutiny and how the diocese has responded to the survivor and victims' voices.