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SCIE Learning Together[®]

Diocese of Aberdeen

Independent safeguarding audit





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- identifying and sharing knowledge about what works and what's new
- supporting people who plan, commission, deliver and use services to put that knowledge into practice
- informing, influencing and inspiring the direction of future practice and policy.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE AUDIT

- 1.1.1 The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) has been commissioned in partnership with Children in Scotland to undertake an audit of the safeguarding arrangements of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Aberdeen. Audits for the Diocese of Galloway and the Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh have already been completed.
- 1.1.2 The aim of the audit is to work with the Diocese to support safeguarding improvements by identifying how well safeguarding is working, identifying where there might be weaknesses and exploring the rationale for both strengths and weaknesses found.
- 1.1.3 The audit has used SCIE's established methodology Learning Together which has been used through a three-year programme of Church of England Diocesan audits. Whilst some of the areas to be explored differ slightly, the methodology remains the same. The audit was completed by Jane Bee and Jane Scott in January 2021 with quality assurance provided by SCIE through Sheila Fish, Senior Research Analyst.
- 1.1.4 The audit process involved interviews, written contributions, a survey and documentary analysis. This included nine conversations with key clergy and lay staff involved in safeguarding within the Diocese, five written contributions from lay members of committees and parishioners, four survey returns from parishes, with one additional written submission, a documentary analysis of six case files, policies and procedures for safeguarding and minutes of meetings. Details of the process are provided in the Appendix.
- 1.1.5 As part of the audit process, the Diocese of Aberdeen sought to involve survivors of abuse who had received a service from the Diocese. Unfortunately, no one came forward.
- 1.1.6 The audit was designed to be proportionate. Auditors aimed to cover enough breadth and depth to gain an insight into safeguarding within the Diocese, recognising that within the timescales available this was not wholly comprehensive.
- 1.1.7 The audit was carried out during the time of the global Covid19 pandemic during which the UK was in lockdown. A site visit was not possible and the fieldwork was carried out over three days virtually to comply with Government restrictions. Files were transferred via a secure file share IT application. The methodology and approach to the audit were amended in advance by SCIE. This report reflects the commitment from the Diocese to ensure smooth running of the audit during difficult circumstances.
- 1.1.8 Limitations to this audit included the lack of discussion with any survivors of abuse and the fact that the audit was completely virtual. Input from parishes was therefore limited to an electronic survey rather than a Parish Focus Group. There were no other known limitations to this audit.

1.2 THE DIOCESE

- 1.2.1 The Diocese of Aberdeen is geographically the largest in the UK, covering one third of the whole of Scotland (11,223 square miles) and includes Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Moray, Highlands and the Orkney and Shetland Islands. Conversely, the Diocese of Aberdeen is one of the smallest in numbers with the general population being approximately 18,500 (2.5 per cent of the total population as at 2012) spread across 44 parishes and four deaneries. The Diocese comes under the Ecclesiastical Province of St Andrews and Edinburgh.
- 1.2.2 The Archdiocese of St Andrew's and Edinburgh is led by Metropolitan Archbishop Leo Cushley and the Diocese of Aberdeen is led by Bishop Hugh Gilbert.

1.3 DESCRIPTION OF THE SAFEGUARDING STRUCTURE

- 1.3.1 The Bishop takes ultimate responsibility for safeguarding within the Diocese of Aberdeen. Supporting him in this task is a team comprising the Vicar Episcopal (Safeguarding) to whom safeguarding is delegated by the Bishop, the DSA who is a part-time volunteer, and the Chair of the DSAT, who is also a part-time volunteer. The Vicar Episcopal also line manages the Diocesan Safeguarding Administrator, who is a part-time paid employee.
- 1.3.2 The Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Team (DSAT) supports the work of the safeguarding team and is made up of individuals with specific safeguarding experience and is organised and attended by the DSA. The senior safeguarding trainer is also member of the DSAT, supporting the links between the Diocese and the parishes.
- 1.3.3 A smaller Diocesan Safeguarding Management Team (SMT) has evolved to progress the more operational and detailed work of the DSAT in between each of the quarterly DSAT meetings. This consists of the Vicar Episcopal (Safeguarding), the DSA and the Chair of the DSAT and reports to the DSAT.
- 1.3.4 In addition, where there is an allegation or safeguarding concern raised, the Vicar Episcopal convenes a Diocese Risk Assessment Management Team (DRAMT) meeting to assess risk and make recommendations to the Bishop.

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

- 1.4.1 This report is divided into:
- Introduction
 - The findings that the audit presented – by theme
 - Questions for the Diocese to consider, listed where relevant at the end of each Finding.
 - Conclusions of the auditors' findings: what is working well and areas where future development might be considered.
- 1.4.2 An appendix sets out the audit process and any limitations to this audit. Each substantive section begins with a generic introduction. This is followed by a

description of what the auditors learnt about arrangements and practice in the Diocese, followed by their analysis of the strengths and systemic vulnerabilities identified. The description is value neutral. In the analysis the auditors make assessments of the safeguarding arrangements and practice they learnt about. SCIE methodology does not conclude findings with recommendations. Instead for each theme, the report provides the Diocese with questions to consider in relation to the findings. This approach is part of the SCIE Learning Together methodology, and requires those with local knowledge and responsibility for progressing improvement work to have a key role in deciding what to do in order to address the findings and to be responsible for their decisions. This methodology also helps to encourage local ownership of the work required in order to improve safeguarding.

2 FINDINGS

2.1 SAFEGUARDING LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

- 2.1.1 Safeguarding Leadership within the Diocese falls ultimately to the Bishop of Aberdeen who is responsible for leadership on all aspects of life within the Diocese. Safeguarding leadership takes various forms with different people or groups taking different roles. The key areas considered by the audit were on aspects of leadership including spiritual, strategic and operational leadership, and how this was defined and understood. How these roles are understood and how they fit together can be determinative in how well led the safeguarding function is.

Spiritual / Theological leadership for safeguarding

Introduction

- 2.1.2 McLellan (2015) wrote of the need for 'a clear account of the theological principles which underpin safeguarding' (p 215, para 3.24). The Commission emphasised the importance and the urgency of the task in setting out a compelling and coherent theology of safeguarding for the Catholic Church in Scotland. Recommendation 3.110 addressed this specifically: *The relative absence of theological insight in the 'Awareness and Safety' manual must be replaced with a clear explanation of the task of safeguarding as a Christian privilege with a firm theological foundation* (paragraph 3.78). *In God's Image* also sets out a clear theology of safeguarding at 2.1.8.
- 2.1.3 It is for the Bishop, Vicar General, Vicars Episcopal, Chancellor and Deans to help parish priests, congregations and others around the Diocese to understand that safeguarding is intrinsic to the Catholic faith and therefore a priority. This aspect of the leadership role is the foundation for the culture of the Church and is critical in terms of making it a safer place for children and vulnerable adults.

Description

- 2.1.4 The Bishop of Aberdeen is responsible for the spiritual leadership of the Diocese, which includes a responsibility for safeguarding. The Bishop clearly articulated his vision for a theology of safeguarding that is integral to the culture of the Church. The Church must be a safe place for young people and vulnerable adults and the Church must reflect on the importance of responding appropriately in terms of its pastoral response to all survivors of abuse, including those abused by the Church and in communities more generally.
- 2.1.5 The Bishop reflected that there was a greater understanding and awareness more recently of the centrality of safeguarding to the Catholic faith. There is wider discussion on safeguarding within church life more generally and there is an increased focus on safeguarding as part of the training for seminarians and those becoming ordained. The Bishop acknowledged, however, that he could take more responsibility for ensuring that the integral nature of safeguarding through a theological lens is understood.

Auditors heard that the liturgical calendar outlines that the Church as a whole holds a Day of Prayer for those suffering from abuse on the first Friday after Ash Wednesday. The Diocese has put out the booklet online for prayers at home which includes provision for prayers for survivors.

2.1.6 The Diocese of Aberdeen has a number of clergy from abroad and the Bishop described an 'Inculturation Programme' for them on arrival to ensure they understand the importance of pastoral care and safeguarding in a Scottish context. The Bishop expressed that he felt this was an important way to ensure that all those working within the Catholic community saw that safeguarding was intrinsic to the mission of the Church.

Analysis

2.1.7 The auditors reflected that the Bishop's understanding of the theological aspect to safeguarding and his commitment to prioritising safeguarding and becoming involved in the work of the Diocese is good. He clearly articulated the need for safeguarding to be core to the Catholic mission. The Bishop reflected on developments in safeguarding recently in wider society and within the Diocese and parishes. Auditors heard that he is visible within the parishes, although a few completing the parish survey thought he could be more visible.

2.1.8 This articulation and commitment from the Bishop were crucial parts of setting the context and tone for the work of the Diocesan Safeguarding team within the Diocese and local parishes. However, the Bishop did reflect that perhaps he could be more overt in his theological leadership role in relation to safeguarding.

2.1.9 The extent to which the importance and centrality of safeguarding is understood across the entire Diocese is less evident. The auditors did hear that work to improve the theological centrality of safeguarding has begun through consistent messages from the Bishop and his team, an ongoing training programme for the clergy and laity, and implementation of safe recruitment procedures. The understanding of why this is important and the willingness to take it forward was also evident in discussions with all audit participants. All acknowledged, however, that this commitment across the Diocese was less developed in some areas and not always supported in a few of the parishes.

Questions for the Diocese to consider:

- How could the Bishop's message that safeguarding is part of the Catholic mission and life be more overtly articulated across the deaneries and parishes?
- How can the message shared directly with deaneries, parishes and congregations be strengthened and reinforced both during online and face-to-face contact?
- What are the ways to engage more effectively the Parish Safeguarding Coordinators (PSCs) in the theological message of safeguarding?

Strategic leadership for safeguarding

Introduction

- 2.1.10** Strategic and operational leadership are commonly considered essential aspects of the leadership and governance of organisations. Strategic leadership develops the vision and mission, strategies, systems and structures for achieving that vision and overall accountability. Operational leadership delivers that vision and mission on a day-to-day basis. Roles and forums for strategic leadership and governance exist in dioceses to cover a range of areas and activities, e.g. Bishop's /Archbishop's Councils. It is useful therefore to consider how strategic leadership is provided for safeguarding in the context of these fora.
- 2.1.11** *In God's Image* states that safeguarding commitments lie with the Bishop: 'In this responsibility, the Bishop must be supported by those he has appointed to advise him and to manage safeguarding arrangements in the diocese – the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser (DSA), the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Team (DSAT) and the Diocesan Risk Assessment Management Team (DRAMT)' (Section A Paragraph 6.2). *In God's Image* does not specify how the Bishop and senior clergy team should provide any strategic leadership and management of these roles and fora.
- 2.1.12** Similarly, the standards it sets out do not speak to the need for local strategic plans that capture how *In God's Image* is to be implemented. It is easier for organisations to be clear of progress and improvements if the objectives and actions to take are set out in a strategic plan. For the Diocese, this would be a work plan which sets out how the safeguarding service will be developed and who will lead on the different aspects of achieving the plan. Although not outlined in *In God's Image*, governance of the delivery of this plan would logically sit within the local governance arrangements of each diocese. Setting out the goals of the service and tracking progress against them enhances accountability and should assist operational leadership by identifying barriers to development that need to be addressed.

Description

- 2.1.13** The Bishop has a Vicar General and three Vicars Episcopal, one of whom has delegated responsibility for safeguarding. This was in recognition of the importance given to safeguarding by the Bishop and the need to have a strong safeguarding team within the Diocese. Much of the strategic safeguarding work in the Diocese sits within the remit of the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Team (DSAT). The Diocese has a Safeguarding Development Plan (2019) the most recent of which has begun to look at how the strategic responsibilities under the eight Standards within *In God's Image* are to be developed. This work sits under the DSAT whose members have each taken responsibility for one of the eight Standards in order to develop the future work of the Diocese.
- 2.1.14** There was a consistent message that the Bishop works hard to demonstrate good leadership across the Diocese and that he has a 'hands-on' approach to safeguarding and its leadership within the Diocese working closely with the Vicar Episcopal.
- 2.1.15** The Bishop visits each parish annually and during the pandemic has been visible online undertaking prayers morning and evening with one of the priests. As mentioned previously, there was no parish focus group as part of this audit and, instead, an electronic survey was disseminated to chosen parishes.

- 2.1.16 The work of the Diocese of Aberdeen is overseen by a committee structure. The Management Committee is chaired by the Bishop and its membership includes all four Deans, Vicar General, Diocese and Finance Officer, several lay people, and the Chancellor. Its remit is to oversee major decisions within the diocese in relation to decisions of finance and fabric; each has a subcommittee, which oversees the detailed work in each area and report back to the Management Committee. The Diocesan Trustees are the Bishop, the Vicar General and the Procurator oversee the management of the investments of the diocese. Neither has safeguarding as an agenda item.
- 2.1.17 The Bishop is supported by a Council of Priests which acts as an advisory body for the Bishop and meets two to three times per year. Its membership includes the four Deans, Vicar General and several elected or nominated priests. The Vicar Episcopal is currently an elected member and therefore able to raise safeguarding as an agenda item when required. If the Vicar Episcopal for Safeguarding was not a member of the Council, then he could be invited to address matters in relation to safeguarding or ask the Bishop to raise them on his behalf.
- 2.1.18 Finally, the Assembly of Priests brings all priests in the Diocese together twice a year and general issues of safeguarding are raised there including national updates from the National Catholic Safeguarding Service and input from local diocesan training coordinators.
- 2.1.19 Auditors saw evidence of good and regular communication between the Diocesan Safeguarding team and the Bishop and regular contact between him and the Vicar Episcopal regarding safeguarding issues raised at the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Team (DSAT) and the Diocese Risk Assessment Management Team (DRAMT).
- 2.1.20 *In God's Image* is currently under review and all DSAs from the eight dioceses have been meeting together to look at how the Standards might be further developed, with guidance and exemplars for each being drafted. Auditors heard that these will be part of strategic planning for safeguarding within the Diocese and the members of DSAT who have volunteered to champion each Standard will assist in taking this forward strategically.

Analysis

- 2.1.21 In terms of strategic leadership, within the Diocese much work has been started. It is evident that the Bishop acts as a conduit between the Diocese and the Bishop's Conference on matters of safeguarding.
- 2.1.22 Auditors judged strategic leadership of safeguarding to be good. The Diocese has a Safeguarding Development Plan with a clear structure setting out the actions planned for developing the standards within *In God's Image*. In order to root the development plan in the work of the Diocese, this plan would benefit from being located within an overarching strategy which sets out the vision for safeguarding and identifies clear responsibility and forward planning in all areas of safeguarding. The current development plan could be developed into a broader Safeguarding Strategic Plan to include issues such as safeguarding continuity and forward planning of issues which sit out with the eight Standards within *In God's Image*.
- 2.1.23 The Management Committee provides an advisory role to the Trustees. Whilst there is regular consideration of safeguarding issues in relation to the pastoral work of the

Diocese, there is perhaps a missed opportunity for the Fabric and Finance Committees to ensure clear opportunities for the discussion of safeguarding issues in relation to their decisions. Currently, there is no opportunity or forum to discuss these issues; for example, in relation to potential paid safeguarding posts within the diocesan structure. There is a risk that decisions are made from a financial perspective only. This is tempered by the fact that the Bishop is a Trustee and involved in safeguarding, but the system of Management Committee, Fabric and Finance Committees and Trustee meetings does not build in strategic oversight for safeguarding.

2.1.24 At present, the Vicar Episcopal is an elected member of the Council of Priests and is well placed to ensure discussion and additional oversight of safeguarding. If he was not an elected member, however, this broader scope would be reliant on communication between the Vicar Episcopal and the Bishop. Auditors felt that this might weaken the safeguarding link and therefore advice to the Bishop.

Questions for the Diocese to consider:

- How might strategic oversight of safeguarding specifically be strengthened by drawing it systemically into the focus of the Trustees?
- How can issues of safeguarding be linked to wider decision-making within the Diocese?
- If there is an appetite for extending the Safeguarding Development Plan to provide a Strategic Safeguarding Plan drawing in wider strategic issues across the Diocese, how will this be done?
- What are the barriers to safeguarding being a standing agenda item for the Council of Priests?

Operational leadership of safeguarding

Introduction

2.1.25 Senior clergy leadership and management of the operational work of safeguarding is needed to provide oversight of safeguarding in a diocese including identifying any barriers to implementation that need tackling. It is also needed for accountability purposes, particularly when the safeguarding service is delivered through collaboration between clerics, staff and laity. Operational leadership and management by the clergy can be seen as providing a strong link to the strategic leadership of senior clergy and ultimately the Bishop. It is distinct from an operational decision-making responsibility.

2.1.26 There are inherent challenges to clergy, as non-safeguarding specialists, fulfilling the operational leadership and oversight of safeguarding, given it is a specialist function. However, leaving the centralised operations of safeguarding in a diocese without any clergy-led governance and oversight would also weaken the safety of safeguarding arrangements.

Description

- 2.1.27** Daily operational leadership for safeguarding is delegated to the Vicar Episcopal (safeguarding) who works closely with the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser (DSA) and the Chair of the DSAT. The Bishop is very much part of this when required and there is a collegiate approach to safeguarding work. The Bishop explained that operational leadership for the role had been delegated to the Vicar Episcopal rather than Vicar General in recognition that it required a dedicated post. It would have been difficult for the Vicar General to undertake this role in addition to the range of work he already undertakes on behalf of the Bishop across the Diocese. The Vicar Episcopal line manages and oversees the work of the Diocesan Safeguarding Administrator.
- 2.1.28** All three advised that the National Catholic Safeguarding Office (Scotland) (NCSS) has been a good source of advice and support but that there is a level of anxiety about the continuity of this post now that the previous coordinator has moved on.
- 2.1.29** This key group of people work together at all levels of safeguarding and have formed a small Safeguarding Management Group (SMG) to provide operational oversight across the Diocese. The Safeguarding Management Group reports to the DSAT which allows work to be progressed between DSAT's quarterly meetings and remove some detailed time-consuming work from the DSAT without removing its operational oversight responsibility.
- 2.1.30** There are also clear links between the DRAMT and DSAT. Issues which arise in the DRAMT, but have wider consequences across the Diocese are anonymised and discussed at the DSAT. For example, a disagreement within DRAMT regarding the length of a contract on a particular case was anonymised and taken to the DSAT for discussion regarding the wider strategic overview of contracts and whether issues were being correctly addressed. All found this useful and auditors felt that this was a good example of operational leadership leading to strategic decision-making.

Analysis

- 2.1.31** The Vicar Episcopal is visible and proactive and takes his operational leadership seriously. With the DSA and Chair of DSAT (who are volunteers), there is a sense of a strong team which operates at a diocesan level, but which acts as a conduit between the Diocese and parishes to ensure oversight at all operational levels. Auditors heard many comments to this effect.
- 2.1.32** The Safeguarding Management Group which is leading on both operational leadership and decision-making has effectively freed up time within the DSAT to allow it to develop strategically. The Bishop and the Safeguarding Team are reluctant to add a further layer in the provision of a Strategic Management Group, but instead would prefer to develop the strategic work of the DSAT further allowing it to take responsibility for strategic safeguarding development, particularly during the revision of *In God's Image*.

Questions for the Diocese to consider:

- What contingency plans are in place for continuity of operational safeguarding leadership by the Vicar Episcopal when the DSA and Chair of DSAT move on?
- What consideration should be given to more formal resolution of disagreement processes being put in place?
- How might the Diocese put in place more formal processes for escalating concerns should these arise?

Dealing with the legacy of a high-profile conviction

Introduction

2.1.33 Across all settings, dealing with the legacy of a high-profile case of abuse presents opportunities and challenges. Assuming leadership of a diocese with a high-profile case of clergy abuse is no different. A change of leadership creates the possibility to focus on restorative practice:

2.1.34 - to help all affected parties come to terms with the facts, the betrayal and the possibility of their own, albeit unwitting, part in allowing abusers to go unchecked

2.1.35 - to identify and right any wrongs of the past, working closely and compassionately with survivors to hear and respond to what they need.

2.1.36 It is challenging, however, when the prominent member of senior clergy has formed close working relationships and friendships with many in the Diocese, when survivors and others past efforts to bring the abuse to light have not been responded to appropriately and there is inevitable loyalty to your predecessors. The response by bishops to these issues are key to setting the tone of their leadership and the tenor of the safeguarding culture they are trying to propagate.

Description

2.1.37 There have been no recent high-profile cases in Aberdeen Diocese of individuals who may have caused harm and abuse. There have been, however, two previously high-profile cases of institutional abuse which has impacted on individuals across parishes and have continued to cause division.

2.1.38 The first case is Fort Augustus Abbey school where allegations were made regarding systematic physical and sexual abuse on pupils reportedly carried out by monks at the school between 1953 and 1974. Whilst this is outside the scope of this review, the abuse was only investigated in 2013 and has received attention more recently as part of the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry. At the time of the discovery of abuse, the Bishop of Aberdeen visited the parish and gave public acknowledgement and an apology. A survivor of abuse also visited, speaking about her abuse and healing. The English Benedictine Congregation, to which Fort Augustus belonged, spent time with the parish to support them. The second case is Nazareth House, a care home for children and school run by the Sisters of Nazareth. As part of recent work, the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry concluded that between 1933 and 1984, Nazareth houses were 'places of fear'. Nazareth House in Aberdeen no longer existed when the abuse was reported. It had been a home for children but reverted to a place for the elderly and then became an Independent trust. It is still a care home for the elderly under a different

name, however, when the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry raised the abuse concerns across all Nazareth Houses, it was the Sisters of Nazareth who managed the impact.

2.1.39 Auditors saw evidence from a case file of recent ongoing divisions within a parish regarding the allegations, and subsequent charges, which had been made against one former priest and teacher at Fort Augustus Abbey School.

Analysis

2.1.40 Healing from any high-profile case is something that takes time and in the case of the Fort Augustus Abbey School, when the abuse was disclosed, the Bishop of Aberdeen asked the priest against whom the allegations were made to step down from ministry. Those within his current and established parish at that time were torn between their belief in the priest, and their anger regarding what might have happened. This was difficult for the incumbent to manage, and the Bishop visited in order to provide support.

2.1.41 Ongoing healing, particularly regarding a high-profile case which is non-recent, is a challenge for any diocese. Those managing such situations in parishes and deaneries require support and there is a need for the diocese to provide information, which is easily accessible, whilst also leading by example in being transparent and accountable.

Questions for the Diocese to consider:

- How can the Diocese prepare itself to manage any further non-recent allegations related to these cases, or any future cases?
- Should the Diocese consider a plan for helping to heal a parish and support all those involved and, if so, how will this be taken forward?

2.2 DIOCESAN SAFEGUARDING ADVISER

Introduction

2.2.1 The Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser, along with the DSAT and DRAMT, are key to the infrastructure set out in *In God's Image*, to advise and assist the Bishop to fulfil safeguarding responsibilities. The role is summarised in the Glossary Structures and Roles – Section 2 (p76) as follows:

'The role of the DSA is to assist the Bishop with the development and management of Diocesan Safeguarding approaches. Has a central role in providing support and may also chair the DSAG meetings (and any subgroups thereof).'

2.2.2 Elsewhere the guidance specifies that the DSA roles are to:

- coordinate efforts to raise awareness of safeguarding within parish communities, including the recruiting and training of Parish Safeguarding Coordinators
- recruit diocesan safeguarding trainers and the training of diocesan clergy
- advise the Bishop on good practice in responding to allegations of abuse.

- 2.2.3 The DSA is described as providing a conduit between concerns/allegations and experts appointed to sit on the DRAMT, assess risk and make recommendations to the Bishop for how concerns or risks might be addressed.
- 2.2.4 The particular function of being the recipient of allegations and concerns is in paragraph 6.6 of *In God's Image* which deals with parishes and in Standard 3 linked to 'following established protocols for liaising with statutory authorities'. Here it states that: both allegations and concerns must be referred to the DSA, 'so that the DRAMT can address how they might be addressed'. i.e. The DSA is described as providing a conduit between concerns or allegations. Experts appointed to sit on the DRAMT, assess risk and make recommendations to the Bishop for how concerns or risks might be addressed.
- 2.2.5 Paragraph 4.6 of the Glossary Structures and Roles states that:
- 'While investigation is not part of the role, Diocesan Safeguarding Advisors may agree to additional, mutually acceptable functions consistent with the position. Caution should, however, be exercised in extending the activities beyond what is reasonable and practical.'*
- 2.2.6 The guidance recommends that the role is undertaken by a layperson. It makes no specification about the professional expertise required.

Description

Resourcing and Relative Roles

- 2.2.7 The Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser (DSA) in Aberdeen has a background in social work and has been in post for 12 years. The post is voluntary and while there are no set hours for the role, it amounts to approximately two to three days. Originally the role was consultative, but following the McLellan report in 2015, the role became formal. The DSA describes the role as both operational in terms of dealing with casework and day-to-day management of safeguarding and strategic in terms of having an overview of safeguarding across the Diocese via the DSAT.
- 2.2.8 DSA deals with all queries in relation to safeguarding and links with Parish Safeguarding Coordinators when safeguarding issues are raised locally. The Chair of DSAT, whose role is complimentary to that of the DSA, organises four DSAT meetings annually which are arranged immediately following the four national meetings in order to capture learning. These are attended by the DSA. The DSA is a core member of the Safeguarding Management Group (SMG) which takes place between DSAT meetings and deals with much of the operational work in order to keep the quarterly DSAT meetings to a manageable length. The DSA also attends DRAMT meetings which are called when the need arises for assessment of risk.
- 2.2.9 The DSA and the current chair of the DSAT, who is also a volunteer, would like to step down from their roles later this year. The DSA described the role as having grown and recently a scoping exercise was carried out which led to the creation of a formal job description based on the role descriptors for the DSA within *In God's Image*.
- 2.2.10 Interviews and the parish survey results show that the DSA is highly regarded and well respected throughout the Diocese as part of the safeguarding team, which includes the Vicar Episcopal and the chair of DSAT.

2.2.11 The DSA meets regularly with the other DSAs across Scotland to discuss the National toolkit which will include developed protocols and exemplars for the revised *In God's Image*. The hope is to standardise the protocols and ensure parity across all dioceses of Scotland, although processes may be adapted locally for each individual diocese.

Resources

2.2.12 The DSA works either from home or from the Diocesan Office and is provided with the required office resources for the role. Cover arrangements for the role are through the Chair of DSAT or the Vicar Episcopal. There is a 'Buddy System' in place via the DSA at Galloway Diocese and in the event that additional advice is required to assist the DSA, Vicar Episcopal and the Chair of DSAT.

Qualifications

2.2.13 The DSA is a retired qualified social worker with longstanding experience in safeguarding and multi-agency working with families.

Conflicts of interest

2.2.14 There are no known conflicts of interest for the DSA in this role.

Line management and supervision arrangements

2.2.15 The DSA is line managed by the Bishop. There are no formal supervisory arrangements in place but the DSA and Vicar Episcopal meet regularly as do the DSA and the chair of the DSAT. The DSA can also contact the national office for support and guidance on specific issues when required.

2.2.16 With both the DSA and the Chair of DSAT stepping down this year, the Diocese has advertised the posts in the hope of recruiting further volunteers. This has not yet produced suitable candidates. To counter this, ideas around a shared paid post for both roles have been discussed, but currently the Diocese's financial situation is fragile, and this is under consideration.

Analysis

2.2.17 The DSA brings a high level of expertise to the role. Her experience as a social worker and past experience of safeguarding ensures a good fit for the role and has ensured an excellent level of both operational and strategic work.

2.2.18 The DSA works closely with the chair of the DSAT and the Vicar Episcopal and auditors were impressed with the close teamwork and shared sense of purpose, but also the level of challenge provided both within and out with the team. Links with the Bishop, Parish Safeguarding Coordinators (PSCs) and Safeguarding Trainers was clearly evident, with good lines of communication and a real sense of understanding of the remits of each role.

2.2.19 Cover arrangement with the Chair of DSAT and the Vicar Episcopal have ensured the DSA feels able to take leave. The Buddy System with the DSA in Galloway also adds an extra layer of support should this be required, and while the arrangements have not been required during the pandemic, it was viewed positively that these were in place.

2.2.20 Auditors felt that the role of the DSA in Aberdeen works exceptionally well, but that

this was mainly due to the fortuitousness of finding a volunteer with the current DSA's background, experience and personable nature. One salaried role incorporating both posts would be more attractive to those with such experience, while also ensuring the formal supervision and line management required for such a role. The auditors felt there was a sense of urgency from the safeguarding team but in particular from the Bishop to resolve this.

2.2.21 The auditors did not observe conflict between the DSA and the Vicar Episcopal as there appeared good, strong and respectful working relationships between all three members of the SMG. All were clear that, if needed, the process for resolving conflicts was with the Bishop.

2.2.22 Auditors felt a more formal process for disagreements between the Vicar Episcopal and the DSA or of performance management for the DSA should be considered. Currently there is an agreement that the requirements within *In God's Image* are followed and that in addition, the Diocese operates under the Papal requirement of *Vos Estis Lux Mundi*. The current arrangement is effective, but this is in a large part due to the current relationships. Whilst the responsibility for safeguarding would not change with the DSA and Chair of DSAT wishing to step down this year, the collegiate team dynamic and the shared feeling of responsibility may change and could be supported by a more formal approach.

2.2.23 It is difficult to keep the role of the DSA from growing beyond what is described within *In God's Image* because of the nature of the work. The way that close working has been arranged between the DSA and Chair of the DSAT with oversight by the Vicar Episcopal and the Bishop has prevented the role from becoming unmanageable. However, auditors were struck by the difference between the role described in *In God's Image* and the role carried out by the DSA, which is greatly over and above that described. In Aberdeen, the role has become one which works at three distinct levels:

- Strategic, driving change and keeping a strategic oversight across the Diocese
- Operational, providing professional advice and facilitating responses to those within the Diocese
- Administrative, organising meetings, requesting new files, etc.

2.2.24 Auditors questioned whether this is sustainable as a part-time voluntary post.

Questions for the Diocese to consider:

- How can the Diocese ensure continuity for the role of the DSA within Aberdeen?
- Despite the financial constraints, what consideration should be given to a combined salaried role for the DSA, possibly combining it with that of the chair of DSAT?
- How might the process of escalation be formalised?
- How might the Diocese provide professional supervision for the DSA role with formal links to line management?

2.3 DIOCESAN SAFEGUARDING GROUP/TEAM (DSAG/DSAT)

Introduction

2.3.1 Within *In Gods Image*, the DSAT along with the DRAMT and the DSA is a core part of the safeguarding infrastructure, whose function it is to support the Bishop in his responsibilities for safeguarding.

2.3.2 Responsibilities are listed in *In God's Image* (para 6.1.3) as including:

- Advising the Bishop on safeguarding matters within the Diocese
- Ensuring compliance with national safeguarding standards within all diocesan groups
- Responding to issues emerging from the safeguarding audit
- Organising training for parish clergy, safeguarding volunteers and Parish Safeguarding Coordinators
- Liaising with the Scottish Catholic Safeguarding Service on national developments, resources, legislative change etc.

2.3.3 Drawing on our understanding of equivalent groups in the Catholic Church in England and the Church of England, we think it is helpful to try to clarify the different functions this list entails.

2.3.4 If the DSA is to play a vital operational role, the role of the DSAG can be seen as threefold: first, it is described as having an operational function around the organisation of PVG applications and monitoring of ongoing membership of the scheme across the dioceses (para 6.4) and organising training for parish clergy, safeguarding volunteers and Parish Safeguarding Coordinators (para 6.1.3); second, it should play an oversight, scrutiny and challenge role in order to ensure compliance with national safeguarding standards across the Diocese and discuss ongoing issues related to safeguarding arrangements in the Diocese:

'8.3.1 In each Diocese, the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Group (DSAG) must meet at least four times per year to discuss ongoing issues relating to safeguarding arrangements in the Diocese. These discussions should consider compliance with safeguarding training and PVG checks across the Diocese. The Bishop must be kept informed of the outcomes of DSAG meetings.'

2.3.5 Thirdly, it has something of a strategic leadership role, in the responsibilities for:

- responding to issues emerging from the safeguarding audit
- liaising with the Scottish Catholic Safeguarding Service on national developments, resources, legislative change etc.

2.3.6 Membership is prescribed as follows:

6.1.3 Membership of DSAG must include the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser and any key individuals charged with Diocesan Safeguarding responsibilities, as well as representatives of relevant diocesan groups: Pilgrimage leaders, SPRED, Youth Office etc. The National Safeguarding Coordinator may be invited to these meetings to share information about national developments and to discuss resource needs and training development.

2.3.7 There is no requirement within *In God's Image* for an independent Chair of the DSAG/ASAG or independent membership from the statutory agencies. No overt scrutiny and challenge function are specified that independent elements would support.

Description

2.3.8 In line with *In God's Image*, the Diocese of Aberdeen has a Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Group (DSAG); referred to the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Team (DSAT) within Aberdeen. The DSAT is chaired by a volunteer with an Operational Management background in the Scottish Prison Service including sex offender management of high-profile cases. The group is attended by the DSA and Vicar Episcopal with representation from a wide remit of attendees drawn from various professional backgrounds including education, social work, Canon Law and internet safety.

2.3.9 There are no separate terms of reference for the DSAT. Instead, the group relies on the description from within *In God's Image*.

2.3.10 Minutes from the DSAT were provided and demonstrated a wide range of subjects discussed including safer recruitment, Protection of Vulnerable Groups disclosures (PVGs), local and national updates and the DSAT action plan. Over the last two years, the DSAT has put in place a Safeguarding Development Plan. The DSAT has sought leadership from within its representation for championing each of the eight Standards within *In God's Image* to progress the development plan. This work is in progress but has been hampered by the current pandemic.

2.3.11 In between the DSAT meetings, the DSA, Vicar Episcopal and the chair of DSAT meet together to allow business to be progressed and to keep the work of the DSAT to a manageable level. Minutes are taken and fed back to the DSAT when it next meets to build in challenge if required

2.3.12 Auditors met with two members of DSAT who felt that the Diocese was dealing well with safeguarding. The formalisation of development plans and requesting a lead on each of the eight Standards was described as useful and starting to plan for the future.

Analysis

2.3.13 Auditors judged that the DSAT works well. Meetings are regular and well attended and the group provides effective oversight of a wide remit of safeguarding issues within the Diocese. The remit of the DSAT covers the three aspects within *In God's Image* of operation, oversight and strategic function. This includes oversight of PVGs, organising training, advising the Bishop on safeguarding matters and ensuring compliance on safeguarding within the Diocese. Minutes show that during the last two to three years, the remit of this group has evolved and the Safeguarding Management Team has begun to pick up more day-to-day advice and operational work, with the DSAT providing more of the strategic oversight and scrutiny role.

2.3.14 Membership of DSAT is varied and includes those with safeguarding expertise from external agencies and those from some groups within the Diocese. One reflection heard by the auditors was that the membership of the DSAT could perhaps better represent the different cultures and ethnicity across the Diocese; for example, reflecting the African and Polish communities within Aberdeen.

- 2.3.15 The National Safeguarding Coordinator also attended before the post became vacant.
- 2.3.16 The development of the Safeguarding Management Group (SMG) which meets in between the DSAT meetings and reports decisions and concerns at the next available meeting, has had the effect of freeing up time for the DSAT to take up a more strategic role. This has meant a separation of the functions of the DSAT as outlined in *In God's Image*, which auditors judged to be useful.
- 2.3.17 The current Chair has been in post for 14 years. He has somewhat widened his role to that of being part of the Safeguarding Management Team, working closely with the Vicar Episcopal and the DSA and taking on the role of an additional conduit between the Diocese and the parishes where this is helpful, for example mentoring to a religious community group, or when parish audits are not received. The Chair's role within the Diocese has been rightly recognised by the presentation of a Papal Medal (Pro Ecclesia Et Pontifice Medal)
- 2.3.18 The auditors reflected that this was an opportune time to reflect on the role and remit of both the DSAT and DRAMT which shares its membership, and to set out clear terms of reference.
- 2.3.19 As mentioned under Strategic leadership, auditors felt that the Safeguarding Development Plan could usefully be further adapted into a Strategic Diocesan Safeguarding Plan with broader and more long-term strategic objectives such as continuity and outreach to survivors (see further information section 9).
- 2.3.20 Auditors noted that the Bishop does not attend the DSAT and it might be helpful that he occasionally attends to demonstrate to its members the importance of its work. The Bishop does, however, have good oversight of its function and workflow, meeting when required with the Chair of DSAT to discuss and communicating regularly with the Vicar Episcopal.

Questions for the Diocese to consider:

- Should the DSAT have terms of reference to further enhance the effectiveness of functioning and governance?
- How could the Bishop be more visible at DSAT meetings in order to enhance governance?
- How might the already existing Safeguarding Development Plan be further developed into a broader Strategic Diocesan Safeguarding Plan?
- Where should the governance of a strategic plan sit within the diocesan structures and committees?
- How could the DSAT further develop how it hears the voice of survivors?

2.4 DIOCESE RISK ASSESSMENT MANAGEMENT TEAM (DRAMT)

Introduction

2.4.1 *In Gods Image* sets out that the DRAMT along with the DSAG and the DSA is a core part of the safeguarding infrastructure, whose function it is to support the Bishop in his responsibilities for safeguarding.

2.4.2 The DRAMT is described as follows:

6.1.4 The main function of the DRAMT is to offer recommendations to the Bishop in relation to situations of risk, convictions on PVGs, allegations or cases in relation to anyone involved in the life and work of the Diocese who has contact with children and vulnerable adults. The DRAMT must comprise a small number of individuals with relevant expertise, including those with experience of working in the legal profession, healthcare, social work and the Police. Its composition should be balanced, in numbers of both ordained and lay members, and in their gender.

6.1.5 It is for each Bishop to decide if he wishes to preside at meetings of the DRAMT, or if he wishes to receive its recommendations in writing. The group must discuss each case, agree the recommendations that it has made to the Bishop and record these in writing. It is the ultimate responsibility of the Bishop to decide the action he will take in each case. The Bishop must communicate his decision in writing to the individual concerned.

6.1.6 The DRAMT must meet as often as is required, as cases are brought to its attention.

2.4.3 The guidance is very clear that a key part of the DSA's role is as a conduit for safeguarding concerns to the DRAMT. It is the DRAMT rather than the DSA that is ascribed responsibility for differentiating between concerns and allegations and deciding when referrals to statutory agencies need to be made:

'Appropriate safeguarding training must ensure that everyone remains vigilant and is able to identify safeguarding concerns. These should be referred to the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser so that the DRAMT can address how they might be addressed.

While it is important to differentiate between allegations and concerns, both must be referred to the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser. If concerns are shared sufficiently early, then it is possible that behaviours or attitudes can be addressed without significant harm developing. The DRAMT may advise that particular concerns need to be reported to statutory services who will consider whether to explore these. Once those concerns are explored further, there might well be evidence of harm. In that case, a concern may lead to an allegation.'

2.4.4 The detail of the DRAMT outlined in *In God's Image* creates potential conflicts of interest. These hinge on the advisory nature of the DRAMT. The DRAMT gives advice and recommendations, but decision-making authority lies with the Bishop/Archbishop. This means he is making decisions about the clergy, employees or volunteers for whom he also has pastoral responsibilities. The relationship between a volunteer and Bishop may be more distant, but Bishops appoint and ordain priests, make decisions about many aspects of their lives and have the responsibility for their pastoral care,

including when they have safeguarding allegations made against them (see Standard five in *In God's Image*). This makes it essential that there are clear processes for identifying and dealing with disagreements where they emerge between the DRAMT and Bishop/Archbishop so they can be resolved swiftly and transparently.

Description

- 2.4.5 The Diocese of Aberdeen has a small DRAMT consisting of the DSA, the Chair of the DSAT and the Vicar Episcopal. Meetings are chaired and minuted by the Vicar Episcopal and are called when required. Those with relevant expertise from the DSAT are called upon to widen the attendance at the DRAMT as required, depending on the issue presented and to be discussed.
- 2.4.6 The DRAMT does not have a formal terms of reference other than those cited in *In God's Image*. The DRAMT reports directly to the Bishop via the Vicar Episcopal.
- 2.4.7 Auditors heard evidence of the DRAMT making decisions regarding risk and the management of agreements including how these are fed back to the parish so that they are managed effectively. The Bishop and all members of the DRAMT have signed up to mandatory reporting and understand its importance. Auditors also heard that individual cases are considered by the DRAMT meeting and one or two members of the DSAT with relevant experience being drawn into the DRAMT as required. The Vicar Episcopal reports recommendations made by the DRAMT, which is attended by the DSA, directly to the Bishop. Members of the DRAMT did not feel that this caused a conflict of interest and whilst there is no formal agreement, the DSA was confident in her view that were she to disagree with the recommendations made by the DRAMT, she would discuss this with the Bishop. If the Bishop were to disagree with the recommendations, the DSA would discuss this with him and, if necessary, would seek advice from the Metropolitan Bishop in Edinburgh or follow the process for disagreements highlighted in paragraph 2.2.22 above.

Analysis

- 2.4.8 The auditors judged the DRAMT to be good. The remit of the DRAMT is clear to its members and has a secure role in diocesan decision-making.
- 2.4.9 As discussed previously, the auditors felt there was a strong link between the risk-management decisions made at DRAMT and the strategic oversight by the DSAT. The DSA receives all allegations, but rather than act as a passive 'conduit', as proposed by *In God's Image*, is an active member of the DRAMT, discussing the issues and providing advice.
- 2.4.10 There were two issues to emerge for consideration. The first is that the current DSA has a background which has prepared her well for challenge. The auditors felt that the current system was dependent on the person within post rather than existing systems and that a process is lacking for what should happen if there is disagreement, including escalation when required. Second, as membership is often shared between the DRAMT and DSAT, then it is important that the boundaries between the two do not become blurred. It could be seen from previous minutes that, occasionally, the DSAT had discussed anonymised individual cases. It might, therefore, be helpful to consider formalising the role and purpose of the DRAMT with terms of reference at the same time as considering a more strategic role for the DSAT. This would help to clarify the function of each and how wider learning and practice developments are informed by the work of the DRAMT.

Questions for the Diocese to consider:

- Should the DRAMT have formal terms of reference, tailored to the Diocese but based on *In God's Image*?
- How should plans for any disagreement between the DRAMT and the Bishop be put in place as a contingency including plans for escalation if required?

2.5 LINKS WITH SCOTTISH CATHOLIC SAFEGUARDING SERVICE*Introduction*

- 2.5.1 The role of the Scottish Catholic Safeguarding Service, led by the National Safeguarding Coordinator, is limited in *In Gods Image* to the provision of advice on good practice in safeguarding and provision of training materials, as well as being the point of contact for external bodies and agencies. It has no casework role ascribed to it for dioceses.
- 2.5.2 'The NCSS offers support through the collation of PVG applications, the design and provision of training, the development of guidance and the facilitation of an annual audit to check compliance with national safeguarding standards. The National Safeguarding Coordinator is also expected to offer advice and counsel to safeguarding staff in dioceses and Religious Institutes as required by the Bishops' Conference of Scotland.' (para 6.4.2)
- 2.5.3 It is not given any authority in terms of quality assurance or deemed a point of escalation if conflict or disagreement arises within or between dioceses.

Description

- 2.5.4 The DSA, Vicar Episcopal and the Chair of the DSAT all reported good links with the Scottish Catholic Safeguarding Service (SCSS). Members of the DSAT reported that they felt well informed on national issues because the DSAT meetings are diarised to follow a week after the national meetings and attended by the National Safeguarding Adviser. Trainers also felt well informed on national developments for the training.
- 2.5.5 The DSA reported a good relationship with the SCSS and felt able to call on the National Safeguarding Coordinator for advice when required.

Analysis

- 2.5.6 The Diocese has good relationships with the SCSS and in particular with the National Safeguarding Coordinator which in turn has assisted with the strategic work being developed through the DSAT. The National Safeguarding Adviser post is now vacant, however, and the future remains unclear creating additional concern for continuity planning coupled with the DSA and the Chair of the DSAT also wishing to move on.
- 2.5.7 Auditors heard that the Diocese is not averse to the idea of a new structure unrelated to the current model. This model might incorporate the national and local vacancies, perhaps along the lines of a central strategic oversight model covering more than one diocese, which also includes supervision.

Questions for the Diocese to consider:

- How might the Diocese take forward ideas for a different model and structure with the SCSS and BCOS?
- How can the Diocese robustly plan for the loss of a National Safeguarding Adviser for advice?

2.6 GUIDANCE, POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

- 2.6.1 The Scottish Catholic Safeguarding Service provides support and advice to the Catholic Church including the Diocese of Aberdeen. The service is developing a manual of procedures and policy/process exemplars, templates, forms and information sheets which are supported more recently by each of the eight DSAs across Scotland who are meeting together regularly.

Description

- 2.6.2 The Diocese of Aberdeen has a website which includes information on each aspect of safeguarding. It also includes an online link to *In God's Image* and advice for those wishing to raise concerns or seek support, including for survivors.
- 2.6.3 Since March 2020, there has been much work by DSAs across all dioceses in Scotland to contribute to the revision of *In God's Image*. The DSAs have been involved in drafting guidance for each of the elements of the eight Standards. The Aberdeen DSA is hopeful that before she moves on, all the exemplars for each Standard will be in place as well as the policies which fall from them, tailored to reflect the customs and practices within the Diocese. Such policies will fall under the remit of the DSAT and are seen as part of the continuity plan to assist a new DSA. The auditors also heard that the Diocese had identified the need for policies and procedures to be adapted where they are not currently explicitly covered in *In God's Image* such as online safety and social media.

Analysis

- 2.6.4 The Diocese of Aberdeen use the policies within *In God's Image* and see those as central to their safeguarding work. Part of the national revisions to *In God's Image* includes the development of templates for a range of procedures which can be adapted to reflect each diocese. Whilst separate policies tailored to the Diocese do not yet exist, the plan was to develop these once the national work was complete.
- 2.6.5 The DSAT has extended its membership to include a local IT expert to advise members of DSAT on issues associated with the internet and computer misuse. Auditors felt this work might be usefully shared with parishes and should also inform national developments, particularly during Covid19 and increased online working.

Questions for the Diocese to consider:

- Despite the excellent work being undertaken nationally by the DSA, what consideration should be given to interim diocesan policies on aspects of safeguarding not currently covered by *In God's Image*?
- How confident is the Diocese that its role in influencing national developments can continue with the pending vacancies?

2.7 COMPLAINTS AND WHISTLEBLOWING*Introduction*

- 2.7.1 A complaints process is required so that anyone who has contact with the Diocese about safeguarding knows how to complain should they feel that they need to. A strong policy is clear about who complaints should be made to, and how they can be escalated if necessary. Positive features include an independent element, and clarity that raising a safeguarding concern, and making a complaint about a safeguarding service, are two distinct things. The outcome of complaints enables an organisation to learn from those who have had to use their service, enabling them to make any necessary changes or improvements.
- 2.7.2 Whistleblowing and complaints procedures can be part of a general complaints procedure, but it is important that the process for making a complaint about the safeguarding response or service is clear and is different from sharing safeguarding concerns or allegations.
- 2.7.3 A search on 'complaints' or 'whistleblowing' within *In God's Image*, however, does not elicit results. And the index does not reference either term.
- 2.7.4 Where policies and procedures do exist, it is important that the culture of an organisation supports their implementation which means people must be able to access them without having to contact the Church.
- 2.7.5 Without a clear procedure, individuals are left to seek advice and support through a variety of means including: the Apostolic Nuncio, who represents the Holy See in the Church in Britain; or through the Bishop who has a lead for safeguarding on behalf of the Bishop's Conference; or the Scottish Catholic Safeguarding Service which leads the development of effective safeguarding arrangements.
- 2.7.6 None of these individuals or services has a defined role in the responding to escalation of concerns or complaints, and within the culture of the Catholic Church it would be unusual and difficult for the lead safeguarding bishop to comment on the decisions within another diocese without a clear remit for doing so.
- 2.7.7 The function of the Independent Review Group (IRG) in terms of whistleblowing is also as yet underdeveloped – an issue to be discussed in the overview report.

Description

- 2.7.8 The Diocese of Aberdeen does not yet have a whistleblowing policy in place, but this has been discussed at DSAT and is currently being developed by the DSA based on the National Toolkit and adapted for the Diocese of Aberdeen. The Diocese is also

developing a complaints procedure, which will be for all complaints, not just for those regarding safeguarding. At present, any complaints usually come in directly to the Bishop.

- 2.7.9 Currently a search on the Diocese of Aberdeen's website for complaints or whistleblowing does not elicit any results.

Analysis

- 2.7.10 Auditors could see clear reference to the development of a complaints procedure and a whistleblowing policy with a recognition that the Diocese wishes to seek feedback in order to assure quality. DSAT minutes show discussion and commitment to putting these in place. At present, however, there is a gap in information provided to those who might wish to make a complaint.

Questions for the Diocese to consider

- While the arrangements for whistleblowing and complaints are under development, how can the Diocese encourage people to flag up where there are concerns or problems with the Diocesan Safeguarding Team?

2.8 CASEWORK

Introduction

- 2.8.1 In order to manage concerns well and respond to allegations there must be a system in place which clearly defines escalation for seeking advice regarding concerns and reports of abuse. There should be effective and clear recording of issues and incidents which are kept securely and are compliant with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) 2018. Integral to managing concerns well is the requirement to work jointly with statutory agencies and to debrief and reflect on any areas of weakness in order to improve practice.
- 2.8.2 The auditors looked at a range of casework material that was identified by the Diocese as related to safeguarding. These included general enquiries dealt with by the DSA.
- 2.8.3 The auditors focused on recording systems, quality of response to allegations, information sharing, risk assessments and safeguarding agreements. For this section, description and analysis are presented together for each sub-section.

Recording systems

Description

- 2.8.4 All case files are in paper form and are held by the Safeguarding Administrator. New cases are provided with a case number based on when the incident took place. Files are kept in a locked cabinet in line with GDPR with a corresponding file number held electronically on an Excel database for ease of tracking. The database includes the case file number and initials but no full name.
- 2.8.5 The auditors received a number of relevant case files which showed a wide range of

information from the Diocese. It was clear from the case files that there is supportive and sensitive handling in relation to a range of allegations. This ranged from situations where Police Scotland were involved to the management of contracts to situations where Police Scotland was not taking an investigation further, but issues remained which needed careful and sensitive management.

Analysis

- 2.8.6** Three issues emerged from the case file audit and were in relation to the administration of the case files rather than the case management of individual situations.
- 2.8.7** The first was that despite there being a database for case files and a form of tracking, the case recording system lacks the ability over time to track information and is reliant on staff remembering names and cases. This means victims and abusers from different locations cannot be cross referred except from memory.
- 2.8.8** Second, documents were filed in chronological order containing a wealth of information including emails, meeting logs, referrals and phone conversation records, but lacked information on closure. Auditors could not always see 'what happened in the end' and were unsure if cases had been closed or there had been little activity.
- 2.8.9** Third, a front sheet on all case files would be helpful, particularly for new lay staff of clergy undertaking roles in relation to safeguarding.

Questions for the Diocese to consider:

- How empowered is the Diocese in pushing the priority of a national case file system?
- How might the current diocesan case file database system be further developed to provide the ability to track cases over time?
- Could the Diocese consider retrospectively adding a case summary sheet to assist new staff coming in and also to ensure all actions are complete on case closure?

Quality of response to concerns and allegations and information sharing

Description

- 2.8.10** In 2013, the Bishop's Conference of Scotland committed to publish allegation statistics on an annual basis. Aberdeen contributes to this annual audit and auditors saw evidence of this being discussed at DSAT with a clear message warning against complacency. The Diocese has guidance on the management of allegations within its website under 'How to respond to allegations' which includes signposting to both the DSA and to wider external agencies for advice.
- 2.8.11** Auditors saw evidence of how allegations are managed by the Diocese and how process is followed through the DRAMT. These included where there had been challenge. The Chair of DRAMT, or the Chair of DSAT who also sits on the DRAMT, feeds back to the parish regarding the management of allegations.

Analysis

- 2.8.12 There is good use of those with relevant expertise from the DSAT who are seconded onto the DRAMT for clarity of thinking. There is good evidence that the DRAMT is used to make decisions and recommendations regarding risk assessment, in line with *In God's Image*.
- 2.8.13 The level of contact and robust challenge to external agencies where the Safeguarding Team felt a response had not been forthcoming appeared robust from the documentary analysis. This included where it was felt additional support for both those the subject of alleged abuse and those accused to support mental health. From the case files, there was also evidence of appropriate and helpful challenge from lay members of DSAT members seconded onto the DRAMT to advise on individual cases.

Questions for the Diocese to consider

- How can the Diocese be assured that the current process of managing allegations can adequately continue when the DSA and chair of the DSAT move on?
- What more could be done to disseminate the message regarding the need to report concerns within the deaneries and parishes, including to the congregations?

Risk assessments and safeguarding agreements

Introduction

- 2.8.14 *In God's Image* states that: 'Every Catholic in Scotland has the obligation and the right to attend the public celebration of the Liturgy on Sundays and holy days of obligation. Where a registered sex offender (RSO) expresses a wish to participate in a religious service in a parish, an assessment of potential risk of harm must be made by the statutory authorities. Police Scotland has agreed with each diocese in Scotland an Information Sharing Protocol which is governed by the system known as the Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) which the police service, local authority, prison service, health service and others are statutorily obliged to operate on a multiagency basis, with the objective of protecting the public from the risks that may be posed by sex offenders.' It further specifies that:
- 2.8.15 2.8.19: When a convicted registered sex offender expresses a wish to worship in a Catholic Church in Scotland, the relevant personnel from Offender Management or Criminal Justice will discuss with the DSA if appropriate safe arrangements can be made. Each request for such a contract must be considered by the DRAMT who will make an informed recommendation about the best place to worship, how and when. Currently, there is knowledge and experience of the criminal justice system within the DRAMT.
- 2.8.16 2.8.20 Each contract should be reviewed every six months. Contacts between the statutory authorities, the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser and parish priest must be maintained if there are any changes in circumstances either for the RSO or in the parish. The Parish Safeguarding Coordinator must also be made aware that a sex offender is attending Church and has signed a contract.'

2.8.17 Good practice (not specified in *In God's Image*) is that such RSO contracts should be underpinned by a risk assessment that details the risks posed by a worshipper, the measures in place to manage those risks, and therefore the reasons for the safeguarding agreement. Having a clear rationale for any restrictions helps people enforce the agreements with the level of diligence appropriate. Clarity about the risks that a safeguarding agreement is intended to address, also allows for a robust reviewing process, which allows safeguarding agreements to be strengthened where needed, or indeed terminated if appropriate.

Description

2.8.18 Auditors saw a small number of cases involving the management of covenants of care and agreements for those within the Diocese about whom there were concerns. Some of these were non-recent but had been raised within the timescale of the audit, others were recent agreements. Auditors also heard evidence of the Bishop offering support when required, including visiting parishes and speaking with individuals to assist with the smooth running of safeguarding agreements where needed.

Analysis

2.8.19 DRAMT meetings are called appropriately to assess and manage risk and to support any ongoing covenants of care and agreements. Where the parish has concerns, these are referred back to the DRAMT for further risk assessment.

Questions for the Diocese to consider:

- No questions raised.

2.9 SUPPORTING SURVIVORS

Introduction

2.9.1 Standard 4 of *In God's Image* relates to providing care and support for survivors:

'We provide a compassionate response to survivors of abuse when they disclose their experiences and we offer them support, advice, care and compassion.'

2.9.2 An important part of the audit was to seek the views of survivors, as well as those working in the Diocese.

Description

2.9.3 Auditors heard that survivors do come forward and make themselves known, most usually in a parish setting through the parish priest or the Safeguarding Coordinator. All are offered a conversation with the DSA.

2.9.4 Trainers, members of DSAT, DRAMT, the DSA, the Safeguarding Coordinator, Chair of DSAT and the Bishop and Vicar Episcopal are all clear that survivors should be listened to and supported in line with *In God's Image* and the McLelland report. The Bishop advised that he would welcome a wider focus on those who have encountered abuse not just through the Church, but in any area of their life. To this end, the DSAT has discussed 'Safe Spaces' resources for victims and survivors of abuse in other

settings, currently supported by the Catholic Church in England, although the link is not yet on the diocesan website.

- 2.9.5 At a parish level, allegations concerning clergy and those in church office have been low in number, but the DSA, Bishop and Vicar Episcopal were clear that they are not complacent.

Analysis

- 2.9.6 No survivors came forward to speak to auditors, but the Diocese could demonstrate offers and take-up of the Raphael Counselling Service. The Diocesan Safeguarding Team is acutely aware of the two non-recent but high-profile cases of the Abbey School at Fort Augustus (closed for over 20 years) and similarly Nazareth House in Aberdeen.
- 2.9.7 Auditors felt that survivors who do come forward for support are offered a timely and compassionate response. What is lacking is a sense of proactive support for those who have not yet come forward or for whom the Church itself is no longer felt to be a safe place.

Questions for the Diocese to consider:

- How might the Diocese, perhaps through theological leadership and dissemination of this through the deaneries and parishes, more proactively reach out to survivors?
- How can the Diocese include survivors who do not wish to have contact with the Church?
- What are barriers to creating links with 'Safer Spaces' or other support mechanisms for survivors?
- How can the work of the counselling service be better disseminated without adding further trauma to survivors through contact with the Church?
- Could the Diocese work with survivors who have had a positive experience of support provided in order to better capture and share good practice?

2.10 SAFE RECRUITMENT OF CLERGY, LAY OFFICERS AND VOLUNTEERS

Introduction

- 2.10.1 The mandatory safer recruitment process in the Catholic Church in Scotland is central to ensuring that everyone, including volunteers, is safe to work with children and vulnerable adults. *In Gods Image* specifies the DSAG as having an operational function around the organisation of PVG applications and monitoring of ongoing membership of the scheme across the dioceses.
- 2.10.2 Standard 2 of *In God's Image* states that: 'When admitting men to seminary, appointing clergy and religious and recruiting lay employees and volunteers, we require PVG checks on their suitability for working with vulnerable groups.' (2018 p15).

Description

- 2.10.3 In Aberdeen, the management of safer recruitment processes falls mainly to the Diocesan Safeguarding Administrator rather than the Chancellor. Details from application forms are added to the diocesan recruitment database which is held by the Administrator and is the same database rolled out across all the Scottish dioceses. Once selected for a post, all staff and volunteers complete a PVG application form in addition to a personal record and two references. All information is added to the database.
- 2.10.4 During this process there is ongoing communication with the parish, which is informed of progress. Once cleared, a letter signed by the Bishop is sent to the volunteer or staff enabling them to start in post.
- 2.10.5 Where a PVG is blemished, details are sent to the Vicar Episcopal and a DRAMT meeting is convened to consider and address risk. Where risk is deemed too serious for an individual to take up a post, the individual and the parish priest are informed but the blemish is not shared. The individual has the right to appeal the decision of the DRAMT.
- 2.10.6 The database used within Aberdeen was designed centrally and can be interrogated to extract relevant data cross cut in various ways. The data also includes training for all staff and volunteers (see section 2.11 below)
- 2.10.7 The Diocesan Safeguarding Administrator is confident that every member of staff and volunteer has a PVG and is entered onto the database. Previously, the Administrator checked parish information from the annual audit against the information contained on the database to ensure a match. Last year the audit information went directly to the Bishop's Conference and has been copied to the Chair of DSAT rather than to the Administrator.
- 2.10.8 Priests and visitors from abroad are asked to provide a letter of support from their Church, they then follow the same recruitment process.

Analysis

- 2.10.9 Auditors saw evidence that policies within *In God's Image* for safer recruitment are being applied. All new staff and volunteers receive a letter from the Bishop and do not start in post until this time.
- 2.10.10 Auditors saw evidence that recruitment and the management of PVGs is discussed at DSAT which takes strategic oversight for the system, including the responsibility of DRAMT to look at any concerns raised. The Diocese has confidence in the new database which is working well, and which is able to provide a depth of information not previously available.
- 2.10.11 There is good communication between the Diocesan Safeguarding Administrator, the Vicar Episcopal and parishes regarding safer recruitment. Auditors heard high praise from one parish for the efficient management of PVG applications. Currently there are ten Parish Safeguarding Coordinator (PSC) vacancies (from 44) but where there have been concerns regarding recruitment of these posts, the Chair of DSAT has assisted the parishes to explore alternative arrangements so that safeguarding is covered. Retention is thought to be an issue due to competing external factors, usually related to full-time work.

2.10.12 The Diocese of Aberdeen receives a number of visiting priests from abroad. These visitors provide a letter of support from their Church and then follow the PVG process in the normal way. While this is common practice, PVGs only cover an individual's time within the UK. Overseas checks required in other agencies are not carried out by the Catholic Church and this appears to be an omission.

Questions for the Diocese to consider:

- How best can the Diocese cross check information regarding staff and volunteers at parish level with the information held on the database to ensure parity?
- How can the Diocese be assured that overseas checks for visiting priests are in line with information required for those in other agencies working with children and vulnerable adults?
- How might the Diocese ensure improved retention of Parish Safeguarding Coordinators?
- Is there good practice from other parts of the Catholic Church to draw on?

2.11 TRAINING

Introduction

2.11.1 Safeguarding training is important within the Diocese in order to establish a baseline of safeguarding awareness; signs and symptoms, reporting etc. and to instill confidence in recognising and passing on safeguarding issues in those working and volunteering in the Diocese.

2.11.2 Prior to the introduction in *In God's Image*, training was not mandatory before volunteering or taking up a role within the parish. *In God's Image* has clarified the importance of training. The DSAG is ascribed the key role of organising training for parish clergy, safeguarding volunteers and parish safeguarding coordinators (para 6.1.3)

Description

2.11.3 The Diocese of Aberdeen has 13 lead trainers providing training to staff and 534 volunteers as required. The trainers are spread geographically to best match demand across the wide geographical areas of the Diocese. The lead trainer is a member of DSAT.

2.11.4 PSCs contact the lead trainers on behalf of the parish when a new volunteer is ready to start in post. Once the training has taken place the trainers advise the Safeguarding Administrator to update the database. The Diocesan Safeguarding Team ensure that the volunteer has completed an application, has two references, a PVG and has completed Induction Training Part 1 before a volunteer starts regulated work.

2.11.5 Parish priests and PSCs are aware that the volunteer must not be employed in any regulated activity until they are issued with their approval letter from the Bishop.

- 2.11.6 Trainers attend the annual training update provided by the SCSS in order to ensure their skills and information remain current. Trainers felt that the material provided by the SCSS is of a good standard, regularly refreshed and provides opportunity for reflection using relevant case studies.
- 2.11.7 In order to further update PSCs, trainers hold two annual one-day events for all PSCs across the dioceses, one in Aberdeen and the other in Inverness which provide an opportunity for discussing any updates, relevant topics and to provide support where required. Auditors heard from parishes that the quality of training received from the Diocese is good. Parish priests receive a mandatory training session annually.
- 2.11.8 The diocesan database shows the number of training courses completed, the date, who carried out the training and the level. The Diocese is confident that all existing volunteers in post have completed safeguarding training. Three years ago, volunteers who had not completed training were asked to step down until their training was complete.
- 2.11.9 Auditors heard evidence that volunteers are not approved to start in their post until they have completed the relevant training which completes the three-part safer recruitment process of PVG, references and training. Parish priests receive Level 1 safeguarding and training on appointment and annually thereafter which ensures safeguarding knowledge is current.
- 2.11.10 Refresher training for volunteers is not currently taking place across all areas. The pandemic has made this more difficult and the SCSS has begun to develop modules for training online. The Diocese has identified trainers with sufficient IT skills to run such courses. The requirement for annual mandatory safeguarding training for parish priests, PSCs, seminaries, students and Deacons was identified as part of the Diocesan Safeguarding Development Plan under the strategic oversight of DSAT and is in place.

Analysis

- 2.11.11 Quality and timeliness of training is good across the Diocese. Volunteers undertake their first safeguarding training before they are approved to start in post. The second training is usually undertaken 18 months later. With the exception of training carried out for volunteers within parishes by the PSCs, auditors saw good evidence of strategic oversight of training needs for each role within the deaneries and parishes.
- 2.11.12 Where training is offered and not taken up, trainers advise the Diocese and the Chair of DSAT has offered support and robust challenge to ensure this is rectified.
- 2.11.13 Auditors felt that the Diocese adapts well to changing needs. Aberdeen is multi-cultural, and trainers described it being challenging at times to deliver training in different languages to match needs. Where there are volunteers from abroad whose first language is not English, trainers have found that the concept of safeguarding is different and so they have adapted training, using smaller groups and a translator. Larger documents have also been translated.
- 2.11.14 Training requirements for the future were explored in interviews and auditors heard that there is need for a level of knowledge regarding working with trauma. Minutes of the DSAT show previous discussion on the potential of Trauma Management Training to support the work of parish priests and hospital chaplains.

This was provided on a voluntary basis by the national office in order to support priests during the first Covid19 lockdown when there were concerns regarding a rise in mental health concerns. Take-up of this training by parish priests is not known by the Diocese.

Questions for the Diocese to consider:

- What are the barriers to oversight of safeguarding refresher training delivered by PSCs within parishes and how might the DSAT improve strategic oversight of this part of the training roll-out?
- How might the Diocese disseminate the importance of a trauma-based approach where this is most needed?

2.12 HOW THE DIOCESE PROVIDES SAFEGUARDING SUPPORT TO PARISHES

Generic introduction

2.12.1 In a centralised diocesan structure of safeguarding, support from the Diocese to parishes is key to safe and reliable safeguarding. Diocesan safeguarding is, in significant ways, only as good as its weakest parish.

Description

2.12.2 The DSA, Vicar Episcopal and Chair of the DSAT are all available to provide safeguarding support to parishes. The DSA and DSAT Chair have job descriptions and it is the DSA who provides individualised support regarding parish issues and support for survivors. The Vicar Episcopal and the Chair of the DSAT support with practical matters such as recruitment, completion of the parish audit and support with managing covenants and agreements, involving the Bishop where required.

2.12.3 Auditors heard that communication and support from the Diocese was rated as good by those contributing from the parishes, with mention of support from both the DSA and the Chair of the DSAT. PSCs are supported through the Deanery and also through the one-day training event held annually. Regular documents regarding safeguarding and topics of interest are disseminated to the parish priests and PSCs with email updates if required.

2.12.4 The DSAT meets four times per year and some of its members are also PSCs. Auditors heard that parishes regularly relay safeguarding messages via the PSC. The DSAT also aims to produce a parish safeguarding app in order to assist the parishes further. This will be uploaded onto the diocesan website where it can be downloaded onto a mobile phone to assist where volunteers do not have access to the internet. The app provides information on safeguarding and questions can be posed using the app. It will be disseminated via parish priests with a media announcement to follow.

2.12.5 Auditors heard that retention of PSCs is at times, a challenge. This is possibly because of the geographical spread and that in more remote areas, the role can feel isolated. Improved and more regular videoconferencing has heightened confidence levels, but diocesan trainers regularly hear of PSCs feeling that the management of

sex offenders in terms of their agreements or undertaking a PVG where an individual discloses that there is a blemish, can lead to PSCs finding the role challenging.

2.12.6 The Bishop is aware that some areas of the Diocese are remote and can feel isolated. Each priest is, during seminary training, encouraged to engage with a spiritual director or support group. This is encouraged again in times of crisis but not at any other time. In addition, the Bishop encourages an open relationship with priests who are free to contact him directly.

Analysis

2.12.7 Auditors felt a strong sense of collegiate team working between those in the Diocese and that this provided a good level of support to the parishes, despite the geographical distances involved. This is supported by the views of parishes.

2.12.8 The 13 trainers across the Diocese provide an additional link with the parish priests and the PSCs via their annual training days. Links between the trainers and the Diocese are strengthened by the lead trainer being a member of the DSAT and by regular contact with the Diocesan Safeguarding Administrator. Further thought may be required to support the work of PSCs and recognising that holding and knowing highly sensitive and personal information about fellow parishioners in small communities can be challenging. The Bishop did suggest that meeting with PSCs once a year to pray with them and hear or discuss challenging issues may help.

2.12.9 The Diocese has provided support to the Islands through video link even before the advent of Covid19. For other parishes, auditors were particularly struck by the willingness of all those within the Diocesan Safeguarding Team to visit parishes where a particular issue arises. The team plays to its skills and where required, feeds back wider issues to the DSAT for strategic consideration.

2.12.10 Retention of PSCs has been an issue and there are currently 10 PSC vacancies (from 44). Auditors felt that support for PSCs in parishes where perhaps safeguarding is not as integrated into the Catholic mission as it might be, should be prioritised.

2.12.11 Despite the remoteness of some of the Islands, auditors were advised that the Diocese is accessible and responsive to concerns raised. The Bishop and DSA were particularly praised for this in one written contribution, however, there is perhaps a broader issue of how support for safeguarding can be strengthened in remote and rural communities.

Questions for the Diocese to consider:

- How might the Diocese identify and prioritise safeguarding support to PSCs who might be finding the role challenging?
- How might the Diocese strengthen advice for parish priests regarding safeguarding outside of times of crisis, including where to find support for themselves?
- How can the Diocese ensure that safeguarding support for remote and rural communities is strengthened?

2.13 QUALITY ASSURANCE

Introduction

2.13.1 A safe organisation needs constant feedback loops about what is going well and where there are difficulties in relation to safeguarding, and this should drive ongoing cycles of learning and improvement. Robust quality assurance enables an organisation to understand its strengths and weaknesses. Potential sources of data are numerous, including independent scrutiny. Quality assurance needs to be strategic and systematic to support accountability and shed light on how well things are working and where there are gaps or concerns.

2.13.2 There are a range of mechanisms that can support this:

- Professional supervision of the DSA (see section 2.2)
- Scrutiny by the DSAT (see section 2.3)
- Independent audit of non-recent cases
- Routine benchmarking the Diocese against other dioceses within and out with Scotland
- Identifying lessons learnt from other dioceses and feeding these into planning the work of the Diocese
- Abuse survivor 'customer' feedback
- Routine PSC 'customer' feedback
- Complaints procedure about the safeguarding service (see section 2.6)
- Independent 'lessons learnt' reviews of cases where things seem to have gone wrong or there are concerns that they have

2.13.3 Standard 8 of *In God's Image* sets out an expectation that each diocese will oversee effective planning processes to monitor, review, self-evaluate and report on local safeguarding practices. Compliance with these safeguarding standards is to be monitored externally by the Independent Review Group (IRG). In particular, there are expectations that:

- parishes monitor and review their safeguarding arrangements and to self-evaluate their safeguarding practice by completing an annual audit and devise a safeguarding action plan
- dioceses regularly monitor and review their safeguarding arrangements and to self-evaluate their safeguarding practice by completing an annual audit and devising a safeguarding action plan.

Description

2.13.4 The Diocese requests safeguarding audit responses from the parishes annually. The Chair of the DSAT is the lead for collation of the information, responses are monitored, and themes or concerns discussed by the DSAT to feed into the Safeguarding Development Plan. An example of this is the concern that some parishes were unable to recruit PSCs. The Diocese offered support in this area.

2.13.5 Despite encouragement, not all parishes return their audits and require chasing. In the 2017 audit, there were two non-returns and in 2018, there were three. Previously non-returns of audits went directly via the deans for assistance and this worked well, with 100 per cent return rate over several years.

2.13.6 The Diocese has recently become part of the larger group of DSAs working on amending the templates and protocols to assist with the revisions to *In God's Image*. The DSA recognises the strength in this group and is able to contact DSAs from other dioceses to request advice on specialist situations and to share good practice.

Analysis

2.13.7 Quality assurance within the Diocese is focused mainly on the parish audits, which have been helpful and there is evidence that themes from the audits are fed into the DSAT for consideration.

2.13.8 More recently, relationships between DSAs across the Catholic Church of Scotland have been developed, including reciprocal cover arrangements. This has provided an additional level of support and quality assurance between dioceses. Building on this would include feedback of any learning to the DSAT for discussion on future learning and strategic planning.

2.13.9 The Safeguarding Development Plan and the identification of individual members of the DSAT to take forward the safeguarding standards of *In God's Image* is a firm foundation. However, there is no quality-assurance framework beyond this. Auditors felt that this would usefully form part of any strategic planning and feedback loops. In particular, auditors would like to see:

- professional supervision for the DSA
- inclusion of survivor feedback
- requesting and incorporating PSC feedback, particularly from new PSCs or those planning to move on
- information from those raising complaints against the Safeguarding Team.

Questions for the Diocese to consider:

- How could the Safeguarding Development Plan be usefully progressed to form the basis of a Strategic Safeguarding Plan and quality-assurance framework for the Diocese?
- How satisfied is the Diocese that the current model of parish audits elicits the most effective return of information?
- How might learning and knowledge of specialised incidents between DSAs in Scotland be incorporated into wider quality-assurance activity?
- How might the views and perspectives of survivors be sought and incorporated into quality assurance?

2.14 CULTURE

Introduction

- 2.14.1** The most critical aspect of safeguarding relates to the culture within any organisation. In a diocesan context, that can mean, for example, the extent to which priority is placed on safeguarding individuals as opposed to the reputation of the Church, or the ability of all members of the Church to think the unthinkable about friends and colleagues. Any diocese should strive for an open, learning culture where safeguarding is ‘everybody’s business’ and a shared responsibility, albeit supported by experts, and which encourages people to highlight any concerns about how things are working they can be addressed.
- 2.14.2** An open learning culture starts from the assumption that maintaining adequate vigilance is difficult and proactively seeks feedback on how safeguarding is operating and encourages people to highlight any concerns about how things are working in order that they can be addressed.
- 2.14.3** Culture within a diocese is crucial to effective safeguarding as is the priority given to safeguarding children and vulnerable adults over the protection of the reputation of the Church. A safe culture also relies on the knowledge and understanding of all within the diocese to react to allegations and disclosures of abuse even when these might be about those they know and admire. Crucially, a safe culture requires trust in the organisation’s leadership and in fair and transparent systems and processes.

Description

- 2.14.4** The geographic span of the Diocese of Aberdeen provides additional challenges to a safeguarding culture because it is difficult for the Safeguarding Team to be visible in all parishes. Despite this, parishes who completed the survey felt that they received good safeguarding support and that the message regarding safeguarding is filtering through to each parish.
- 2.14.5** The Safeguarding Team had confidence that those making disclosures or allegations would be referred to the DSA and that parishes would know the process to follow. The team has ensured the message that the Diocese cannot afford to be complacent is reinforced via training, PSC and Assembly of Priests’ awaydays and parish notices.
- 2.14.6** There has been a societal shift in the profile of safeguarding over recent years. The lead Safeguarding Trainer described safeguarding culture within the Church as having begun to turn a corner and uses the computer analogy that safeguarding is an ‘operating system’ rather than a bolt on. While some attending the training understand that safeguarding should be integral to the culture of the Church, others find this more difficult. A higher profile in the media and the fact that many of those attending safeguarding training have also had to undertake similar training in their various other roles also contribute to an increased understanding of its importance.

Analysis

- 2.14.7** The auditors felt that the Diocese know themselves well and have identified that there are strengths and weaknesses within safeguarding culture. There is a willingness and commitment from those who took part in the audit to improve safeguarding within all aspects of diocesan life.

- 2.14.8 The DSA described the Safeguarding Team as being underpinned by dedicated and committed volunteers across the Diocese who engage and promote training and safeguarding awareness within the parishes. Auditors agreed that this helps to develop a culture of safeguarding as being everyone's responsibility. It has also meant that there is a confidence in the Diocesan Safeguarding Team within the parishes.
- 2.14.9 *In God's Image* is well embedded within the Diocese Safeguarding Team and work is underway to draw out more detailed actions and plans to further embed this in the culture of the Diocese. Auditors were struck, however, by the varied thoughts within the Diocese regarding aspects of safeguarding culture. Some described safeguarding as remaining a 'bolt on' to usual Church life and others described it as completely integral. It is possible that there are pockets where both are the case.
- 2.14.10 There is a clear unified voice of the theological importance of safeguarding from the Bishop shared with the Safeguarding Team including training, recruitment and other structures of DSAT and DRAMT. This consistent approach helps to challenge perspectives and thinking, and inconsistencies across all parishes.
- 2.14.11 Improvements in safeguarding practice by the Diocesan Safeguarding Team and the Bishop are clear and there is good evidence of communication with and support to the parishes. The development of more strategic thinking to oversee the effectiveness of safeguarding across the Diocese and further embed a safeguarding culture in all areas is in its infancy but nevertheless beginning to have an effect.

Questions for the Diocese to consider

- How might the Diocese identify areas where safeguarding culture is less well embedded and spread good practice where it is?
- What proactive measures could the Diocese implement to bring those who might be more reluctant, into a broader safeguarding culture?
- How can progress in the development of safeguarding culture be quality assured and how will the Diocese be confident that things are improving?
- In what ways could survivors of abuse be invited to support the development of safeguarding culture?

3 CONCLUSION

- 3.1.1 The Diocesan Safeguarding Team working together with the Bishop provides a strong leadership for safeguarding which has been recognised by the parishes. *In God's Image* was published in March 2014 and has been in place for most of the tenure of the Bishop. Steps have been taken under his leadership to ensure that the standards within *In God's Image* are met and, in some aspects, local practice has developed where the guidance is less clear, keeping this within the spirit of *In God's Image*. There is a strong sense of unity and of ownership for safeguarding by the Diocese as a whole. There are good working relationships with external agencies, good challenge both externally and internally and a desire to learn from concerns and from good practice.
- 3.1.2 The DSAT and DRAMT are a real strength and work well together to ensure risk management and safeguarding oversight. The development of the Safeguarding Management Group has allowed more time for the DSAT to consider wider safeguarding issues and therefore become more strategic.
- 3.1.3 While managed well in practice, there is a lack of formal process for disagreements arising from diocesan work, particularly around the DSA and Vicar Episcopal's role in risk-assessment recommendations. A process for managing disagreements or conflicts of interests is required, including escalation where the conflict cannot be resolved.
- 3.1.4 There are a high number of volunteers who take up roles such as trainers, PSCs and other parish volunteer roles, as well as members of DSAT. Volunteers impact positively within parishes and the wider Diocese and their willingness and enthusiasm are without comparison. The work of the Diocesan Safeguarding Administrator to ensure safer recruitment, references and records for volunteers is also to be commended.
- 3.1.5 A focus is now needed on the further consolidation of strategic oversight for safeguarding. The Safeguarding Development Plan is a firm foundation for broadening the Diocese's thinking and future planning which sits well within the current DSAT framework. Terms of reference for this group would further clarify its role.
- 3.1.6 The Diocese should also consider how best to show a more proactive response to survivors of abuse, in particular how to reach out to those who might not have come forward and also to ensure their voices are heard within policy and strategic planning in order to also assist with wider healing.
- 3.1.7 The Diocese should also focus on a quality-assurance framework. This might concentrate on reducing the pockets of practice in which safeguarding has yet to form part of Church culture. This would be supportive of the role of the parish priests and also for the PSCs, assisting in recruitment and retention in these challenging but important roles.
- 3.1.8 The theology of safeguarding and how this forms part of the mission of the Church as well as continued high-quality training will assist with ensuring the direction of change continues.

4 APPENDICES

APPENDIX: REVIEW PROCESS

Data collection

Information provided to auditors

In advance of and during the site visit, the Diocese of Aberdeen provided auditors with the following:

- In God's Image
- The McLellan Report
- A self-assessment of Safeguarding
- DSAG minutes
- The Safeguarding Development Plan
- Training Overview
- DSA job description
- Chair of DSAT job description
- Diocesan context and local safeguarding structure and arrangements
- Safeguarding Management Team minutes
- Parish Survey results
- PVG database information
- Safe recruitment forms
- 2019 Parish safeguarding audit
- Safeguarding report form
- Bishop's conference Safeguarding in the Catholic Church
- Access to the website
- Invitation to survivors

Participation of members of the Diocese

On 26 January to 28 January the auditors conducted the audit virtually and had conversations with:

- The Bishop of Aberdeen
- The Vicar General of Aberdeen
- The Vicar Episcopal (Safeguarding) of Aberdeen

- The Designated Safeguarding Advisor
- The Chair of DSAT
- The Diocesan Safeguarding Administrator
- The Diocesan Chancellor
- A member of DSAT
- A member of DRAMT
- Representatives from the parishes (via the survey)
- Trainer representatives

The audit: records / files

Auditors looked at:

- A number of randomly selected case files
- Safer recruitment files
- Examples of enquiries handled within the Diocese from 2016

Limitations of audit

It is possible that some survivors of abuse who have no further contact with the Church and who have not approached survivor support organisations would not have been made aware of the audit. We also recognise that those with strongly negative or positive views are more likely to come forward than those with broadly neutral views.

This audit was completed virtually in line with the Government restrictions on travel during the Covid19 pandemic. Limitations of not seeing members of the Diocese or parishes in person may have limited communications.

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