

REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT CHAIR OF THE SAFEGUARDING ADVISORY GROUP TO CHAPTER

1 January 2024 – 31 December 2024

CHAPTER MEETING: MAY 2025

Introduction and Outline of Report

This report has been prepared for Chapter by Peter Spindler, the independent chair of the Cathedral's Safeguarding Advisory Group (SAG). It provides details of the safeguarding activity at St Paul's Cathedral during 2024 and assurance on how well colleagues are performing against an agreed set of safeguarding metrics. The data has been provided by Louise Wilcox, the Cathedral's Safeguarding Officer (CSO) and the Human Resources Department.

This is my eighth and penultimate report for Chapter as this will be my last year in post. The register of risks and the up to date action plan are attached as appendices. Much of the information will not be new to Chapter and the data is an amalgam of that already provided quarterly to them by the Chapter Safeguarding Lead (CSL), however this report is written for publication to demonstrate the spirit of openness and transparency adopted by the Cathedral in its approach to safeguarding. Transparency remains key to accountability especially as the Church has been under such intense scrutiny over the quality of its past safeguarding responses during the last year.

This year's report is presented in a new format and uses the headings from the National Safeguarding Standards to provide a narrative from my perspective on how well the Cathedral is working to ensure the wellbeing of any children, vulnerable individuals or at-risk groups who attend the Cathedral in whatever capacity.

STANDARD ONE: Culture, Leadership and Capacity – *Cathedrals have safe and healthy cultures, effective leadership, resourcing and scrutiny arrangements to deliver high quality safeguarding practices and outcomes.*

A new CSL joined the Cathedral in September and Revd Canon Dr Catherine Okoronkwo has taken over from Revd Canon Dr Neil Evans. I am pleased to report that this has been a seamless transition and the Cathedral has been able to maintain the momentum built by Canon Neil. The CSL continues to be well supported internally by the CSO, COO, Chaplain and HR when appropriate. A new monthly Safeguarding Working Group (SWG) has been established as a result of an external review by the law firm Farrer & Co. to ensure delivery of the safeguarding initiatives arising from the SAG and other associated meetings. This is proving to be a welcome and much needed support to the CSO and CSL.

The Virgers continue to provide the primary initial response on the Cathedral floor if the Chaplain or a pastoral team member are not immediately available and offer support as necessary. Externally, support is provided by the Diocesan Head of Safeguarding and me as independent chair of the SAG thereby ensuring an effective team-based approach to safeguarding. The CSO continues to receive external supervision from a senior, professionally qualified social worker. Safeguarding is a standing item on the agenda of all relevant internal meetings. A new regional supervision model has yet to take effect.

The SAG met in person on four occasions in 2024, with a hybrid attendance option available; March, June, September and December. The Head of Safeguarding for the diocese remains an active member of the SAG, working closely with the CSO. The relationship between the two entities continues to improve and the CSL attends the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel. A close working relationship between the two will be vital as preparations are made for the national audit by the INEQE Group scheduled for September 2025. The Memorandum of Understanding is now due for review between the Dean and the Bishop although I am unaware of any need to invoke the conditions set out in the review during 2024 and consider it fit for purpose.

One issue of note for Chapter concerns capacity. It has been raised as a concern on a number of occasions by senior colleagues at the SAG and has been added to the risk register. The Cathedral has many priorities and it can be challenging at times to deliver on all expectations. The CSO in particular works incredibly hard to co-ordinate activity, deliver training and manage risk. Administrative support to the role is vital and at times has been lacking, however I am pleased to note that support is now planned and am optimistic that the new SWG will provide further additional assistance to the function.

STANDARD TWO: Prevention – *Cathedrals have in place a planned range of measures which together are effective in preventing abuse in their context.*

The Cathedral's safeguarding processes are set out in the policy document '*Promoting a Safer Cathedral*'. The Cathedral Safeguarding Policy and appendices are subject to regular review. Service sheets now include a note advising how members of congregation can alert staff to any safeguarding concerns. A new safeguarding communications plan has been implemented to help bring to life the five national safeguarding standards. The following sub-sections detail prevention elements of the safeguarding arrangements currently in place at the Cathedral:

Safer Recruitment – These practices form part of a framework of checks and balances, which will reduce the possibility of appointing inappropriate individuals to work with those at risk of harm. The Cathedral continues to maintain a good grip on which posts require safeguarding measures to be in place. All HR staff have undertaken the Church of England's safer recruitment training, as have relevant managers with training ongoing throughout 2024. Every interview panel has a colleague who is safer recruitment trained in attendance. Additionally, interviews for relevant posts include safeguarding questions and take account of other safer recruitment protocols, for example closely examining gaps in CVs. In 2024, seven such interviews were held.

Vetting and Barring Checks – The Cathedral contracts *U-check* for its Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks to verify the suitability of those applying to roles which involve working with people at risk of harm. The following data has been provided for the past year:

- 46 DBS applications were submitted by the Cathedral
- 5 DBS checks were carried out by the Diocese for clergy
- All of the above checks were satisfactory
- There are no returns outstanding for all those submitted/checked.

It should be noted that whilst the Cathedral has not accepted DBS certificates from other institutions in the past, it is now allowing this, in certain cases, where a standard or enhanced DBS check is required and the individual is a member of the DBS Update Service. In these circumstances, the following steps are carried out:

- Obtaining consent from the individual to allow the Cathedral to carry out the online check via the DBS Update Service; and
- Requesting to see a copy of the original DBS certificate carried out by the other institution to confirm that the DBS certificate matches the individual's identity and that the level of check is appropriate to the job they are applying for.

STANDARD THREE: Recognising, Assessing and Managing Risk – Risk assessments, safety plans and associated processes are of a high quality and result in positive outcomes. The assessment and management of risk is underpinned by effective partnership working.

Risk Register - The SAG has continued to oversee a detailed 16 point safeguarding risk register following the Cathedral's standard format for the management of risk (see Appx A). Two new risks were added in 2024; overseas schools groups and capacity in safeguarding. None are listed as high while eight are listed as medium risk. Risk management is now a standing item on the SWG agenda. An environmental risk register focussing on safeguarding risk has been updated by the deputy head of security.

Partnership Working – The CSO has built a strong working relationship with both the local authority and City of London Police as well as a number of referral bodies. As set out in section five below, referrals to statutory bodies are routine as is collaboration with other similar institutions.

Working with the Cathedral School – The Designated Safeguarding Lead for the school is an active member of the SAG and the school's relationship with the CSO is strong. This year has seen the introduction of a girls' choir, a significant development, and chorister chaperones ensure the safety and wellbeing of the choristers whilst in their charge. This is a positive initiative which appears to be working well. The school is also an active member of the two SCMGs and is fully engaged in learning lessons from these incidents.

Safeguarding Agreements - The Cathedral currently has only one worshipper on a behaviour management plan.

The Safeguarding Action Plan - (see Appx B) is designed to drive the business of safeguarding at the Cathedral capturing a list of longer-term activities underway and is additional to the routine actions arising from the SAG meetings. There are currently six actions outstanding, five were completed in 2024 and the remainder are being progressed for completion in 2025.

National Review Benchmarking – A number of significant reviews into past abuse within the Church were published in 2024 including the Scolding report into Soul Survivor and the Makin Report. All of the recommendations and learning from these reviews has been transposed onto a benchmarking grid and checked against the current Cathedral safeguarding arrangements. This work is being managed by the SWG which feeds into the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) and SAG as appropriate.

STANDARD FOUR: Victims and Survivors – Victims and survivors experience the timeliness and quality of cathedrals’ responses to disclosures, and their subsequent support, as positively meeting their needs, including their search for justice and helping their healing process.

The identification and reporting of safeguarding presentations, incidents, concerns or issues is a good indicator of the safeguarding culture of an organisation. The Cathedral continues to actively encourage people to speak out when they don’t feel comfortable about a situation or when someone at risk presents in concerning circumstances. Incident/concern reports are submitted by proforma to the CSO for assessment, any further action and entry onto the MyConcern database. The CSO has completed the migration from the original SafeBase case management system to the new national system.

There has been a marked increase in reporting this year from 66 presentations in 2023 to 83 in 2024. The following table demonstrates the trends in reporting year on year since the SAG was established in 2017 when centralised recording was initiated:

Year	Total	Adults	MH Issues	Children
2024	83	57	23	26
2023	66	41	22	25
2022	88	67	23	21
2021	60	47	28	13
2020	38	29	15	9
2019	58	43	N/K	15
2018	12	N/K	N/K	N/K
2017	3	N/K	N/K	N/K

The reports for 2024 can be broken down as follows:

- 57 related to adults – with many displaying issues with their mental health
- 26 concerned children – often on visits and becoming separated from their guardians
- 22 incidents were significant and required referral to statutory services, the London Diocese or other Dioceses/Cathedrals

- One new safeguarding management plan was required as a result.

Safeguarding Case Management Groups (SCMG) – Two SCMGs (formerly known as core groups and chaired by the CSL) have been established, one to manage the response to concerns raised from personal injury claims for abuse at the Cathedral School and secondly, a further disclosure from the years 1979 to 1989. These will continue to meet in 2025 until matters are resolved. Victims and survivors are represented at both groups by the Guild of Companions of St Paul and more recently, a survivor has joined one of the groups. The overall feedback from survivors engaged with the process has been very positive in regard to the approach adopted by the Cathedral to managing these deeply distressing cases.

Survivors' Reference Group – The CSO is a member of a working group, led by the diocese, discussing the creation of a reference group to ensure that the voice of the survivor is heard in developing policy and practice.

Safeguarding Complaint Investigation - In early 2024 I carried out a Stage One internal complaint investigation, commissioned by the COO, in response to a complaint made regarding the Cathedral's handling of a specific safeguarding matter. I am pleased to report the Cathedral's actions in handling the issue were entirely appropriate and in accordance with national practice. Three recommendations were made in relation to record keeping and communications with the family involved.

STANDARD FIVE: Learning, Supervision and Support – *All those engaged in safeguarding related activity in cathedrals receive the type and level of learning, professional development, support and supervision necessary to respond to safeguarding situations, victims and survivors, and respondents effectively.*

Safeguarding Training - The Cathedral adheres to the national Church of England training framework and, in addition to the mandatory national training, the Cathedral provides localised safeguarding training to all pastoral volunteers to prepare duty ministers for the type of safeguarding presentations they are likely to see in a cathedral context delivered by the chaplain and CSO. Proposals for joint training of staff with Westminster Abbey are being actively progressed. The following table provides a detailed breakdown of the safeguarding training delivered in 2024 and what remains outstanding:

Training	Total Completed 2024	Total outstanding
Basic Awareness required for all Church Officers, volunteers and staff	107 Staff 30 Volunteers	9 116
Foundation required for those who work with children/vulnerable adults	105 staff	7
Leadership those with PTO, managers and staff who have significant contact with children and vulnerable adults as part of their duties	16	5 (all booked for courses in 2025)

Senior Leadership training required for all senior staff	9	0
Safer Recruitment for recruitment panels for positions working with children and young people	17	3
In house pastoral team training – for all volunteer ministers and appropriate lay staff.	5	0
Domestic Abuse Awareness	5	1

Cathedral Safeguarding Practitioners’ Network – St Paul’s continues to be an active member of the national Cathedrals Safeguarding Network and staff attended the national conference in November at Westminster Abbey which this year focussed on suicide prevention and “safeguarding the safeguarders”. A speaker from the event has been invited to address staff from the Cathedral, the Diocese of London and Westminster Abbey later this year in a collaborative training event which is a welcome initiative.

External Specialist Safeguarding Review – The Cathedral continues to demonstrate its willingness to learn from others and open itself to external scrutiny. In July 2024, the law firm Farrer & Co presented a report to the SCMG examining the response to the disclosures of non-recent abuse from 2019. The comprehensive, 13-page report concluded with 11 recommendations, all of which have been accepted by the SCMG and are being actioned by the COO and the SWG.

Concluding Remarks

There are a number of issues I would encourage Chapter to monitor progress on during the coming year. In summary, these are listed as follows:

- Development of a survivor engagement strategy in partnership with the Diocese
- Preparation for the 2025 INEQE national audit of diocese and their cathedrals
- Building capacity and monitoring welfare of those with safeguarding responsibilities
- Review the MOU between the Diocese and the Cathedral
- Identifying and inducting a new independent chair for the SAG

In conclusion, I am pleased to report that the Cathedral’s safeguarding response remains effective. Overall, the team continue to work well with the CSO who is focussed and energised. I remain confident that the Cathedral has the requisite levels of commitment and understanding to ensure high standards and look forward to working with INEQE to see what further improvements can be made to the current safeguarding framework.

Peter Spindler
Independent Chair, Safeguarding Advisory Group
February 2025