

Annual Report 2024: Safeguarding Team

The Diocese of Ely Safeguarding Team seeks to contribute to 'People Fully Alive: Ely 2025' in its strategic aims of developing healthy churches and serving the community. We aspire to strengthen and integrate good safeguarding practice within the culture of all those working, volunteering or worshipping across the Diocese.

Safeguarding Team

Rebecca Boswell - Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor (DSA) – now a vacant post following her leaving the dept on the 12.03.25. New role to be called 'Head of Safeguarding' and recruitment ongoing with interviews on the 28.03.25

Sharon Gage - Assistant Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor (ADSA)

Lisa Pearson - Assistant Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor (ADSA) and Ely Cathedral Safeguarding Adviser

Jacqueline Jugg – Assistant Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor (ADSA) recently appointed initially on a 6-month contract.

Sarah King - Safeguarding Training and Parish Support Co-ordinator

Kelly Nott - Safeguarding Training Administrator

Jackie Williamson - Safeguarding Administrative Support

Over 2024, Team members have continued to work in a hybrid capacity, but with more time being spent in the new Diocesan office at Etheldreda House.

Policy and Practice Guidance

All safeguarding work within the Diocese is undertaken within the context of Statutory and House of Bishop's Policy and Practice Guidance.

The new Managing Safeguarding Concerns and Allegations Code of Practice, as well as the Reporting Safeguarding Concerns and Allegations Code of Practice were approved by General Synod on Wednesday 12th February 2025. The implementation period is now underway, allowing time for training support and preparations ahead of the go-live date on 1 September 2025.

Other practice guidance documents that have been published or updated by the NST during the past 12 months include the new Learning and Development Framework which came into force on 1 Jan 2025. The main changes are around Domestic Abuse Awareness training (a new requirement for all working with children, young people and vulnerable adults).

The Parish Safeguarding Handbook is currently being revised by the National Safeguarding Team and will be advertised as a toolkit, linked to the dashboard and be available to download as an app hopefully by the end of 2025. The Diocese of Ely have a number of Parish Safeguarding Officers who have kindly signed up to join the different working groups in relation to this document.

Safeguarding Referrals and Requests for Advice

The Safeguarding Advisers provide advice, guidance, and leadership whenever concerns arise about the possible abuse of a child or adult at risk, in relation to allegations against church officers and where there are concerns in relation to adults posing a risk within congregations. Referrals include but are not limited to: disclosures from

survivors of abuse (both current and non-current), allegations against an identified person, issues concerning a person who has been convicted of offences against children or adults, safeguarding and welfare concerns raised by or about a member of a congregation, conduct issues relating to a member of the clergy, laity or volunteer, information arising from DBS applications, and so on.

Year	Number of Contacts
2016	109
2017	131
2018	158
2019	188
2020	177
2021	215
2022	248
2023	241
2024	254

There were 254 contacts raised on the safeguarding database MyConcern in 2024, 11 of which related to Ely Cathedral. Of the 254 contacts, the majority of these were low level concerns with 137 contacts relating to general advice being requested and signposting. The other largest categories of primary concern were in relation to mental health issues, domestic abuse and concerns being raised around adult behaviour.

There were less than 5 contacts which were managed under Allegations Against Church Officers Guidance.

Risk Assessments and Church Safety Plans

The church welcomes all, including those individuals who pose a potential risk to other people. Central to all safeguarding work are the holistic assessment of risk and the development of effective strategies to manage any identified risk. These are often complex, involving liaison with partner agencies in the community, such as probation and police.

In 2024, following the National Safeguarding Team producing new practice guidance and templates in 2023 to support consistent and transparent approaches to risk assessment and risk management across church bodies the Safeguarding Team have reviewed all of the old Safeguarding Agreements and converted these over into the new nationally agreed template for Church Safety Plans (CSP).

Developing the safety plans utilises the risk assessment, which has been undertaken by the Safeguarding Team, exploring directly “what are we worried about.” The safety plan will be formulated from “what can we do,” with common language used across the two documents, to outline what the church body will do to support safe worship and the action required by the individual.

The subject of the CSP participates in this process and the Plans are regularly reviewed and monitored. Where statutory agencies are involved, they participate in this process. The purpose of CSPs is to protect all within the church community, including the subject.

At the end of 2024 there were 18 CSPs in place across the Diocese.

Safer Recruitment and People Management

All church officers¹ working with or in relation to children or adults who are vulnerable are required to be recruited in accordance with the Church of England's Safer Recruitment and People Management Guidance (2021).

During 2024, 1634 DBS checks were undertaken across the Diocese, in comparison with 2023 where there were 1558.

The Ely Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF) has continued to fund the administrative costs for parishes undertaking DBS Disclosures. Parish costs are also met by the DBF for undertaking digital identity verification for disclosures, which was made available to parishes during 2024. Parish Safeguarding Officers are now able to undertake digital identity verification, for the purpose of verifying an individual's identity, as part of an application for a DBS check which makes the process far simpler for both the parish and the individual for whom the check is being requested.

Year	DBS Disclosures
2016	999
2017	1192
2018	1692
2019	1525
2020	1082
2021	1379
2022	2105
2023	1558
2024	1634

Where safeguarding information is disclosed on a DBS certificate or Confidential Declaration, this must be assessed by the Safeguarding Team who will make a recommendation regarding the individual's appointment.

Safeguarding Training

The safeguarding training modules which apply mainly to employees and volunteers in our parishes are: *Basic Awareness and Foundations*, *Safer Recruitment and People Management* and *Raising Awareness of Domestic Abuse* all of which are available online via the Church of England Training Portal. For individuals who have a lack of access or confidence in accessing online training, it is possible for clergy or PSOs to offer local sessions by running the online training to small groups and the Safeguarding Team offer support and materials to do this. Parishes have expressed that this has worked well in supporting volunteers to access the training.

The Safeguarding Team continue to deliver the national *Leadership* and *Parish Safeguarding Officer's Induction* training. The training is delivered virtually or face to face. The majority of participants express that they prefer

¹ 1 A "Church Officer" is anyone appointed/elected by or on behalf of the Church to a post or role, whether they are. ordained or lay, paid or unpaid.

the convenience of accessing the training from home while some others have expressed a preference for face-to-face training. The Safeguarding Team will continue to deliver both virtual and face-to-face training over 2025.

Individuals who have been personally affected by safeguarding issues have reflected that they have found attending safeguarding training problematic and distressing and, in those cases, additional support has been put in place to enable the person to access the training and in circumstances where training with support has not been possible, an exemption has been given.

Ely Safeguarding Team also deliver local bespoke training, briefing and workshops including Churchwarden's Safeguarding Briefings, DBS Workshops, Parish Safeguarding Dashboard, Managing Risk in the Church Context for Reference Group members managing Church Safety Plans and Safer Working Practice, which was created and delivered alongside Mission & Ministry.

Module	2021	2022	2023	2024
Basic Awareness	1210	1507	1354	1301
Foundation (online)	731	1057	1196	1122
Leadership	344	386	419	334
Safer Recruitment	282	229	213	357
Domestic Abuse	268	1111	759	826
Parish Safeguarding Officer Induction	20	20	31	24

Ely Cathedral

The Service Level Agreement between the Diocesan Board of Finance and the Chapter of Ely Cathedral agrees terms of the provision of safeguarding advice and support to the Cathedral by Ely Diocesan Safeguarding Team. This was reviewed in June 2024 and has been approved for further three years.

Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP)

Ely DSAP has strong multi-agency and inter-departmental representation which allows robust discussion on safeguarding issues, drawing on a wide range of professional experience and expertise. It is also a supportive group, offering advice, guidance and quality assurance on policy and practice matters. Ely Safeguarding Team is very grateful for all the contributions to its work made by diocesan and partner-agency members of the DSAP.

Support to Parishes

The Safeguarding Team continues to provide advice and support to parishes in relation to safeguarding concerns, safer recruitment, good practice, and training. There have been four virtual Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) meetings over the year, where outside speakers from organisations, such as the Disclosure and Barring Service, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Group and Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) have attended. Our PSOs have largely welcomed the convenience of a virtual meeting, and this has been reflected in high levels of attendance at these events. Ely Safeguarding Team note our appreciation for the vital contribution to safeguarding work by all PSOs.

From July 2024 the Safeguarding Team have provided monthly drop-in sessions to provide additional support to PSO's.

In Jan 2025, in partnership with Mission & Ministry, *'Team Around The Parish'* (TAP) monthly meeting are being facilitated to identify and discuss joint resources and a more coordinated approach in supporting parishes with safeguarding compliance.

The Safeguarding Team works with Parishes to support their compliance with House of Bishop's Safeguarding Policy and Practice Guidance. Parishes who, for a range of reasons, are at risk of not complying with 'The Code' are offered Focussed Support. This process brings together the Safeguarding Team and Parish in a coordinated response to help parishes overcome their difficulties. Several parishes have been supported during 2023.

Parish Safeguarding Dashboards and Hubs

The Parish Safeguarding Dashboard software is funded by the DBF and is available free of charge to all parishes. At the end of 2024 90.4% of parishes were registered with the Dashboard in comparison with 78% at the end of 2023 and we continue to advocate that all parishes register for a Dashboard. This will be particularly important for parishes in the implementation of the National Safeguarding Standards and Quality Assurance Framework. Last figure obtained in Oct 2024 indicates that Ely Diocese is in 8th position out of the 38 Diocese using the Dashboards.

The developers of Safeguarding Dashboards have been working on a new set of tools to help parishes with safer recruitment and people management These include supporting parishes by maintain DBS and training records, developing role description, tracking safer recruitment and ongoing people management.

National Safeguarding Standards and Quality Assurance Framework

Implementation of the Church of England's Safeguarding Standards and Quality Assurance Framework, continues to be the primary strategic focus of safeguarding in the Diocese of Ely and Ely Cathedral, especially ahead of the INEQE audit scheduled for the 2-6 February 2026. Diocesan, Cathedral and joint Audit Preparation Groups have now been set up and diary dates scheduled for throughout the year. The focus of these meetings will be to look at the guidance for the audit, scheduling stakeholders' diaries to meet with the auditors, revisiting previous reviews, administration preparation, and the completion of the 360 ° survey prior to the audit.

For parishes the primary focus for implementing the National Standards will be through the Parish Safeguarding Dashboards and Hubs. To support parishes in this work a series of workshops were delivered in 2024 by the Safeguarding Team and Clearly Simpler the developer of the software tools.

Looking Ahead in 2025

The Safeguarding Team are looking forward to the appointment of a new Head of Safeguarding, with a view to them taking on more strategic role.

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) recommended that the Church of England continue the Independent Safeguarding Audit Programme. One recent outcome of this has been the recent appointment of Joanne Fowler as the East Anglia Region Safeguarding Lead.

In February 2025, The National Safeguarding Team concluded their work to review all clergy under the authority or oversight of the Church of England who are criticised in the Makin Review, published in November 2024. The review was commissioned to look at the Church's handling of the allegations of the abuse by the late John Smyth.

The Future of Church Safeguarding was debated at General Synod in February 2025 (work resulting from the Jay and Wilkinson Reports) and it approved an amended version of 'Model Thee' including the setting up an external scrutiny body and the transfer of most functions currently delivered by the National Safeguarding Team (NST) – except policy development – to an external employer. Diocesan and Cathedral Safeguarding Officers will continue in their same roles.

It is hoped that once the Safeguarding Team returns to full capacity in 2025 that the staff can look at ongoing development work in supporting parishes with all aspects of safeguarding and compliance responsibility, such as arranging a PSO annual conference, a joint annual conference with Mission & Ministry focussing on children and families activities and more bespoke workshops to respond to themes raised by PSO's and from safeguarding referrals.

Lisa Pearson, Assistant Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor

March 2025