

Diocese of Bath and Wells Past Cases Review 2

Executive Summary

Foreword

The independent review of all past cases of concern or allegations has proved to be an invaluable process for the diocese. Most importantly, it has allowed us to reach out to survivors who have been failed in the past and to apologise to them for any failures. I would like to thank all the survivors who engaged with the review for their bravery in sharing their stories with us – by doing so they are helping us to move forward and be a safer church for all.

The review has identified some important lessons for us to learn. We started to address the concerns raised as soon as the report was received and remain committed to addressing them fully and we will be updating you on our progress.

It is important to say, however, that while the review into past cases may be complete our commitment to safeguarding is ongoing and unwavering. We would always ask anyone with concerns, past or present, to report those concerns to us directly or via other support networks.

Safeguarding is not just the responsibility of a few individuals in our diocese, it is the responsibility of each and every one of us. We must all make sure we undertake the required safeguarding training for our roles, remain aware and report any concerns we may have to ensure that the mistakes of the past are not repeated.

The Rt Revd Michael Beasley
Bishop of Bath and Wells

The Rt Revd Ruth Worsley
Bishop of Taunton

Introduction

The Diocese of Bath and Wells, along with dioceses across the country, commissioned an independent review of its past safeguarding cases. The review commenced in March 2020 and the reviewers submitted their report to the Church of England in December 2021. You can read the summary of the national findings on the [Church of England website](#).

The aim of the Past Cases Review 2 (PCR2) was to ensure that any files that could contain information regarding a concern, allegation or conviction in relation to abusive behaviour by a living member of the clergy or church officer (whether still in position or not) were identified, read and analysed by independent safeguarding professionals. In Bath and Wells, every file dating back to the 1950s was reviewed, 3,063 in total. PR2 builds on a previous Past Cases Review which took place between 2007 and 2009 which the Archbishops' Council for the Church of England decided was not comprehensive enough and should be done again.

Of the files reviewed, 175 files were flagged as requiring further action. These actions ranged from addressing practical failings such as locating missing paperwork or removing file duplications, to more serious safeguarding concerns, such as case management issues.

Regardless of the nature of the concern raised, each of the 175 files were subjected to further review and, if appropriate, were investigated by the diocese's dedicated PCR2 caseworker, a former police detective with extensive safeguarding experience.

In all, 16 new safeguarding cases were identified. A new case is determined as information pertaining to an individual or a concern that was previously unknown by the local safeguarding teams. Six of those cases were subsequently referred by the Diocese of Bath and Wells to statutory bodies, including the police and Children's Social Services. None of the statutory bodies has taken any further action with these cases.

In Bath and Wells, the PCR2 review not only looked at past cases, but also safeguarding systems and structures, which is reflected in the recommendations made by the PCR2 independent reviewers.

Four areas were identified as needing improvement:

- survivor support
- reporting concerns
- filing and information management
- engagement with statutory agencies

The diocese has accepted the recommendations of the independent reviewers and an action plan is in place to address each of the local recommendations.

The report recognised the improved safeguarding practice of the Diocese of Bath and Wells over time, stating, “It is evident that the safeguarding response and investigations conducted by the diocese have developed and been refined over time. This reflects both the changes in staff within the safeguarding team and their professional experience. The Diocesan Safeguarding Manager (DSM) and Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser (DSA) have a good knowledge of the policies, legislation and processes at the core of their roles. The independent reviewers found that the significant majority of the concerns identified related to older cases prior to the [then] current DSM and DSA taking up their posts.”

Addressing the concerns raised in PCR2

Area of concern 1: Survivor support

The PCR2 report has identified the need for our diocese to have a clearer strategy for survivor support. It states, 'The outreach and offer of apologies, or support [to survivors], shows a practice of commitment to survivors. This should be maintained and built upon to enable survivors to, for example, co-produce policies as part of an enhanced survivor strategy.'

Response

Ben Goodhind, diocesan safeguarding manager, says, "During my time in the diocese it is clear that there is a passion to support survivors, but we need a more holistic and innovative means of support. While we have offered counselling for some time, many survivors I have spoken to do not feel they receive enough or the right kind of support from us and that needs to be addressed."

With the new Chair of the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP) now in place, there will be a year-long open and transparent review of the support the Diocese of Bath and Wells offers all survivors of abuse. Victims, support groups and other interested parties will be part of that review process to ensure the diocese offers a system of support that victims can trust, and get all the help they need.

Areas that will be considered include: a more joined up approach to victim support with other agencies; including victims in the development of support provision and integrating learnings from national best practice.

The safeguarding team recognises that because it has limited resources it must reach out to other organisations, including victim support groups, to identify what more we can do.

Area of concern: Reporting safeguarding concerns

While the PCR2 report noted that the diocesan website provides 'clear safeguarding guidance and points of contact for reporting concerns and abuse, and survivor support information', as well as an emergency contact number, it also noted that 'there is no standardised referral format and no proactive process for anonymous reporting.'

Response

On receiving the PCR2 report steps were immediately taken to provide a route for anonymous reporting on the diocesan website. However, further work is being undertaken to make reporting easier, not only by making information on the Safeguarding section of the diocesan website clearer and more comprehensive, but also to do more to make sure that people in church are aware of how to report concerns and to make that process as straightforward as possible.

A new member of staff has been appointed to manage website content and develop an online reporting template. Any concerns raised by phone will be captured using the same format.

A new poster promoting safeguarding in the Diocese of Bath and Wells and offering an anonymous reporting option will be available to all churches in time for Safeguarding Sunday, which this year falls on 20 November 2022.

Area of concern: Filing and information management

The independent reviewers noted that there was 'no coherent approach or governance' with regarding to the filing of safeguarding-related information across the diocese. It noted that information was often stored in different places, making it difficult to ensure consistency and to ensure that concerns were passed on. More assurance was also needed with regard to checks on incoming and outgoing clergy.

Response

Bishops' Staff, the senior staff team of the diocese, and the Safeguarding team are working closely together to address this concern and significant progress has already been made. In addition, the Safeguarding Manager and Bishops' Chaplain now meet in person once a month to review and discuss files of clergy transferring into and out of the diocese. A move to an electronic filing system is also planned in order to protect files from damage and make them easier to access.

Area of concern: Liaison with external agencies

The report notes that the Diocesan Safeguarding Manager participates in a variety of multi-agency working systems in the day-to-day delivery of the safeguarding function, including the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP), the South West Ecumenical Safeguarding Forum (SWESF), and has case strategy meetings with the local authority designated officer (LADO) and other partners as required. The report noted the 'effective professional working arrangement' between the Diocesan Safeguarding Manager and the Somerset LADO, but shared concerns around the challenges around information sharing between agencies.

Response

One of the first tasks of Louise Adams, the Chair of the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP) is to work with the Safeguarding Manager to address the lack of formal Information Sharing Arrangements (ISAs) with external agencies. This will require building greater trust with external agencies as to the competencies of the diocese's safeguarding team, who have extensive safeguarding experience and a background in both the probation and police services.

About the Safeguarding team

Ben Goodhind joined the Diocese of Bath and Wells as Safeguarding Manager in September 2021. Ben, who has 20 years of experience in safeguarding and public protection work in the Probation Service, has reshaped the team during his 12 months in post.

Ben is supported by Safeguarding Adviser, Andrew Duncan, a former detective with Avon and Somerset Police who has worked for the diocese for three years. Two part-time and experienced trainers, Enita Andrews and Jacqueline Keir-Bucknall, have recently joined the team and will be reviewing and delivering the team's training provision for clergy and lay people across the diocese. The team is supported by Leonie Jones who has recently moved across from the diocese's training team.

Safeguarding support in the diocese is not only offered by the diocesan Safeguarding team, there is also a network of around 350 volunteer Safeguarding Officers in parishes and benefices throughout the diocese.

The work of the diocesan safeguarding team is scrutinised by the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP), which has recently appointed a new independent chair, Louise Adams, an education, and safeguarding consultant. Louise is a former headteacher, OFSTED inspector and Director of Education for two large academy trusts. The members of the safeguarding panel, which includes representatives from Avon and Somerset Police, the legal profession and Social Services, meets quarterly to provide advice, support and scrutiny of the safeguarding team's strategic vision, performance and service delivery.

Finding support

If you or anyone you are in contact with are affected by the publication of this report and want to talk to someone independently please call the Safe Spaces helpline on 0300 303 1056 or visit www.safespacesenglandandwales.org.uk

Alternatively, you may wish to contact the Diocese of Bath and Wells safeguarding team. Their contact details and other guidance can be found at bathandwells.org.uk/reporting-concerns-or-abuse/