



Diocese of Leicester
Diocesan Safeguarding Oversight Group
Annual Report to Bishop's Advisory Forum
and Trustee Board for 2025

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Diocesan Safeguarding Oversight Group

Annual Report 2025 for Bishop's Advisory Forum

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Trustee Board

Purpose & Summary

This Annual Report covers the activity of the Diocesan Safeguarding Oversight Group, its sub-groups, and the Diocesan Safeguarding Team in the 2025 calendar year. Its purpose is to provide an opportunity for the Bishop's Advisory Forum (and ultimately the Trustee Board) to understand more fully the safeguarding work that is undertaken, to be assured that the Independent Chair and external members of DSOG are satisfied that safeguarding provision in the Diocese is effective, to have the opportunity to raise any concerns and to prompt the Forum and Board to discuss matters raised in the report and consider any necessary action. The report is also intended for publication on the diocesan website.

The report is structured around the five National Safeguarding Standards and QA Framework, and also covers the context in which safeguarding takes place at national, diocesan and local level. As in 2024, the national context has continued to be extremely challenging with consequent local impact and this is reflected in the report. The report covers major developments in safeguarding, particularly the implementation of the Regional Safeguarding Model, how work has been shaped by responding to the Makin and Scolding Reviews, and work on preparing for the INEQE independent audit of safeguarding provision, which will take place in 2026.

It also provides information about the work of DSOG and its sub-groups during the year, the Independent Chair's perspective, the work of the Diocesan Safeguarding Team (DST), engagement with victims and survivors, safeguarding in Leicester Cathedral, training, safeguarding in church settings and the impact of the Parish Dashboards.

Diocesan Safeguarding Oversight Group (DSOG):

Purpose of Diocesan Safeguarding DSOG:

As outlined in the Terms of Reference, DSOG should provide advice, expertise and challenge on safeguarding policies, procedures and practices to the Diocesan Bishop, the Trustees and Bishop's Advisory Forum (BAF) and to seek assurance that the diocesan safeguarding policies, working practices and training arrangements in place are consistent with statutory requirements and the House of Bishops' policy and practice guidance.

Membership of DSOG

The membership of the Oversight Group is as follows.

Independent Chair:

Adrienne Plunkett - Independent Chair

External members:

Ruth Lake – Director Adult Social Care and Safeguarding, Leicester City Council, representing three Local Authorities in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland

Shabnum Popat: Clinical Lead, Quetzal, survivors' representative (Resigned in September 2025)

Kaye Knowles: Deputy Head, Probation Service (Replaced by Martin Gardner)

Des Hearnshaw: Leicestershire Police (Replaced by Kevin Brown)

Diocesan and Cathedral Staff:

Rachael Spiers – Diocesan Safeguarding Officer (DSO)

Claire Wood – Archdeacon of Loughborough

Karen Rooms – Dean of Leicester

Andy Brockbank – Director of Operations and Governance

James Pickersgill – Bishop's Chaplain

Gemma Starkings – Head of Communications

Parish Safeguarding Coordinator Representatives:

Julie Croysdale – Safeguarding Coordinator

Pete Coopey – Safeguarding Coordinator

Independent Chair's Introduction:

The Diocesan Safeguarding Oversight Group (DSOG) has continued to meet quarterly. There has been changes in membership (listed above), but attendance has continued to be good. I would like to acknowledge the commitment made by our two Parish Safeguarding Co-ordinator representatives and members representing external agencies, i.e. Adult Services, Police, Probation, Quetzal. The role they play in scrutinising the safeguarding arrangements in the Diocese is vital. My thanks go to Shabnum Popat who advised and supported the development of the Survivors Care Strategy. Consideration is being given to how to ensure the views of victims and survivors are well represented at DSOG.

Perspective of Ruth Lake, an Independent DSOG Member:

I have been an independent member of the DSOG since 2019. I represent the three Local Authorities in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, bringing a social care perspective. Other independent members bring their experience from policing and probation backgrounds.

The inclusion of independent members on DSOG reflects the commitment of the Diocese to be reflective, welcoming a range of views and being open to challenge. The Quality and Improvement Sub-Group of DSOG is supported by two independent members, enabling a 'critical friend' approach to auditing Diocese safeguarding practice.

As a member of the local safeguarding adult boards and safeguarding children's partnerships, I have been able to make links to safeguarding resources, share approaches to developing safeguarding strategy and performance management approaches, and help to connect the experiences of the Diocese representatives to the wider safeguarding challenges in Leicestershire. As a person who is not connected to the activities of the Church, I also ask questions where others may not, which draws out the value of having a range of perspectives on DSOG in addition to the Diocese members. These are positively received and reflected on.

DSOG's sub-groups are crucial in taking forward the work of DSOG. The Training Sub-Group oversees training provision and compliance, the Executive progresses the safeguarding strategy and action plan and the Quality and Improvement Sub-Group (QISG) scrutinises practice. It undertakes two audits per year, interrogates the collated data from the Parish Dashboards and oversees six-monthly production of the Safeguarding Intelligence Pack (SIP). The audits are important in assuring the effectiveness of safeguarding practice in the diocese; this year safer recruitment and core groups (now Safeguarding Case Management Groups) have been the focus and learning has been identified from both. The SIP provides valuable information, e.g. regarding referrals, training compliance, timeliness of reviews of church safety agreements.

I would like to recognise the important contribution of Dan Cumpsty and Ruth Lake to QISG, Dan has chaired the group for two years and both have participated in audits. This external scrutiny is invaluable.

As this report will demonstrate, 2025 has been a challenging year for safeguarding in the Church of England and I have highlighted below the key national and local developments.

National Picture:

Safeguarding Structures Programme (SSP): The Response Group considering the recommendations of Professor Jay's report, *The Future of Safeguarding*, reported to the General Synod in February 2025 and recommended that The Church accepted the recommendation for the establishment of an independent scrutiny body (Organisation A) and considered further whether to make operational safeguarding fully independent (Organisation B). This work has been taken forward by the SSP which will report to the General Synod in February 2026.

Stakeholder consultations have taken place and an area for consideration has been whether there would be a future role for Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panels. The most recent update from the SSP indicates that the national scrutiny body should not unnecessarily duplicate local scrutiny mechanisms, e.g. for safeguarding at parish level, and should therefore not replace the important role of Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panels.

On 14 November the Chairty Commission issued a Regulatory Action Plan to the Archbishops' Council setting an expectation that the Archbishops' Council should implement independent safeguarding structures as endorsed by the Church's General Synod in February 2025 within 18 months, a year sooner than planned.

National Safeguarding Audit Programme: INEQE has continued to undertake safeguarding audits of dioceses and cathedrals. Leicester Diocese and Cathedral will be audited in Autumn 2026, although requests for evidence and surveys will commence in July. Preparation is underway and learning from the completed audits is assisting in promoting improvements in safeguarding practice, e.g. a diocesan safeguarding risk register, as well as preparation for Leicester's audit. INEQE produced the first Annual Report in January 2025 and were positive about the changes taking place in the Church.

...the Church of yesterday is not the Church of today. Moral outrage and public exposure have driven significant change...

The systems in place are demonstrably better. Those on the front line of safeguarding are more aware, and the Church's blended safeguarding teams – comprised of credible safeguarding professionals with previous experience from statutory or equivalent services – are driven by a safeguarding-first philosophy that is constantly evolving and improving.

INEQE Independent Safeguarding Audits of Church of England Dioceses and Cathedrals. January 2025.

"There has never been a more important time for safeguarding arrangements within the church to be the focus of independent rigorous scrutiny. As a national leader of safeguarding with extensive experience across a wide range of settings, INEQE reports objectively and dispassionately, without fear or favour, acknowledging good practice and progress while also highlighting areas for improvement. This first annual report will help dioceses to drive further improvement."

Sarah McKimm, Independent Chair of the Audit's Quality Assurance Group.

Makin Report into the abuse perpetrated by John Smyth: The national Task and Finish Group has determined that all twenty-seven recommendations should be accepted, and work will continue scoping and scrutinising the Church's response. In order to maximise the learning, work has been undertaken locally to identify and prioritise the recommendations that have relevance for the Diocese and a plan will be developed and monitored by DSOG.

Local Developments:

Trustees: The Charity Commission wrote to all Diocesan Bishops in January 2025, asking whether there were any legal impediments under ecclesiastical law which prevented trustees from fulfilling their safeguarding duties. This correspondence highlighted the role and responsibilities of Trustees in ensuring effective safeguarding arrangements and a Memorandum of Understanding has been drawn up between Trustees and DSOG outlining how DSOG and the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer will inform the Trustees of strengths, areas for development and, importantly, alert them to any potential risks. This development should strengthen diocesan governance arrangements.

Culture and Leadership survey: To better understand the culture around safeguarding in the diocese, the Bishop's Leadership Team commissioned an external facilitator, Margaret Gildea, to run a series of focus groups and an online survey with staff, including clergy, lay ministers, PCC members and parish safeguarding co-ordinators. 150 people from across the Diocese and the Cathedral took part, discussing questions regarding approachability of the bishops and senior leaders, the ease of challenge, the level of confidence as to whether action would be taken and how safeguarding could be improved. Much of the findings were positive, but it was agreed there can be no complacency. The recommendations were accepted and have been translated into an action plan. DSOG will receive regular updates.

Regional Safeguarding Arrangements: As recommended by IICSA, the regional safeguarding arrangements are now established nationally. In September Leicester received certification to join the East Midlands region; Rachael Spiers has been appointed as the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer (DSO) and Gemma Barber as the Regional Safeguarding Lead (RSL). Gemma will provide professional supervision with the aim of improving consistency of practice across the Church. It should be recognised that the change from Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor to Diocesan Safeguarding Officer (DSO) is much more significant than a change of title. This is a strategic role with the authority to act independently of the bishop in safeguarding matters.

Survivors' Care Strategy: The development of the strategy by Rachael Spiers, DSO, through engagement with victims and survivors and the support of Shabnum Popat, from Quetzal, is a major step in ensuring that the voices of victims and survivors are heard. The strategy contains some powerful messages which will be disseminated widely across the Diocese and Cathedral and if acted upon should make a difference to the response to survivors. I would like to thank the victims and survivors for being prepared to take part in this meaningful development and to share their views.

Whilst the strategy is important, further work is planned to capture feedback from victims and survivors and to ensure there is a route whereby their views will be heard.

Bishop's Children and Youth Council Safeguarding Listening Exercise: The views of children and young people are essential in helping to make the Church a safer place. Over the summer this exercise was undertaken by Matt Long, Youth Engagement and Intergenerational Communities Enabler, supported by Rachael Spiers, DSO. The report contains some valuable practical feedback, notably the importance of safeguarding leads being familiar and face to face information-giving rather than a reliance on posters and online resources. Matt Long presented this work at the DSOs National Network Day, and it was described as '*inspirational*'. My thanks go to Matt and Rachael for their commitment to giving children and young people a voice, and to the children and young people for taking part and contributing to the learning.

Parish Safeguarding Coordinators: As highlighted last year, PSCs are at the very forefront of safeguarding in the Diocese and play a key role in prevention. Engagement with PSCs continues to highlight the serious challenges PSCs face in fulfilling their role, e.g. without an incumbent for support, in achieving compliance with training requirements in their parishes, and that a significant number are also holding additional roles in parishes. The DST are looking at ways of strengthening further the support available and DSOG is monitoring the impact of diocesan developments, e.g. Minster Communities, on safeguarding in the parishes.

Diocesan Safeguarding Team (DST): The professionalism and expertise of the DST, comprising Rachael Spiers, DSO, Louise Warner, Training Officer, Pete Holloway and Sue Erett, Assistant DSOs, is recognised and highly valued across the Diocese and Cathedral. The need for increased capacity was accepted by the Trustees and funding made available for an additional Assistant Diocesan Safeguarding Officer post, which was filled by Sue Erett in September. Julie Foulds, the DST's highly efficient Safeguarding Administrator, retired this year, and has been replaced by Ariel Baker.

Over the year the team has joined the national electronic case management system, MyConcern. This has taken a considerable amount of time but will be a more efficient system and enable the Church to identify people of concern more efficiently. The capacity of the DST should continue to be monitored as challenges remain, notably the importance of the DSO having space to develop the strategic role and the PSCs' need for consistent support and advice.

Role of Archdeacons: It is important to acknowledge the key role Archdeacons play in effective safeguarding in the Diocese, including ensuring that Parochial Church Councils are fully aware of their safeguarding role and responsibilities and working closely with the DST in managing safeguarding concerns regarding church officers, including chairing the Safeguarding Case Management Groups. There can be challenges for their capacity which may need further consideration.

Summary:

As evidenced above, much has been achieved this year: the Memorandum of Understanding, certification to join the regional safeguarding arrangements, the

listening exercise with children and young people, the launch of the survivors' care strategy, the survey of leadership and culture and implementation of the new electronic case system. Additionally, audits and the Safeguarding Intelligence Pack have assisted DSOG in scrutinising safeguarding arrangements. It should be recognised that these developments indicate a strong commitment to safeguarding across the Diocese and Cathedral.

However, challenges remain. It will be important to ensure the Memorandum of Understanding is implemented to promote Trustee oversight and strengthen governance, to act quickly on the recommendations of the culture and leadership review, to embed the Survivors' Care Strategy and the learning from the Listening Exercise, to address the challenges faced by PSCs and to monitor the capacity of the DST and the Archdeacons.

Over the coming months preparation will continue for the INEQE audit in the Autumn 2026. This will be a learning opportunity, and the next Annual Report will reference the findings and recommendations.

Adrienne Plunkett
Independent Chair DSOG

Church of England National Safeguarding Standards and Quality Assurance Framework

The National Safeguarding Standards have the purpose of establishing consistent standards across the Church at all levels and to provide a means of answering the question 'How good is our safeguarding activity?'

There are five standards:

- **One: Prevention:** Ensuring that church settings have a range of measures which together are effective in preventing abuse.
- **Two: Culture, leadership and capacity:** Securing the safe and healthy culture, effective leadership, resourcing and scrutiny arrangements necessary to deliver high quality safeguarding practices and outcomes.
- **Three: Recognising, assessing and managing risk:** Ensuring processes are of a high quality and result in positive outcomes.
- **Four: Victims and survivors:** Seeking to place victims and survivors at the centre of safeguarding responses and to ensure that they experience the Church's responses as helpful.
- **Five: Learning, supervision and support:** Emphasising the importance of training, professional development, support and supervision for roles within the Church.

Each standard has several ‘What good looks like’ indicators to identify strengths, as well as areas for development. Resources and tools have been developed to support diocesan, parish and cathedral settings.

Safeguarding Standard One: Culture, Leadership & Capacity

Leadership

The Bishop’s Leadership Team (BLT) has continued to engage with the resources developed by the National Safeguarding Team to support the National Safeguarding Standards and has been working through each Standard in turn. The culture survey referenced in last year’s report has taken place and is covered in more detail below. At the time of writing BLT is in the process of finalizing an action plan as a response to that survey.

In July, Bishop Martyn and Bishop Saju welcomed PSCs to an event at Launde Abbey to celebrate and encourage their work. More recently, Bishop Martyn has recorded a video message in support of the launch of the Survivor Care Strategy.

Safeguarding has been a regular item on the agenda of the Trustee Board and Adrienne Plunkett attended for the discussion of the 2024 DSOG Annual Report in April, as well as participating at the Bishop’s Advisory Forum when it discussed the same report. Regular links have been established between the Chair of Trustees and Chair of DSOG.

In March the trustees responded to a letter from the Charity Commission which was sent to all dioceses, asking for the trustees to comment, in light of decisions made by General Synod, whether there were legal impediments to safeguarding in the Church of England. The trustees gave a comprehensive response outlining some areas for consideration.

Culture Survey

In alignment with the National Safeguarding Standard relating to Culture, Leadership and Capacity, the Bishop’s Leadership Team commissioned a survey to assess safeguarding practices, leadership approachability, and the overall climate around safeguarding within the diocese. Independent HR consultant Margaret Gildea was engaged to conduct the survey and facilitate focus groups, ensuring a wide range of voices were heard, including Parish Safeguarding Coordinators, Diocesan Staff, Clergy, and Lay Ministers.

The methodology combined six in-person focus groups, one online session, and a survey completed by 84 individuals, representing clergy, lay ministers, and safeguarding coordinators. In total, feedback was gathered from approximately 150 people across the diocese. The survey and focus groups explored perceptions of senior leadership’s approachability, openness to challenge, willingness to listen, and responsiveness to safeguarding concerns. Participants were also invited to suggest improvements for safeguarding culture.

Key Findings

- **Approachability and Responsiveness:** Most participants had not directly approached senior leaders with safeguarding concerns, but those who had generally found them approachable and felt listened to. The Diocesan Safeguarding Officer and DST received significant praise for their expertise and support. Survey data indicated that 77% of those who raised concerns felt heard, and most were confident that action would be taken.
- **Enablers:** Established relationships with senior leaders, good communication, prior positive experiences, and the expertise of the Diocesan Safeguarding Team were cited as major enablers. Face-to-face contact was preferred over email, and feeling respected and included in decisions fostered confidence.
- **Barriers:** The main barriers included busy schedules of senior leaders, uncertainty about what constitutes a safeguarding issue, and concerns about damaging relationships or being perceived negatively. Ambiguity between safeguarding, HR, and pastoral issues was frequently mentioned, especially regarding bullying and unhealthy behaviours.
- **Areas for Improvement:** Suggestions focused on enhancing two-way communication, clarifying safeguarding thresholds and processes, improving training (especially practical and role-specific content), fostering more relational leadership, tailoring expectations to parish size, and strengthening support for Parish Safeguarding Coordinators. Improved systems for addressing bullying and clearer accountability measures were also suggested.

The survey revealed a strong safeguarding culture within the Diocese of Leicester, characterized by approachable leadership, a highly valued Diocesan Safeguarding Team, and a collective commitment to continuous improvement. An Action Plan is being developed to address the areas for improvement highlighted in the report.

Executive Sub-Group

The Executive Sub-Group comprises the Archdeacon of Loughborough (as Safeguarding Lead), DSO, Bishop's Chaplain, the Dean, and Director of Operations and Governance.

Over the last year the main focus of the Sub-Group's work has been preparation for the INEQE audit. For this purpose two additional members have joined the Sub-Group: the Archdeacon of Leicester and the Chief Executive and Diocesan Secretary. Over a series of meetings covering a large amount of detail, this expanded group has worked through the preparation tool provided by the National Safeguarding Team to identify existing evidence and highlight areas where more attention is needed.

Alongside this preparatory work the Sub-Group has also focused on keeping abreast of national developments, particularly in relation to the Future of Safeguarding proposals and has been involved in keeping track of work towards certification under the new Regional Model. This culminated in certification being achieved in September.

Other main areas of work have included governance clarity and reporting lines, leading to the Memorandum of Understanding between DSOG and the Trustee Board; team capacity; monitoring and compliance work; and the development of a detailed Safeguarding Risk Register (still in draft form at the end of 2025).

Safeguarding in Leicester Cathedral

The Cathedral Safeguarding Committee continues to meet quarterly under the Independent Chair, Mark Dalton, and the Canon Pastor continues to hold the role of Chapter Safeguarding Lead. Written reports to each Safeguarding Committee and Chapter meeting have noted the level of incidents and concerns over each reporting period and reported on progress on the Action Plan. A summative written report was also submitted to the Cathedral community at the Annual General Meeting.

The Cathedral has a detailed and comprehensive live Action Plan which has been formulated particularly through studying the learning coming out of other Cathedrals' INEQE audits but also picking up on operational and strategic matters.

The Cathedral has created another group to sit under the Safeguarding Committee which is currently known as the INEQE Planning Group. This group holds the detailed outworking of the Action Plan and related Action Log. Members of this group are those most directly involved with implementing good safeguarding practices in the different areas of Cathedral life. A working group comprising the two Safeguarding Coordinators, the Chapter Safeguarding Lead and the Canon Missioner meets regularly to work on the details of implementation, and members of that group, together with the Chair of the Safeguarding Committee, are beginning to investigate to see for themselves what things look like in practice now the Cathedral has arrived at some stability in terms of routines. For while the Cathedral diligently worked through procedures prior to opening the Heritage Learning Centre, it is clear that there is further work to be done as the new rhythms of Cathedral life bed down and it is a much busier building now than hitherto.

The Cathedral continues to work very closely with and is very grateful for the Diocesan Safeguarding Team through their Service Level Agreement. The relationship is strong and much appreciated – a feature of our shared Safeguarding life that is not necessarily so everywhere.

The Cathedral's experience is that there is increased social need among those who visit – for example people experiencing homelessness or with mental health needs. The Chaplaincy team is crucial in providing good pastoral listening. Relevant staff readily point people to specialist help, with now several staff trained on Mental Health First Aid.

The Cathedral continues to ensure that staff and volunteers are safely recruited and undertake the appropriate safeguarding training. Other relevant training is offered, with reasonable take up.

Revd Canon Alison Adams

Canon Pastor, Leicester Cathedral

Diocesan Safeguarding Oversight Group (DSOG)

DSOG has continued to meet quarterly during 2025. Rachael Spiers, DSO, and Andy Brockbank, Director of Operations and Governance, meet monthly with Adrienne Plunkett, Independent Chair, to facilitate communication between meetings, with the emphasis on progressing outstanding actions. Adrienne Plunkett also meets quarterly with Bishop Martyn to consider both national and local safeguarding issues and now meets every six months with David Palmer, Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance.

Alongside ongoing discussion of the impact of and response to the Makin and Scolding reports DSOG has also been engaged in discussions of developments in the diocese and their impact on the effectiveness of safeguarding, with invitations extended to:

- Claire Bampton, Diocesan Programme Manager, in respect of Minster Community implementation.
- Bishop Martyn and Margaret Gildea, regarding the Culture survey.
- Liz Rawlings, Discipleship and Vocations Enabler, in respect of safer recruitment and training of lay ministers.

In receiving reports on Minster Community implementation, DSOG looks in particular at their impact on safeguarding arrangements. It has been encouraging to hear that there are examples of Safeguarding Coordinators working together as Minster Communities are formed, and noted that there is a need to monitor and support these developments. With regard to the culture survey DSOG has asked for an update on progress with the action plan developed in the light of this to be presented in March 2026. Discussion of lay ministers has highlighted the need for greater central oversight of Focal Ministry and feedback on this is progressed has been requested.

DSOG has also heard from Kate Dench of the National Safeguarding Team regarding the INEQE audit programme.

A summary is circulated widely within the Diocese after each DSOG meeting to increase understanding of the role of DSOG and the areas of focus and is posted on the diocesan website.

Safeguarding Standard Two: Prevention

It is recognised nationally and locally that parishes are at the forefront of safeguarding in the Church of England, they play a key role in ensuring that church settings are safe places for children, young people and vulnerable adults.

Support for Parish Safeguarding Coordinators (PSCs):

We continue to be aware that the role of PSC comes with significant responsibilities and challenges and the DST endeavours to ensure a high level of support is provided.

Alongside induction sessions for new PSCs, advice & support, sharing training opportunities and regular communication, an annual conference and a social event in

the summer attended by the Bishops' Leadership Team, bi-monthly drop-in sessions are offered. The pattern of zoom and face-to face meetings has continued and attendance ranges between 12 and 30+ PSCs at each session.

Topics have included local resources on self-neglect & hoarding, modern slavery & local initiatives, new leaflets developed by Survivor Voices, accessing the e-manual, together with updates about training and the Parish Dashboard. Links are made between our discussions and the national Standards

Bishop Martyn attended our February drop in, to hear from PSCs and Adrienne Plunkett, Independent Chair, has also joined some of the drop-ins. This has been valuable in ensuring PSCs feel valued and listened to.

The drop-in sessions are also an important opportunity for PSCs to get ideas and support from each other, to talk about their work including the many challenges of this role. A key concern has been the removal of the parish safeguarding handbook by the NST over the summer and its replacement by an online toolkit for PSCs. Several of our PSCs contributed to a pilot of some of the new resources being developed nationally, but concerns remain for many about the practicalities of accessing these in church settings.

Discussions at drop-in sessions, facilitated regularly by the DST, have revealed that a significant number of PSCs are feeling overwhelmed and tired by the demands of the role; with some holding multiple roles in their parishes. Adrienne Plunkett, DSOG Chair, followed this up with a brief survey of PSCs, which was completed by 58 PSCs, representing 71 parishes. The headline data below evidences the challenges faced by some PSCs.

- 26 PSCs (45%) are in parishes in vacancy.
- 21 (36%) are not supported by a member of the clergy/lay minister.
- 13 (22%) are covering more than one parish.
- 23 (40%) have more than one role in their parish.
- 19 (33%) are in parishes where not all roles, e.g. church warden, treasurer, are filled.

The additional comments provide a fuller picture of these challenges, some of which are cause for concern, indicating that some PSCs are overwhelmed by the size of the task and feeling unsupported. This is also a regional and national issue. Developed with DSOG's PSC representatives, a proposed plan of action is being developed with the Lead Archdeacon which will be presented to the Bishop's Leadership Team.

Parish Dashboards

The Parish Dashboard is an important tool, not just for helping PCCs and PSCs manage safeguarding compliance locally, but also for providing a picture of safeguarding implementation across the diocese. Analysis of church attendance figures has shown that the majority of parishes not yet making use of the Dashboard are predominantly those with tiny congregations in predominantly rural areas.

Key statistics at the end of 2025 show a mixed picture in terms of Dashboard usage:

- Reduction in number of parishes with an allocated Dashboard (89% down from 91%)
- Increase in number of Dashboards with no owner (27 up from 22) and allocated Dashboards which are dormant (13 up from 8)
- Total number of live Dashboards up slightly: 86% representing 220 out of 255 (previously 84% representing 217/255)

In relation to the 220 parishes where the Dashboard is live there is increased self-reported compliance evidenced by

- 98% have up to date Safeguarding policy approval (up from 96%)
- 56% operating at Dashboard Level 3 (up from 43%)
- 89% have a designated Parish Safeguarding Coordinator in place (up from 84%) but this is down for DBS Administrators (77% from 84%)
- 62% of Coordinators report being up to date with required safeguarding training (up from 53%)
- 66% of church volunteers are shown as having completed all parts of the Safer Recruitment process (up from 53%)
- 72% show all relevant volunteers as DBS checked (up from 63%)

Subscription to the Safeguarding Hubs is now being considered. This is an additional tool which helps with Safer Recruitment.

Dashboard reports are provided to Quality and Improvement Sub-Group meetings. The Dashboard continues to be promoted by DST with Pete Holloway, Assistant Diocesan Safeguarding Officer holding this brief for the team. Pete is also on the national Dashboard Executive Group which is an advisory group to the service provider of the Safeguarding Dashboard and gives him an important opportunity to feed into the development of the Dashboard. It is anticipated work will include the development of a cathedral specific safeguarding dashboard.

Name	Unused	Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Total Live	Total All
Archdeaconry of Leicester	23	5	5	38	64	107	135
Archdeaconry of Loughborough	4	3	6	27	80	113	120
Total	27	8	11	65	144	220	255
	10.6%	3.1%	4.3%	25.5%	56.5%	86.3%	100%

Listening to Children and Young People

During the spring and summer term this year, the theme chosen for the listening event by young people was safeguarding, with the listening campaign created in partnership

with the Diocesan Safeguarding Team. The project heard from 107 young voices between the ages of 7 and 17 years, made up of 49 children and 58 young people across three primary schools, one secondary school and eight church groups.

Whilst there is information available online and on posters about keeping safe, what this listening work told us was that the best way to share safeguarding information, is in person and by someone children and young people are familiar with. This is an important reminder that, by those in safeguarding roles regularly introducing themselves to children's groups in a church setting, this could be really impactful in ensuring those children know who they can go to, if they ever have a concern.

Bishop Martyn and Rachael Spiers DSO were asked by the Bishops' Children & Youth Council to respond by video, outlining what they were going to do as a result. Rachael undertook to share the report from this work at DSOG, with Safeguarding Coordinators and with other safeguarding teams. Matt's invitation to the November National DSOs' Conference was part of this undertaking.

We are grateful to Matt Long, Diocesan Youth Enabler, for his support in enabling this listening work and to everyone that took part. Matt's presentation of his work at a recent National Safeguarding Officers' Day in September, has understandably drawn significant interest from other diocesan teams.

Safeguarding Standard 3: Recognising, assessing & managing risk

Quality and Improvement Sub-Group (QISG)

The Quality and Improvement Sub-Group (QISG) met regularly in 2025, chaired by DS Dan Cumpsty (Leicestershire Police) and attended by Ruth Lake, representing the local authorities, and key diocesan staff, as well as the Independent Chair of DSOG. QISG's work has focused on internal audit and monitoring activities, including two audits, the first of safer recruitment processes and the second of safeguarding core group minutes.

QISG continued to oversee compliance and progress through the Parish Dashboards, encouraging the Asst DSO's work in identifying parishes with low uptake for increased support and monitoring key safeguarding indicators. The group also reviewed recommendations from the INEQE Annual Report and contributed to the development of the DSOG's Safeguarding Intelligence Pack. Other activities included updating the audit tool for Core Group decision-making and supporting the Healthy Leadership and Culture survey.

Throughout the year, QISG maintained a focus on promoting best practice, responding to national safeguarding developments, and ensuring that governance bodies are kept informed of progress and areas for improvement.

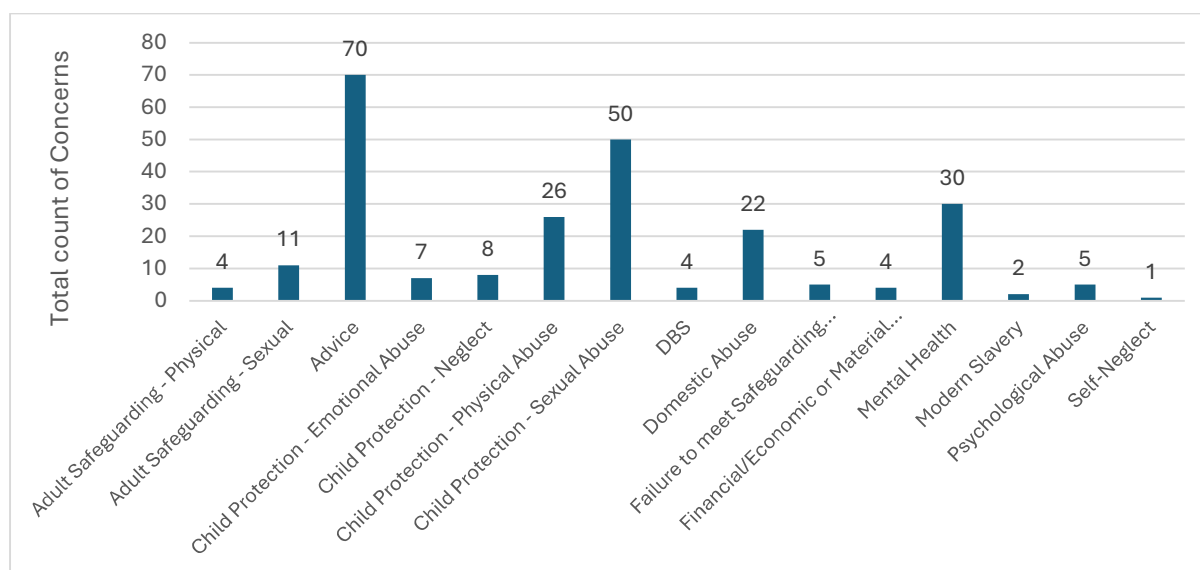
Referrals to the Diocesan Safeguarding Team

Responding to referrals and providing advice to church settings remains a central part of the work of the Diocesan Safeguarding Team (DST).

Concern about the capacity of the team has been identified in successive annual DSOG reports and we are delighted that the team has been boosted by the arrival of Ariel Baker as Safeguarding Administrator in June and Sue Erett, as an additional Assistant Diocesan Safeguarding Officer (ADSO), in September. Ariel previously worked in Generous Giving, so has a good understanding of our diocesan and church context. Sue joins us from Leicestershire Police, where she worked as a detective for 27 years, spending much of that time within the child protection & safeguarding arena.

Referrals can include requests for advice involving a limited number of contacts, as well as matters requiring referral to the police, Children or Adults Social Care and the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), which require complex involvement over many months. With Sue as an additional ADSO, a priority for early 2026 is to create a more efficient system for the management of referrals to the team.

In 2025, 251 referrals were received. It is important to note referrals continue to be overwhelmingly focused on adults. There are currently 23 church safety plans in place to formally manage those potentially posing a risk in church settings. 5 safety plans were closed during the year, 7 new plans have been put in place and 3 more are in progress. These continue to be supported by close working with church settings and colleagues from the Police and Probation.



A significant proportion of referrals to the team are for advice from church settings on a wide range of issues. We believe it is important that people feel able to contact the team about concerns, but we note feedback from the culture survey undertaken during the year that greater clarity in some instances about what is a safeguarding matter for the team, would be welcomed.

Collaboration with the Archdeacons and other diocesan colleagues is central to responding well to referrals and signposting appropriately. The benefits of this have been recognised by the introduction of weekly meetings of the diocesan team and Archdeacons since September. These have facilitated information sharing where needed, joined up working and planning of safeguarding meetings. This has also been invaluable in responding to the demands of the new Code of Practice, for Managing Safeguarding Concerns and Allegations, introduced in September.

The impact of the publication of the Makin Review (November 2024) continued to be felt into 2025 as the DST undertook work in relation to a retired priest in the diocese named in the report and continued work on referrals triggered by the review and publicity. In addition to this, it is important to note the additional workload on the team, in relation to the publication of the File on 4 programme in June.

Safeguarding Intelligence Pack

Having developed the framework for the Safeguarding Intelligence Pack and taking the first steps in populating it with qualitative and quantitative data, 2025 has been a year of consolidation as we have sought to embed the Pack as a tool and ensure that it is possible to capture all of the information required. Unfortunately, the new Casework system has not been able to provide all of the statistical data that was envisaged and it has therefore been necessary to invest staff time in manual counting for some of the information.

DSOG discussions have highlighted that:

- The Intelligence Pack is consistently found to be a valuable tool for oversight, enabling DSOG to scrutinise safeguarding arrangements and monitor trends as well as tracking compliance and identifying areas needing support.
- The qualitative information has been found to be helpful for understanding survivor feedback and training outcomes.
- There is ongoing encouragement to use the Pack for identifying trends and supporting improvement, with DSOG recognising its role in promoting transparency and accountability.

A full version of the Pack was presented to DSOG in December 2025 and the areas of concern highlighted included the challenges of information sharing from statutory agencies, i.e. police and probation, which has contributed to significant delays on the completion of some risk assessments. It has been agreed through the contribution of representatives of those agencies on DSOG that an escalation protocol will be developed. In addition, there is concern regarding the low percentage, around 50%, of PSCs who have completed the Leadership training. This links with the challenges facing PSCs and is being considered with the BLT.

The Pack has continued to evolve and as would be expected, DSOG has requested additions to the information presented, particularly in relation to narrative to support the raw data.

Audit of Core Groups

In November 2025, the external members of QISG met with Rachael Spiers, DSO to undertake an audit in relation to Core Groups held Jan-June 2025. This involved reading meeting reports and minutes of the meetings.

This audit will be discussed in full at the next meeting of QISG, but considerations from this included using a template for minutes, attention to recording standards, including clarity of timescales and ownership for actions.

Safer Recruitment and People Management Audit

As part of QISG's Workplan 2025, Andy Brockbank, Director of Operations and Governance, and Adrienne Plunkett, DSOG Independent Chair, undertook an audit of three HR records using an audit tool based on the NST's Safer Recruitment and People Management Assessment Tool (Short Version). Three HR records were audited, two from 2021 and one from 2025. Findings from the audit resulted in the following recommendations:

- An improved effective online system should be established for maintaining HR records of DBF employees.
- A pre-recruitment checklist should be used to ensure that all the necessary checks, including overseas checks and contact with referees, are undertaken before appointments are approved.
- Ensure that all officers chairing interview panels are safer recruitment trained.
- Ensure all interviews contain safeguarding questions so that candidates understand the importance of safeguarding in the diocese.

The Diocesan HR resources are to be strengthened with the appointment of a part-time HR Manager who will have responsibility for actioning the recommendations.

Safeguarding Standard 4: Victims & survivors

BBC File on Four Programme and Charity Commission Follow-Up

During 2025, the Diocese of Leicester was subject to external scrutiny following a BBC File on Four radio programme which focused on a former diocesan employee convicted of online harassment and stalking. The programme raised questions about the Diocese's response to concerns and whether the matter should have been classified as a safeguarding issue. While the Diocesan Safeguarding Team (DST) supported the victim in reporting to the police, the case was managed as an employment conduct matter rather than a safeguarding case, as the individuals involved did not meet the threshold for vulnerable adults under Church of England policy. The rationale for this decision was documented, and the Diocese acknowledges that such distinctions can be complex and sometimes contentious.

The Diocese remains committed to transparency and continuous improvement in safeguarding practice, recognising the importance of clear decision-making, robust

documentation, and trauma-informed approaches, especially in cases that fall into the grey area between HR and safeguarding. The appointment of a new HR Manager is intended to help address these complexities and support the ongoing development of safeguarding culture within the Diocese.

Focus Group and Survivor Care Strategy.

A key priority in the Safeguarding Strategy, overseen by DSOG, has been the production of a Survivor Care Strategy for Leicester Diocese and the Cathedral, shaping future care and support for survivors. Alongside this it was important to ensure opportunities for survivors' voices to contribute to practice development.

In 2024, we were able to establish a small group of survivors interested in supporting and contributing to this work. The work of the Focus Group was facilitated by Shabnum Popat, Clinical Lead for Quetzal (a local counselling service working with childhood abuse), and Rachael Spiers, DSO.

The Strategy sets out how the Diocese and Cathedral will care for and support those who have disclosed abuse related to church settings, as well as those who have experienced abuse outside of the church. The focus group has developed practical advice for church settings about the care and support for survivors who may be in church settings, including those who may not already be known.

The Strategy was launched at the start of December, with a supporting video from Bishop Martyn. It is located on a newly developed page on the diocesan website specifically for victims and survivors. Briefings for church settings are planned for January 2026.

The opportunity to work in this way, to seek the views of survivors, has been hugely valuable. Above everything, we are indebted to the Focus Group for their work and time, for being prepared to share learning from painful experiences and for their patience as we have worked with them.

We are keen to build on our learning from this experience of engagement with victims and survivors, in the coming year.

It's been really beneficial to be involved in this project and....thank you for giving me the opportunity to share.

Member of focus group

Safeguarding Standard 5: Learning, Supervision & Support

IICSA Recommendations 1 and 8: Regional Safeguarding Lead

I became the Regional Safeguarding Lead for the East Midlands in December 2024 and after a comprehensive induction period lasting four weeks, I began the role properly at the end of January 2025. My background is twenty years in social work and more recently within local authority leadership.

Regional Safeguarding Leads are members of the National Safeguarding Team (NST), working to support safeguarding practice in local Church bodies across the Church of England. Each Regional Safeguarding Lead supports the development of best safeguarding practice in one of eight regional clusters of Diocesan Boards of Finance (DBFs) and cathedrals. They provide professional supervision and quality assurance to Safeguarding Officers working for DBFs and cathedrals in their region. Regional Safeguarding Leads also work closely with senior managers, senior clergy, and other stakeholders in these bodies, representing the NST at the local level. They work closely with their fellow Regional Safeguarding Leads and colleagues in the NST to ensure Church-wide consistency in approach.

My priority was to formulate a supervisory relationship with the DSA and from that begin the certification process. I am pleased to report that this has now been completed, and Rachael Spiers has successfully moved from DSA to DSO. Supervision is 6 weekly and provides a space for Rachael to reflect, discuss and seek advice.

Another priority was the implementation of the regional model where DSOs from across the East Midlands (Leicester, Derby, Southwell & Nottingham, Lincoln and Peterborough) were brought together. We meet online once a week and face to face three times a year. This has enabled the DSOs to access informal peer support, advice and guidance on policy and practice.

A further core responsibility is quality assurance, which has started but is very much in its infancy. A revised framework is in development and the QA Tools are being formulated. The framework will be thematic in accordance with the five National Standards. This will enable an analysis of data from across the country, which will then impact the strategic plan moving forwards.

Gemma Barber, RSL East Midlands

Annual Safeguarding Conference

Around 55 Parish Safeguarding Coordinators (PSCs), churchwardens and members of clergy joined the Diocesan Safeguarding Team, Bishop Martyn and Adrienne Plunkett, DSOG Independent Chair, for the annual online safeguarding conference on Saturday 8 November.

The conference had 3 guest speakers. Alex Kubeyinje, Church of England National Director of Safeguarding, spoke about the work of the National Safeguarding Team; learning & improvement, including work by Pilavachi survivors to create a case study for the revised safeguarding leadership training starting in 2026 and an update on the Safeguarding Structures Programme. Alex outlined national work to create resources to support PSCs.

Tom Wilson, Director of the St Philips Centre spoke about his research into the nature of spiritual abuse, resulting in the publication of a book, Safer Faiths, Safer Followers. Through the use of case studies, we discussed what constitutes spiritual abuse and how we can best mitigate against spiritual abuse occurring in our church contexts.

Finally Matt Long, Diocesan Youth Enabler provided an update on the learning from the Spring/ Summer 2025 listening exercise on safeguarding with children & young people across the diocese.

Training Sub-Group

The Training Sub-Group met regularly throughout 2025, supporting the Safeguarding Training Officer and adapting to new challenges. Charmaine Odum, PSC representative, stepped down at the end of the year, and the group acknowledged her valuable contributions.

Raising Awareness of Domestic Abuse (RADA) training saw changes, with a new course introduced late in 2024 being withdrawn and a wait of several months for a relaunch. Those needing to take this training were directed to the previous version in the intervening period. The Sub-Group also focused on improving compliance tracking and booking processes, moving toward more efficient administration.

Training Uptake and Delivery:

Training numbers increased significantly, especially among PTO clergy, following reminders from the Bishops' Office and in a pastoral letter. There was also a notable rise in Basic Awareness online training early in the year, with safeguarding issues in the news possibly contributing to engagement. The Group responded to ongoing resistance to, and confusion about, safeguarding training requirements.

Training Impact and Feedback:

The Sub-Group refined feedback and impact measurement tools, including surveys and feedback forms, to better capture the effectiveness of training. Efforts have been made to streamline questions and encourage more responses, with a focus on understanding the long-term impact of leadership training.

Parish Safeguarding Coordinators' Conference:

The annual conference took place in November, focusing on spiritual abuse and featuring an update from the National Director of Safeguarding. The Group considered feedback to better meet Coordinator needs and explored ways to increase engagement and interactivity at future events.

The Sub-Group also continued to improve compliance tracking and booking processes, moving toward more efficient administration, and reviewed its workplan in light of national reports and strategic plans.

Training

Louise Warner continues as the full time Safeguarding Training Officer (STO).



3,794 safeguarding courses were completed in 2025, 1183 more than in 2024.

Updates

- New Raising Awareness of Domestic Abuse (RADA) course now in use, following withdrawal of the previous updated version in January. New scenarios stimulate much discussion, and data has an impact.
- 20 coordinators participated in piloting some Extended Learning Materials for PSOs' (Parish Safeguarding Officers – known as Coordinators in Leicester) materials as part of the National PSO Group remit. Choosing modules of interest.

Feedback

- Continued collecting for face-to-face Basic Awareness, Foundation, Raising Awareness of Domestic Abuse (RADA), scanning sheets. Plan to look at how to achieve deeper analysis easier, e.g. electronic forms.
- Collected feedback from PSCs' conference. 100% of responders learned something new. Rated 4.5 stars.

Safeguarding Leadership Impact Survey:

Trialled to understand the impact leadership training is having, ([Safeguarding leadership training Impact November 2025 Example – Fill out form](#)), 95 people were invited to participate who completed training June 2024-May 2025, so would have had some time to work on an action plan which is set to work over 4-8 months. 35 responses received as of 24/11/25. (Total of 68 responses in total)

- 78% said leadership training had definitely impacted their ministry/ role or thinking, with 18% maybe.

- 66% said it definitely helped their context make progress with safeguarding, with 23% maybe.
- 97% could identify a change in practice as a result of leadership training.
- 68% of those who identified challenges in implementing action plans cited time/ too many other things needing attention. (75% of Safeguarding Coordinators)
- 29% completed all actions on action plans, 69% completed some.
- Passed to National Learning & Development Team on their request.
- Will be reviewing and applying learning to other courses.

[Safeguarding leadership training Impact November 2025 – Results](#)

Booking System:

- Moved to Microsoft Forms to make booking easier; can be completed on behalf of someone else.
- The transition to the Church of England Safeguarding Training Portal for leadership training is on hold following feedback from other dioceses on challenges with the system.

Reminders & Compliance:

- Church of England Safeguarding training Portal now sending some reminders
- Manually produced spreadsheets have aided compliance work, but keeping them up to date and usable is a challenge.
- Some specific reminders with all training dates and specified timescale for action and passing to Archdeacon if needed; most responded quickly. Longer term reminders gives the month leadership expires and a table to check training.
- Currently refining CMS possibilities which would work better with more automated reminders currently in development using Excel.
- General reminder in February pastoral letter generated a good response.
- Some people take responsibility for ensuring their training is up to date.
- There's currently a pilot of joining up systems so that they talk to each other.

Recurrent themes arising in training:

- Too many things to do (Minster Communities frequently mentioned)
- Sense of weariness
- Those working hard feeling let down by impression that safeguarding is done badly at a higher level. (e.g. Makin and Scolding Reviews and other news stories)
- Dealing with challenging people and unhealthy behaviour
- Feeling reinvigorated about safeguarding
- Safeguarding in small churches

Response to national reviews

Following the publication of the major reports produced by Makin and Scolding in 2025, work has continued into responding at diocesan level to the implications of these reports. At the end of 2024 DSOG had specifically requested reassurance from the Bishop's Leadership Team that immediate issues arising out of these reports were receiving due consideration and an appropriate response in the diocese. This came in the form of a report to DSOG in March 2025 and in ongoing engagement as follows.

Scolding Report (Soul Survivor/Pilavachi)

In relation to Scolding, the diocesan response has focused on ensuring that church settings which fall outside or on the margins of parish structures have proper oversight in place. This has been a regular agenda item at the Bishops & Archdeacons meeting throughout the year. Reviews of the status of Bishop's Mission Orders (BMOs) have been undertaken and action taken as appropriate to bring legal arrangements up to date to ensure that ministry is taking place within a secure framework and with appropriate accountability.

Makin Report (Smyth)

With the Makin Report having been published late in 2024, DSOG was not able to give full attention to it until its March 2025 meeting. By that time the report and its implications had already been the subject of discussion at meetings of BLT, Diocesan Synod and the Trustee Board of the diocese. A small group was asked to look at the recommendations and identify those which are particularly relevant to the diocese. Due to other pressures, such as the certification process under the regional model implementation, it was not possible for the group to meet until later in the year. Relevant actions have now been identified and are being worked into the Business Plan for 2026 to support the diocesan Safeguarding Strategy.

The actions focus on 5 main areas:

- Dissemination of information around the Diocese;
- Consideration of what a 'golden thread' approach looks like in practice;
- Particular points of clarification in relation to vocations work;
- Points of clarification on Safeguarding Case Management Group agendas;
- How to highlight matters referred to in the report in training.

The work on implementation will continue into 2026.

Conclusion

The aim of this Annual Report is to provide an overview of safeguarding activity in the Diocese and Cathedral, setting this in the context of safeguarding nationally in the

Church of England. The content of the report demonstrates the level of activity both nationally and locally, the strengths, challenges and areas for further development.

At a national level, work is already well underway to establish an independent safeguarding scrutiny body, and a recommendation will be made to the General Synod in February 2026 as to whether an independent organisation should also be established to undertake operational safeguarding. If agreed, this will lead to major change in safeguarding arrangements.

At a local level, as already identified, there have been significant developments during 2025, notably the launch of the Survivor Care Strategy, certification to join the regional safeguarding arrangements, the further development of the Safeguarding Intelligence Pack and the listening work with children and young people. The numbers of safeguarding training courses undertaken has increased significantly and regular drop-ins are held for Parish Safeguarding Co-ordinators. The outcome of the survey of leadership and culture was in the main positive but has provided recommendations to strengthen this from a safeguarding perspective.

Work continues in implementing the Safeguarding Code of Practice, launched in 2025, and audits have identified the need to strengthen safer recruitment processes and the robustness of Safeguarding Case Management Groups. The challenges facing PSCs are acknowledged and consideration is being given to how to address these.

Rachel Spiers, DSO, and the Diocesan Safeguarding Team (DST) continue to provide highly professional advice and support, which is widely acknowledged and valued across the Diocese. It should be recognised that alongside the DST there are key officers who also contribute to the effectiveness of the safeguarding arrangements, including the Archdeacons, Director of Operations and Governance, Bishop's Office and Bishop's Chaplain. Whilst this year additional resources have been allocated to the DST and HR by Trustees, workload and capacity for all these officers should continue to be monitored.

In the Autumn 2026 INEQE will undertake the independent audit of safeguarding arrangements in the Diocese of Leicester and the Cathedral. This will be a major piece of work and preparation is already underway. The next Annual Report will therefore contain the key messages and recommendations from the audit.

One of the recommendations of the Makin Review is that safeguarding should be a '*golden thread*' running through the organisation, so that activities and developments, whether at a strategic or parish level, should be considered through the lens of safeguarding. Having read this report, we would ask you to reflect on your role within the Diocese or Cathedral and whether there is anything further that you can do to ensure this is happening day to day.