

Independent Safeguarding Audit of Chester Diocesan Board of Finance and Chester Cathedral

2026

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Introduction

1 Introduction

1.1 The independent safeguarding audit programme for the Church of England (CofE) was commissioned by the Archbishops' Council and is overseen by the CofE's National Safeguarding Team (NST). Led by the INEQE Safeguarding Group and working to a consistent framework, the audits test the sufficiency of safeguarding arrangements within Diocese Boards of Finance (DBFs) and Cathedrals. They have a particular focus on the CofE's new National Safeguarding Standards that provide the structure for this report.¹

1.2 Audit findings have taken account of the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) audits, Past Cases Review 2 (PCR2) outcomes, other relevant material as well as evidence from surveys, focus groups, direct correspondence and interviews. For Chester DBF and Chester Cathedral, this involved the following:

- Over 530 documents being collated and analysed prior to the Audit's fieldwork.
- A range of interviews being held with Church officers (staff and volunteers), external partners, victims, survivors and other stakeholders.
- 1317 anonymous survey responses being received, which gathered input from key communities connected to the Church. These were submitted by victims and survivors, children and young people as well as those worshipping or working within the DBF, the Cathedral and parishes.
- Six focus groups
- A confidential contact form being made available via a dedicated webpage.
- In total, the Audit undertook 43 separate engagement sessions reaching 91 people.

¹ https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/national-safeguarding-standards-and-quality-assurance-framework_sep23.pdf

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- 1.3 The Audit report is separated into Part One, Chester DBF and Part Two, Chester Cathedral. This has been done to ensure that each audited body is able to focus on their own strengths and areas for identified improvement.
- 1.4 The report has been reviewed for factual accuracy by both the DBF and the Cathedral.

Part One - Chester Diocesan Board of Finance

2 Context

- 2.1 The Diocese of Chester, originally established in 1541, and current dimensions assumed in around 1880, is a geographically diverse region within the Province of York that stretches from the Wirral and Welsh border to the Derbyshire Peak District. The Diocese primarily spans nine primary local authorities; Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Derbyshire, Halton, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford, Warrington and Wirral, with minor overlaps into Flintshire, Manchester, Newcastle-under-Lyme and Wrexham.
- 2.2 Its landscape is a complex tapestry of Victorian industrial sprawl, rural farming communities, and suburban commuter towns, with many residents looking toward nearby urban centres like Liverpool and Manchester for their sense of identity. This variety creates a wide-ranging set of ministry needs across its 263 parishes, approximately 100 of which remain characteristically rural. In 2025, the Diocese of Chester recorded an Adult Average Sunday Attendance of 16,113. For the same period, the Adult Usual Sunday Attendance was 15,174.
- 2.3 The Diocese is roughly divided by the M6 into two archdeaconries: Chester in the west and Macclesfield in the east, each further comprised of nine deaneries. While rooted in the Northwest of England, the Diocese maintains a global outlook through established companion links with the Anglican Church of Melanesia and the Dioceses of Aru and Boga in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

3 Progress

- 3.1 Chester Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF) has undergone both a Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) safeguarding audit and a PCR2. The SCIE audit, published in March 2017, resulted in 15 ‘considerations’. The PCR2 report, published in April 2022, resulted in 75 recommendations. These covered a range of themes, including record keeping, church safety plans, training, and safer recruitment practices.
- 3.2 All 15 considerations put forward in the SCIE report were accepted by the DBF. A Diocese response to the SCIE report was issued. The former Bishop’s initial response to concerns about language used when corresponding with alleged perpetrators was non-accepting. This is no longer the case. Anecdotally, progress did not occur at the necessary pace prior to the current Diocesan Safeguarding Officer’s (DSO) commencement in post due to high workload and capacity constraints. Since then, the recommendations have been absorbed into a consolidated safeguarding business plan and tracking spreadsheet, which groups related actions thematically across reviews. Progress has been driven and overseen through the Safeguarding Executive Group (SEG) and Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP). Implementation is now largely complete, with actions embedded into wider diocesan systems (e.g. training expansion, governance structures, communication strategy).
- 3.3 A dedicated PCR2 action plan was developed in response soon after the report’s publication. The action plan confirmed that the majority of recommendations had been completed with only two marked as ‘in progress’ and due to be completed later in 2025 and other areas naturally subject to ongoing monitoring. Staff shortages and scheduling have been cited as the main reasons for the delay in completion of the remaining actions.

- 3.4 PCR2 generated a very substantial legacy case workload, compounded by poor historic record-keeping. Progress has centred on building capacity and structure while prioritising PCR2 cases for full population and review. Progress on each case is tracked through the central spreadsheet, the National Safeguarding Case Management System (NSCMS) status, and DSAP oversight, with a target of completing PCR2 work by June 2026.
- 3.5 The Diocese's history of safeguarding has been challenging in multiple respects. One of which includes abuse carried out by former Diocesan Bishop, Hubert Whitsey. An independent Learning Lessons Review (LLR), titled '*A Betrayal of Trust*', published in October 2020, reviewed the handling of allegations concerning the former Bishop. Some cases were referred to the National Safeguarding Team (NST) and remain ongoing.
- 3.6 Past reviews highlighted relational tensions between the Diocese of Chester and Chester Cathedral. These relationships have seen marked improvement, bolstered by a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Further, the Audit was informed of legacy issues regarding capacity, the transfer of institutional knowledge, and other inherited difficulties. It is noted that a comprehensive review of safeguarding culture and procedural frameworks was previously completed.
- 3.7 Notwithstanding these challenges, significant change has occurred in recent years, and the Audit is confident that the Diocese is on a positive trajectory in their safeguarding practice. That said, the Audit will make a range of recommendations throughout the body of this report to strengthen key areas.

4 Culture, Leadership and Capacity

Culture

- 4.1 The Audit identified a significant and positive transformation in the Diocese of Chester's safeguarding culture, with the current environment described as "unrecognisable" from previous years. Feedback from anonymous surveys, focus groups, and one-to-one interviews, encompassing the DBF workforce, parish staff, and the wider worshipping community, highlighted widespread recognition of these enhanced safeguarding arrangements.
- 4.2 Driven by the leadership team's active promotion of a 'safeguarding first' philosophy, a robust safeguarding ethos is now firmly taking root. The Diocesan Bishop has largely dismantled hierarchical barriers, developing a collegiate team that shares safeguarding responsibilities while the Diocesan Bishop maintains overall accountability.
- 4.3 This shift in culture has been reinforced by successful initiatives, such as the 'Speak Out, Stay Safe' campaign and trauma-informed practice training for senior clergy and staff, and some other clergy and licensed lay ministers, which actively encourage dialogue and empathy. Consequently, DBF and parish respondents frequently describe the current culture as 'welcoming', 'supportive', and 'inclusive'.
- 4.4 Crucially, this leadership-driven change has established a profound sense of psychological safety for many within the DBF and parish workforces. Among these groups, there is a near-universal consensus that the new culture is becoming embedded, with staff, clergy and volunteers expressing exceptionally high confidence in their ability to raise concerns and challenge improper conduct without fear of reprisal.

- 4.5 However, while the feedback is overwhelmingly positive, a discernible divergence in perspective remains between the workforce and the wider parish worshipping community. Although congregation members strongly acknowledge the recent improvements and report a high sense of personal safety, their conviction regarding the deep, everyday integration of this culture is less pronounced. Most notably, their confidence in raising concerns or challenging behaviour without fear of reprisal is not yet at the same level as that of the workforce.
- 4.6 Ultimately, while a strong foundation for a healthy safeguarding culture has been successfully laid within the DBF and parish teams, this variance underscores the diocese's primary strategic challenge. The focus must now turn to bridging this gap, ensuring that the transformative, 'safeguarding first' culture and the confidence to speak out, permeates the broader worshipping community just as deeply and consistently as it has within the staff and leadership structures.

Recommendation D1: To ensure uniformity of understanding and confidence across the Parish community the DBF, supported by the Diocesan Safeguarding Team (DST) and in consultation with Parochial Church Councils (PCC) should engage in creating 'You Spoke, We Listened' Feedback Loops. To this end, leadership should regularly publish anonymised, high-level summaries of community concerns that have been raised alongside the specific actions taken to resolve them. Furthermore, to enhance confidentiality, the practice should include relevant, anonymised examples of good work from other areas.

Recommendation D2: Adapt current staff-level training (e.g. trauma-informed practices) into bite-sized, highly accessible workshops for clergy, ordinands, licensed lay workers, volunteers, DBF and parish staff, and any other relevant personnel.

Leadership DBF

- 4.7 The Diocesan Bishop holds ultimate accountability for safeguarding, a responsibility he unequivocally accepts. He has built an effective, collaborative team of senior leaders, proactively sharing safeguarding duties without diminishing his overall oversight.
- 4.8 The Audit observed evidence of his authoritative practice, alongside balanced and compassionate responses where necessary and appropriate. This approach is mirrored in the supportive dynamic between him and his suffragan bishops, typified by honest explanations, genuine encouragement, and the issuing of apologies when warranted.
- 4.9 The Diocesan Bishop and his suffragans share a clear vision, demonstrating a strong determination to drive continuous improvement. The appointment of Bishop Julie, a proven and exceptional advocate for victims and survivors with an extensive background in probation, as the Lead Safeguarding Bishop signalled the early intent from a Bishops leadership team perspective that safeguarding is a key priority.
- 4.10 To align with national guidance, this naming convention is likely to change if the recommendations made to the Archbishop's Council regarding the role of lead Bishops and how they should be identified in the National Safeguarding Team (NST) Audit Report are accepted.
- 4.11 The Diocesan Bishop is also supported by a highly experienced and effective Director of Operations and Executive Chaplain to the Bishop of Chester; a reflective, supportive Diocesan Secretary who brings valuable safeguarding experience; and a team of dedicated archdeacons.

Archdeacons

- 4.12 Archdeacons serve as critical leaders within the diocese, encompassing both strategic and

operational oversight in safeguarding and clergy management. Their responsibilities include promoting a robust safeguarding culture, supporting parishes through guidance and inspections, facilitating ongoing training and development, and ensuring compliance with safeguarding standards. They play a vital coordination role during Parish clergy vacancies, collaborate closely with safeguarding teams and other departments, and act as key points of continuity and expertise in maintaining the diocese's safeguarding priorities.

4.13 The Audit identified several key strengths in their current approach, including their willingness to improve, a proactive templated approach to visitations, strong partnerships with the DSO and DST, and effective safeguarding oversight of vacant parishes.

4.14 To build on these strengths, alleviate significant workload pressures and to further strengthen the approach to Safeguarding Case Management Groups (SCMGs), the Audit makes the following actionable recommendations:

Recommendation D3: The DBF should Establish:

- a) That Archdeacons and the DSO should establish a regular meeting cycle to plan the safeguarding elements of all parochial engagements, ranging from informal parish and deanery visits to formal Parish Inspections. To maximise these opportunities and streamline the flow of information, the Archdeacon and DSO should collaborate to produce formal pre-visit and post-visit briefing templates. This will guarantee that Archdeacons receive full advance briefings and systematically return comprehensive feedback following all visits.
- b) Establish clear deconfliction processes for choosing who chairs specific SCMGs. To minimise conflicts of interest, an SCMG should be chaired by an Archdeacon other than the one with local responsibility for the parish involved, while the 'local' Archdeacon should remain on the SCMG as a participant to provide background knowledge. Furthermore, ensure that Archdeacons or others tasked with chairing such groups receive appropriate levels of training and support. This should include the provision of legal advice and 'clinical'

supervision, with the specification that clinical supervision is solely in respect of their safeguarding responsibilities as chairs of SCMGs.

- c) A case for the Appointment of Assistant Archdeacons. This would relieve considerable pressure and boost overall capacity, thereby freeing up the Archdeacons' time for safeguarding related matters.

The Diocesan Safeguarding Officer

4.15 The DSO possesses a robust statutory background and demonstrates a considered, reflective approach to their role. They have been instrumental in stabilising current safeguarding practices during a period of significant initial challenge. The Audit notes that the DSO has cultivated effective and mutually beneficial working relationships with both the DBF and the Cathedral.

4.16 Furthermore, the DSO is supported by a highly capable Deputy Diocesan Safeguarding Officer (DDSO), whose statutory experience complements their own. This is good practice. Facilitated by the support of senior leadership, the DSO has successfully established a well-integrated and effective DST.

The Diocesan Secretary

4.17 The Diocesan Secretary is acutely aware of the multifaceted challenges currently facing the diocese and recognises the critical need for continued investment in, and support for, the DST. They recognise how these pressures can impact team dynamics, and the need to ensure professional supervision, alongside enhanced administrative support.

4.18 Critically, they expressed an understanding that the pursuit of financial sustainability must be carefully balanced with maintaining a highly effective safeguarding culture as well as the need to enhance inclusion and diversity, ensuring that safeguarding efforts are equitable, comprehensive, and sustainably supported for the future.

Governance DBF

4.19 The DBF operates a structure of governance and oversight meetings that meets the expectations of the Church alongside other relevant regulatory standards, such as those set by the Charity Commission. Governance and senior leadership meetings consistently incorporate safeguarding into their agendas, facilitate DSO attendance at all levels, and provide both rigorous scrutiny and practical support.

Bishop's Council and Diocesan Board of Finance

4.20 The minutes of the Bishop's Council demonstrate impressive strategic foresight and adaptability, anchored by a comprehensive four-stream Diocesan Strategy and a willingness to trial innovative initiatives, such as the Complementary Parish Share Scheme.

4.21 It is clear from the evidence examined by the Audit that the Council prioritises robust governance and safeguarding. This commitment is evidenced by the formal adoption of the National Safeguarding Standards, a proactive and constructive response to the Charity Commission, and the successful transition to an independent Diocesan Safeguarding Officer model.

4.22 Furthermore, the leadership exhibits commendable self-awareness and accountability. Members have openly acknowledged the severe trauma inflicted on victims and survivors by John Smyth, revisited after the publication of the Makin Review.

4.23 That said, a critical structural challenge exists in relation to the Bishop's Council and the DBF. While current minutes reflect significant attention to safeguarding matters, it is vital to strengthen the distinction between the functions of the two bodies. The regulator has made it clear that the DBF is the body responsible to it for the good governance of the charity. The DBF must therefore be seen, regardless of the dual membership of

individuals, to maintain an unwavering focus on safeguarding. Furthermore, good governance dictates that the Chair of the DBF should not be the Diocesan Bishop; rather, it should be an independent lay member with the appropriate skills and abilities to lead the board.

- 4.24 The DBF holds explicit legal responsibilities; it is the trustees who bear individual and collective legal liability for the oversight of the charity. This distinction is paramount when considering safeguarding and serious incident reporting, and this specific function must be made unmistakably clear.

Recommendation D4: To address this, the Diocesan Bishop and the DBF should formally delineate the roles of these two bodies. Firstly, an independent lay member should be appointed as Chair of the DBF (if not already in place). Moving forward, the stewardship of charity trusteeship and specific safeguarding responsibilities must be explicitly defined and recorded as distinct, separate items within the DBF agendas and minutes. This will ensure clear legal accountability, proper oversight, and transparent governance.

- 4.25 The governance framework is further supported by an appropriately experienced chair leading the DSAP, an effective Quality Assurance (QA) Group, and a focused SEG.

Safeguarding Executive Group (SEG)

- 4.26 The SEG is a central committee operating within the Church of England's Diocese of Chester. Its primary purpose is to develop, manage, and oversee the diocese's safeguarding strategies and policies. The group's regular activities include reviewing compliance with National Safeguarding Standards, creating communications campaigns such as "Speak Out! Stay Safe!", updating policies (including Lone Working and Harassment & Bullying), and overseeing the review of legacy safeguarding cases. Well-led and consistently attended, the SEG successfully ensures that its work complements the role and function of the DSAP.

Recommendation D5: Should the recommendation for the appointment of a Director of Safeguarding be accepted, they should co-chair the SEG to align the leadership of the Bishop advocating for safeguarding with the operational lead.

The Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP)

- 4.27 The Terms of Reference for the DSAP and the SEG are complementary, carefully balancing effective scrutiny with operational implementation and practical policy development.
- 4.28 The DSAP rigorously examines a comprehensive range of safeguarding, operational, and administrative matters. By conducting critical self-assessments, the panel actively challenges current practices, successfully for example, identifying gaps in capturing the voices of vulnerable individuals. It drives continuous improvement by demanding enhanced quality assurance, actionable minute-taking, and stricter accountability for meeting attendance.
- 4.29 Members demonstrate good oversight by questioning the adequacy of team support, the cross-diocesan capabilities of tracking systems, and parish compliance with safeguarding dashboards. They also execute strategic actions, including ratifying a Cathedral-Diocese MoU, mandating compliance assessments against National Safeguarding Standards, and addressing training gaps in offender management.
- 4.30 While internal attendance remains consistently high, statutory service partners participate less frequently due to competing professional demands. Concurrently, the panel requires broader participation to increase diversity and inclusion. Engaging with local charities, homelessness representatives, and survivor advocates would introduce vital independent perspectives, driving meaningful challenge and strengthening the voices of marginalised and underrepresented groups.

Recommendation D6: To further strengthen existing good practice, and enhance safeguarding information flows between statutory partners and to expand membership to become more inclusive and diverse the DSAP should:

- a) The Chair of the DSAP should work with the chairs of Local Authority children's and adults' boards to develop practical engagement methods. This will enable them to consider current safeguarding issues and share relevant feedback with the wider panel.
- b) Broaden its membership base beyond traditional Church and statutory boundaries. By proactively recruiting representatives from local community organisations, such as food banks and survivor advocacy groups, the DSAP will directly integrate independent, diverse viewpoints into its core governance, ultimately amplifying the voices of victims and vulnerable individuals.

Clergy Files - Blue Files

4.31 The Bishop's Office (lay Chaplain) manages the reception, retention and dissemination of Clergy (Blue) Files. The Audit noted good practice in respect of the storage, access and security applied, the exemplary (recently updated handling policy) and the presentation of files, all dip sampled files had a uniform format, access logs and appropriate flags

4.32 The current storage of these documents does not utilise secure, fireproof cabinets. To enhance the positive arrangements already identified and provide an added layer of security for these valuable records, an interim position should be adopted (prior to digitisation) to provide greater protection from accidental destruction of this key files.

Recommendation D7: To mitigate the risk of catastrophic data loss, the DBF should review and upgrade the physical security of sensitive Clergy files. Management should evaluate and implement protective measures such as on-site fireproof storage, secure third-party off-site archiving, or a specialist fire risk assessment of the current storage facility.

Ministerial Development Reviews (MDRs)

4.33 The position regarding MDRs is reported by those engaged by the Audit to have radically improved over the last number of years. There is now a system in place that ensures appropriate MDR oversight and engagement is maintained and that developmental opportunities from a safeguarding perspective are facilitated. If the additional resource for Archdeacons is agreed the role could usefully support the MDR process.

Capacity DST – Cathedral Safeguarding Officer (CSO)

4.34 The DST is well led and made up of credible safeguarding professionals with complementary areas of expertise. Their positive impact is acknowledged by those with whom they work across the DBF and the parishes they support. They deliver both safeguarding support and training, an approach the Audit recognises as good practice, as well as sensible contingency in the use of outsourced trainers.

4.35 The DBF (along with the Cathedral) has invested in the growth of their safeguarding resource and they are close to optimising their team. To capitalise on their current strengths, the Audit makes the following recommendations.

Recommendation D8: To ensure independent operational responsibility, support, and robust accountability for safeguarding across the Diocese, existing safeguarding resources, namely the DST and the CSO, should be restructured into a Consolidated Safeguarding Directorate.

To maximise the benefits of this integration for the Diocese, the DBF and Chapter should:

a) Appoint a Director of Safeguarding: This role will lead the new Directorate, providing overarching, independent operational responsibility and single professional line management for all specialist safeguarding resources, including the CSO. As the most senior authoritative operational voice regarding safeguarding, the Director must not be line-managed by a single

church officer. Instead, they will be directly accountable to the DBF and the Cathedral Chapter, thereby strengthening Diocesan governance.

b) Work with the Cathedral to bring all professional resources together by formally embedding the CSO into the new Directorate. This ensures the CSO benefits from uniform supervision, peer support, and team contingency. Crucially, the CSO should continue to provide bespoke safeguarding advice and direction to the Cathedral and remain physically situated within it, while being professionally line-managed by the Director.

Recommendation D9: To address capacity constraints, build contingency, and allow specialists to focus on their core competencies, specific roles and functions should be redefined by:

- a) Increasing Assistant Diocesan Safeguarding Officer (ADSO) capacity by appointing an additional 0.5 FTE ADSO.
- b) Create a Safeguarding and Parish Support Officer post. Establish a new full-time role dedicated to frontline triage and support, specifically handling filtering, Parish Dashboards, training evaluation, and direct support for Archdeacons when carrying out specific visits with a safeguarding focus.

Recommendation D10: To broaden the team's skill base and ensure the long-term sustainability and efficiency of the directorate, proactive workforce strategies should be adopted. These should include:

- a) A Remuneration Review to benchmark current salaries against market rates ensuring the directorate can attract, engage, and retain high-quality safeguarding personnel.
- b) Establish clear professional development and career progression routes for safeguarding staff to build internal capability and broaden team skills.

5 Prevention

- 5.1 One way in which the DBF demonstrates its prioritisation of safeguarding is through its arrangements for safer recruitment. It adheres to the House of Bishops' Safer Recruitment and People Management guidelines, ensuring processes are aligned to legislation. Local practice is effective. Personnel involved in recruitment receive thorough training and can access a range of online resources. Furthermore, a contracted provider offers specialist support for Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks.
- 5.2 The DBF uses an Appointments Tracker for all clergy and incumbent roles, a process the Audit identified as particularly effective. The tool confirms that all necessary formalities are met before an appointment is made, such as DBS checks and safeguarding training. Such rigorous oversight is an organisational strength that reflects professional practice.
- 5.3 The Audit found evidence that both the use of and confidence in the dashboard are increasing, a trend noted at Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) Networks, Deanery Meetings and DSAP. It is the view of the Audit that a core responsibility of the safeguarding team's support function should be to actively assist parishes with the Parish Dashboard. Resource for this has been covered in the Culture, Leadership and Capacity section of this report mentioned previously.
- 5.4 The DBF is committed to maintaining robust safeguarding standards by adhering to the House of Bishops' policy, 'Promoting a Safer Church'. To ensure this good practice is effectively developed, adopted, and shared across the network, the Diocese has been producing a range of informative leaflets designed to supplement and reinforce official guidance. The DBF has developed a comprehensive suite of support leaflets, drawing on subject matter expertise from both statutory authorities and voluntary organisations. These

resources provide practical guidance on a diverse range of safeguarding concerns, including domestic abuse pathways, mental health, and county lines. Specific ecclesiastical and administrative contexts are also addressed through bespoke guidance on bell towers, deliverance ministry, and romance fraud, alongside operational tools such as the safeguarding call recording template.

- 5.5 Furthermore, to facilitate continuous learning and the sharing of regional expertise, the Chester DBF actively participates in the Northwest safeguarding network. Through arrangements coordinated by the NST and its Regional Safeguarding Lead (RSL), DSOs meet regularly to exchange insights and ensure a consistent, collaborative approach across the region.
- 5.6 This collaboration extends to close alignment between the DBF and the Cathedral. The DSO and CSO meet regularly, with the CSO integrated into the DST.
- 5.7 A central element of the Chester DBF's commitment to raising safeguarding awareness is its 'Speak Out, Stay Safe' campaign². This initiative features a series of short animated digital messages designed specifically for social media, ensuring the message reaches a wide audience online. These digital assets complement five physical posters, each of which corresponds to one of the Church of England's five national safeguarding standards. To support local engagement, parishes can contact the DBF directly to request printed copies of these posters for display in their buildings. Furthermore, the campaign's resources extend beyond printed media to include practical items such as lanyards, lapel pins, and pre-loaded USB memory sticks.
- 5.8 The Audit highlighted positive feedback regarding the impact of the annual Cathedral

² <https://www.chesterdiocese.org/content/speak-out%2C-stay-safe-campaign-video-shorts>

services, where Parish Safeguarding Officers (PSOs) are formally commissioned and encouraged in their roles. With the Diocesan Bishop, Suffragan Bishops, Archdeacons, and the wider safeguarding team in attendance, these events develop a sense of community and collective purpose. Furthermore, they provide PSOs with a valuable opportunity to feel both visible and genuinely appreciated for their vital work. This commitment to engagement was further demonstrated in June 2025 with the Cathedral launch of the Speak Out Stay Safe campaign. The session, attended by over 100 people, provided targeted training for safeguarding leads, parish officers, and those working directly with children, reinforcing the Diocese's proactive approach to protection and awareness.

- 5.9 The Audit survey responses indicate that a majority of participants have observed a marked increase in safeguarding awareness across both the DBF and individual parishes.
- 5.10 The Audit suggests that the safeguarding webpages could be further developed to serve as a more effective central hub for diocesan resources. To improve clarity and accessibility, the site could, for example, host existing information sheets, such as those covering romance fraud, county lines, and mental health, in a more intuitive location. Furthermore, the user experience would be greatly enhanced by consolidating various national parish materials directly onto the website, ensuring all essential guidance is unified and easy to find.

Recommendation D11: The DBF should evaluate and implement measures to improve the depth of content and resources within the safeguarding webpages, ensuring that accessibility and ease of navigation are prioritised. A primary focus should be on providing Parish Safeguarding Officers (PSOs) with more intuitive access to essential support, tools, and guidance, including, for example direct links to national templates. Furthermore, the DBF should

undertake a comprehensive review of all current supporting materials to ensure they are consolidated into a single, streamlined repository on the Diocesan website.

- 5.11 The Audit found that the safeguarding webpages employ a mix of design approaches, leading to an inconsistent user experience. While certain elements demonstrate responsive design, using a single fluid layout that adjusts to any screen size, others are strictly adaptive. For instance, when resizing a browser window on a desktop, the menu remains fixed rather than scaling dynamically. In contrast, accessing the site via a mobile device triggers an entirely different 'mobile-friendly' menu. This lack of a unified design strategy may affect the site's overall coherence and ease of navigation across different devices.
- 5.12 Although the Audit does not offer a formal recommendation on this matter, the DBF should remain mindful of how best to optimise the site within its current constraints. Should the opportunity for a redesign arise in the future, adopting a fully responsive theme, where the layout fluidly adjusts to fit any screen size, is the preferred industry standard. This approach is recommended as it enhances search engine optimisation performance, ensures the site is future-proof, and significantly reduces long-term maintenance requirements.
- 5.13 The Audit acknowledges the DBF's efforts to raise the profile of safeguarding through its social media channels. However, whilst there are safeguarding related posts, the execution lacks frequency, novelty and local context that could help generate audience engagement and growth. To this end, the Audit makes the following recommendation.

Recommendation D12: The DBF should develop and implement a structured communications plan for safeguarding messages across its digital channels. This plan should include a content calendar outlining timely, considered safeguarding messages for regular inclusion in email newsletters (e.g., a dedicated section or recurring feature) and scheduled posts on relevant social media platforms. Content should be varied, covering topics such as policy updates, training opportunities, real-life examples (anonymised), reminders of reporting mechanisms, and messages promoting a culture of vigilance and support. The DBF should assign responsibility for content creation, approval, and scheduling, ensuring all messages are consistent, accessible, and align with current safeguarding guidelines. Regular review of engagement metrics should inform future content strategy to maximise reach and impact.

5.14 As with all good communication, this needs to be a two-way process. Actively seeking and responding to the views of children, young people and vulnerable adults is a key component to effective prevention planning. Regarding children and young people, the Audit notes that the ‘Speak Out, Stay Safe’ campaign initially prioritised the voice of the child. This focus was established by involving children and young people directly in the campaign’s development, specifically through engagement with the Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) and outreach youth workers. To build upon and further develop this engagement with children and young people, especially concerning safeguarding-specific subject matter, the Audit makes the following recommendation.

Recommendation D13: The DBF should develop engagement mechanisms to consider the needs, experiences and voices of children, young people and vulnerable adults within safeguarding prevention planning. Such children and youth initiatives could be led by, and build upon the existing work of, the Family Children and Youth Adviser.

5.15 In respect of hearing the voices and learning from the experiences of victims / survivors of abuse, see the Victims and Survivors section of this report.

- 5.16 The Audit found that safeguarding was routinely considered in the context of the physical spaces being used. Furthermore, the Audit was informed that appropriate risk assessments are conducted for church-based activities where potential safeguarding risks were identified.
- 5.17 The DBF and the Office of the Bishop of Chester has policies and procedures in place to help make people safer when lone working. Related details are also set out in the Code of Safer Working Practice and the Safer Environment and Activities guidelines.
- 5.18 Although the DBF informed the Audit that they lack specific internal policies or guidance regarding professional boundaries, it is important to note that the House of Bishops provides comprehensive Guidance and Codes of Practice on this subject. Consequently, these national frameworks should serve as the primary reference for establishing and maintaining appropriate standards within the organisation.

Recommendation D14: It is recommended that the DBF formally adopts and communicates the House of Bishops' Guidance Codes of Practice as its interim standard for appropriate boundaries. To ensure long-term clarity and local relevance, the DBF should formally bridge the existing policy gap by explicitly signposting staff and stakeholders to the House of Bishops' documentation via the relevant documentation or website. Furthermore, the DBF should develop local supplementary guidance in the form of a brief "Local Code of Conduct." This document will ensure that the national standards set by the House of Bishops are effectively aligned with the specific operational context and requirements of the DBF.

6 Recognising, Assessing and Managing Risk

- 6.1 The DBF risk register tracks primary corporate issues and includes a dedicated section for safeguarding. Documenting these concerns separately ensures they receive specific attention, which is a positive approach. However, the version provided to the Audit did not indicate when the safeguarding risks were last reviewed. There is an opportunity to improve processes by ensuring review dates are clearly recorded

Recommendation D15: The DBF should include defined review dates for all risks described within its Risk Register(s). Risks should be reviewed on a quarterly basis or as a minimum, at a six-monthly basis, with any changes (and the rationale for these) being documented in relevant meeting minutes.

- 6.2 The DST operates on a low-threshold model of practice. This promotes a culture that encourages reporting and dialogue with the DST when someone has concerns. This is good practice. Defined processes are in place for receiving and triaging new concerns, assessing risk, and allocating cases. Concerns arrive via a central DST email address monitored by a duty team member between 09:00 and 17:00 on weekdays. Cases are primarily allocated based on the geographical area of the diocese the member covers. The DST also considers specific subject matter expertise, current workloads, and the need for early resourcing of complex cases. The DSO or DDSO reviews concerns against codes of practice to categorise them as a query, allegation, or general information. Risk assessments follow a five-point structure:

- a) Risk to the victim.
- b) Risk to the respondent.
- c) Risk to others.
- d) Risk to the parish.
- e) Identification of actions and the rationale for the final decision.

- 6.3 The Audit notes that case management and record keeping have improved significantly. The transition from a paper-based system to the NSCMS in July 2023 marks a positive shift for the DBF. The NSCMS is a centralised and secure database, allowing for safeguarding concerns to be reported and recorded. There is also a facility to attach relevant case reports, quickly retrieve referrals to external agencies and record correspondence and documentation in one place. Despite this transition, high pressures and heavy demand on the DST has made it difficult for staff to review past cases and transfer historic records to the NSCMS. The Audit notes that this area requires continued active management. A project officer is now in place to ensure these improvements happen quickly. To support this, recommendations are included in the Culture, Leadership, and Capacity section of this report to improve capacity and reduce associated risks.
- 6.4 Of the total records, 120 cases have been fully documented and closed, including 13 relating specifically to the Cathedral. There are 191 records currently sitting in the 'new' category. These are not recent incidents; rather, they represent basic details from paper files held by the DST that were uploaded to make all known names searchable in a single system. These remain open while the DST reviews each paper file to ensure all outcomes and outstanding issues are addressed. As each review finishes, a team member is allocated the case to add a summary report and scan key documents before closing the record with a cross-reference to the original paper file.
- 6.5 Records of welfare or safeguarding advice that are not held on the NSCMS include 51 instances in 2022/23 and 144 in 2023/24. Out of 24 referrals made to the Safeguarding Team during the 12 months leading up to the audit, 14 were escalated to statutory agencies. Referrals were made to the following bodies: seven to the police, four to Children's Social Care, two to Adult Social Care, and one to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).

- 6.6 Advice regarding matters below the safeguarding threshold is recorded using a guidance template or email. A hard copy is kept in the relevant Parish or team file held by the DST, and these details are being added to the team database for data tracking.
- 6.7 Supervision involves both formal and informal case discussions with the DSO or DDSO. Formal strategy and actions are recorded, and case meetings take place every six weeks using a standard agenda on the NSCMS. This agenda covers the physical and digital file review, victim/survivor needs, due diligence, and any lessons learnt from the case.
- 6.8 The Audit found effective use of Safety Plans by the DST to manage risks posed by convicted offenders and others within Church settings. Of the open cases, 30 involve active Safety Plans or safeguarding agreements, including one specific to the Cathedral. While 43 personal profiles are currently flagged, 13 of these relate to inactive plans. The case holder and supervisor formally review these plans annually, though reviews occur sooner if specific risks or challenges arise. PSOs and clergy are encouraged to report concerns at any time to trigger an immediate assessment. Safety Plans are shared with the relevant individuals. Information is also provided to other parties such as the police or probation services where applicable.
- 6.9 Risk assessments conducted for individuals posing a risk were found to be comprehensive, analytical and clearly articulated the nature of the risks involved. While the assessments reflected the individual's perspective, they did so critically and avoided adopting their narrative or without validating their minimisation. There was a consistent level of professionalism in records that balanced the respondent's accounts against the known facts of the case.
- 6.10 Due to unforeseen circumstances, the Audit team was unable to meet directly with one

respondent regarding their Safety Plan, although a reference group member was engaged. The member of the reference group demonstrated an understanding of the consultation protocols with the DST, knew the requirements of the Safety Plan and maintained appropriate professional relationships with the individual concerned.

- 6.11 In recognition of the often complex risks being managed through Safety Plans, and to further strengthen this critical area of practice, targeted training should be delivered specifically for reference groups and the broader cohort of individuals involved in monitoring respondents.

Recommendation D16: The Audit recommends implementing targeted training programmes specifically designed for reference groups and the wider personnel responsible for monitoring individuals on safety plans. It is essential that the DBF ensures all training pertaining to risk assessments, safety planning, and broader offender management is contextually appropriate and tailored for use within a faith-based environment.

- 6.12 The Audit found convincing evidence that SCMGs are used effectively to manage complex cases involving church officers. The DSO, DDSO and the Archdeacons of Chester and Macclesfield have completed national SCMG training. The current arrangements align with good practice. These groups are typically chaired by an Archdeacon and follow a structured agenda to support collaboration, scrutiny and information gathering.
- 6.13 The DSO receives structured safeguarding supervision from the RSL every six weeks. Supervision records provided to the Audit highlight the support being provided to the DSO, as well as discussions about organisational issues, non-casework responsibilities and cathedral related arrangements. DST members receive line management and supervision from the DSO or DDSO through one-to-one meetings every six weeks.
- 6.14 The DBF is a registered charity with a statutory requirement to submit Serious Incident

Reports (SIRs) to the Charity Commission. The DBF follow the House of Bishops' guidance set out in 'Safeguarding Serious Incident Reporting to the Charity Commission'. The Audit was informed that three cases have met the threshold for a SIR in the last three years and whilst aligning with the national guidance issued by the Charity Commission, these particular submissions were not shared with the NST.

Recommendation D17: To ensure national oversight, facilitate consistent practice and learning across the Church of England, and support strategic policy development, the DBF should share copies of all safeguarding-related Serious Incident Reports (SIRs) with the National Safeguarding Team (NST).

- 6.15 The DSAP Quality Assurance Group (QAG) reviews cases involving a difference of opinion regarding decision-making and examines the underlying rationale. This group produces feedback that is subsequently agreed with the DSO. If a formal complaint arises, the DBF Complaints Procedure explains the steps to take if someone is dissatisfied with the service received from a member of staff at Church House.
- 6.16 Security and storage of personal information within the Chester DBF and the wider diocese comply with UK data protection legislation and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) through various internal controls and training frameworks. For DBF staff, GDPR training is assigned based on specific job roles. Completion of this training was established as a formal objective within the 2024/25 performance review cycle. At a parish level, PSOs receive general awareness training regarding data protection. While GDPR requirements are referenced during basic, foundation, and leadership training modules, it is not currently taught as a standalone technical subject. There is no formal GDPR training programme in place for clergy. Compliance is monitored through the parish safeguarding dashboards which require responses to specific queries.

- 6.17 Additional steps taken to ensure data protection principles are met. These include staff using their official DBF email accounts to exchange information. These accounts are protected by firewalls and are subject to due diligence procedures to ensure confidential data remains secure. Microsoft Teams is the primary platform for conducting video meetings with the LADO, police, and probation services. When communicating with statutory authorities, staff send emails exclusively to official government or departmental addresses. Finally, NSCMS is used for recording and sharing information with the National Safeguarding Team where required.
- 6.18 To manage the exchange of information appropriately, all PSOs and clergy are advised to establish a dedicated, generic email address rather than using a personal account. This system was established following a six-month preparatory project designed to provide every parish with a professional digital infrastructure for safeguarding communications. While the rollout of these generic addresses across all parishes is still underway and not yet at 100% completion, other protective measures are also employed, such as password-protecting documents. Guidance on the specific protocols for handling and sharing information is provided to all relevant personnel. These addresses are linked directly to the specific role and parish, ensuring that confidential details remain within official church channels. This is good practice.
- 6.19 The approach to data protection is positive and further strengthened by the MoU in place between the DBF and the Cathedral setting out clear parameters governing the legal and good practice requirements for information sharing. Further agreements are in place with other organisations such as the Police and the NST to facilitate sharing information.

7 Victims and Survivors

- 7.1 The experience of abuse can have a deeply traumatic impact on individuals. Disclosing these experiences can be an incredibly vulnerable process, often accompanied by concerns about navigating systems, the possibility of re-traumatisation, or uncertainty about potential outcomes. To address this, it is crucial that Church bodies establish and maintain a safe and supportive environment. This will help to ensure that victims and survivors feel truly heard, supported, and protected, while also creating opportunities for the Church to learn and grow from their experiences.
- 7.2 The Audit evaluated the DBF's safeguarding response by gathering anonymous survey feedback from victims and survivors, facilitating 1-1 discussions with victims and survivors and discussions with key stakeholders and through content analysis of arrangements in place.
- 7.3 Chester DBF is committed to following the House of Bishops' guidance set out in 'Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse'. Responding well to victims and survivors is also integrated within the Diocese's 'Speak Out Stay Safe' campaign in both online and offline resources. Adopted materials from collaboration with survivor-led organisation, Survivors' Voices and other individuals, have been cascaded through this campaign to equip parishes with an understanding of how to respond well to victims and survivors of abuse.
- 7.4 A dedicated support webpage for Victims and Survivors includes the guide to support for victims and survivors of church-based abuse, as well as signposting to the full guidance with interactive explainer videos. That said, 50% of survey respondents were not aware of the existence of this guidance. This evidences a need to ensure its existence is regularly

promoted in offline as well as online spaces.

Recommendation D18: Chester DBF should consider how to ensure both online and offline promotion of its dedication to House of Bishops' guidance 'Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse', can achieve optimal effectiveness. For example, offline signposting could be complemented by QR codes on printed materials to ensure guidance reaches those who do not regularly access the dedicated webpage.

7.5 At a strategic level, survivor representatives are involved in key groups, including the SEG and the DSAP. That said, Audit survey data revealed that only 25% of respondents feel survivor voices are prioritised in shaping practice. While the DBF's commitment to survivor engagement is commendable, the Audit recommends establishing dedicated survivor consultation or working groups. This approach would channel a collective voice into wider governance structures, effectively reducing the pressure placed on individual representatives and enabling a broader range of voices to be heard. Only a quarter of survey respondents believed that victims' and survivors' voices are prioritised and considered when shaping safeguarding practices.

Recommendation D19: The DBF should transition from individual representation to a collective survivor working group model. This will ensure that strategic governance is informed by a diverse range of lived experiences within a peer-supported framework.

7.6 Further, the Suffragan Bishop's direct advocacy work has been well-received; individuals interviewed for the Audit praised their engagement and support for victims and survivors. Building on these foundations, the DBF is well-positioned to further enrich its safeguarding practices. By expanding its listening initiatives to capture a wider range of voices, the DBF can ensure that its commitment to continuous improvement is directly informed by the lived experiences of a broader victim and survivor community.

Recommendation D20: The DBF should establish formal mechanisms for ongoing engagement with victims and survivors of abuse and their families. This should include the facilitation of diocese-wide listening events and implementing accessible feedback options, such as surveys.

- 7.7 The Audit was informed that a review of 'legacy cases' was being undertaken to understand any outstanding needs of victims and survivors. Spiritual and pastoral support has benefited from a training programme in conjunction with Survivors' Voices on the issue of spiritual abuse. This learning was cascaded to parishes to develop 'first responses'. The Audit also heard that the DST and Mission and Ministry Team have continued engagement with Survivors' Voices to further their understanding of spiritual abuse from a victim/survivor perspective. This is good practice. The Audit also heard of the facilitation of 1-1 training for a victim / survivor to ensure a safe environment prior to engaging in later group-based training. This is indicative of a flexible, person-centred approach.
- 7.8 The Diocesan website's Victim and Survivor Support webpage provides a range of contacts for support. This includes contact information for the DST, advising contacting a local parish safeguarding officer, Childline, and instructs those at immediate risk of harm to contact the police. Other information on routes of disclosure and reporting pathways is available through leaflets, pocket cards and posters. Chester Diocese also provides a counselling service and commissions Thirtyone:eight to provide a listening service.
- 7.9 A range of National Church information is also available on the Diocesan website, including information on Safe Spaces, the Interim Support Scheme, Survivor Engagement and the Redress Scheme. External signposts are also available, although these are currently limited to national organisations. The diocesan website signposts to national organisations like Survivors' Voices and the Samaritans, yet there is a significant opportunity to strengthen this by integrating localised support networks. The DBF should appraise and

digitise its offline specialist resource directory while addressing the current lack of dementia-specific signposting. Integrating local services, such as Live Well Cheshire West, Age UK Cheshire, and the Alzheimer's Society's local advisers, will ensure the website offers survivors and adults at risk, immediate access to both mental health and specialist dementia care.

Recommendation D21: The Diocese should digitise and expand its offline directory to include localised support and currently missing dementia-specific resources. This update will provide victims, survivors, and those at risk with immediate, face-to-face assistance tailored to their specific mental health and community needs.

7.10 The Diocesan Bishop remains committed to a trauma-informed approach with victims and survivors, and the Audit highlights the caring and empathic nature of the DST. The DST's successes in providing prompt responses to some individuals have, at times, been undermined by reported communication lapses and a lack of clarity that have left others feeling distressed. Clear, unambiguous communication is a universal accessibility requirement that applies to every individual engaging with safeguarding processes. Without it, delays and vague timelines can lead to feelings of anxiety and a breakdown in trust. The Audit emphasises that consistent communication is essential to maintaining a safe and inclusive environment for all. Survey data further suggests that consistent communication remains a key area for growth. Consequently, the Audit recommends a systematic schedule of check-ins; and during high-workload periods, proactive updates regarding delays to ensure expectations are managed effectively.

Recommendation D22: The DBF should implement a diarised schedule of check-ins to ensure consistent communication and duty of care. During high-workload periods, staff must proactively inform stakeholders of any potential delays to manage expectations and minimise distress.

8 Learning, Supervision and Support

Safeguarding Learning

- 8.1 Safeguarding learning and development in the Diocese of Chester is well embedded within the diocesan structure and is delivered by a skilled and experienced team. The Audit found a proactive approach to training, characterised by flexibility, responsiveness, and a clear emphasis on contextual learning which indicates there is a growing culture where safeguarding is understood as a shared responsibility and where learning is used as a key mechanism to support practice.
- 8.2 The Diocese has developed a comprehensive and adaptable training offer aligned to the national Church of England pathways. Training is delivered through a blended model, including online and face to face sessions, supported by diocesan staff, occasional trainers and volunteer co-trainers. This model supports capacity and strengthens engagement with parish contexts. The Diocese has also developed a forward planning approach, with training programmes scheduled by term, which supports consistency and accessibility.
- 8.3 A notable strength is the Diocese's commitment to bespoke and contextualised training. The development of tailored sessions for specific groups, including clergy, PCC members, and pastoral visits and boundaries training with youth work staff, demonstrates an understanding that safeguarding learning must reflect the roles and environments in which it is applied. The training team has further demonstrated agility by adapting leadership training for bell tower captains to ensure it is accessible and relevant to those who may not identify with traditional Church contexts. Additionally, the use of workshops to deconstruct national standards into practical applications across different levels of the organisation represents a standard of good practice.
- 8.4 The Diocese has also strengthened its infrastructure for managing training. Record

keeping continues to improve, with staff working toward integrating systems to help streamline administration and enhance data accuracy. Monitoring and reporting of training activity to senior safeguarding bodies is working well and providing additional assurance and oversight.

8.5 While the breadth and quality of training provision is strong, there remains an opportunity to further develop the evaluation of its impact. Current processes include a number of feedback mechanisms, such as trainers routinely holding debrief discussions following sessions, participant reflection documents within leadership training providing insight into both learning and experience, and feedback is actively encouraged through direct communication with the safeguarding team. Where concerns or themes are identified, these are explored and can lead to further engagement, including follow up discussions and input into wider diocesan work. This is good practice.

8.6 However, these processes are not yet applied consistently across all training provision and are largely qualitative in nature. The Diocese has limited ability to systematically collate, analyse, and evidence impact. There is currently no standardised post course evaluation process, and limited use of structured tools to identify trends or measure the extent to which learning is embedded in behaviour and practice.

Recommendation D23: The Diocese should build on its existing reflective and responsive approach by introducing a consistent and structured evaluation framework, including standardised post course feedback and mechanisms to collate and analyse themes across training provision.

Recommendation D24: The Diocese should further develop its evaluation processes to include measures of impact on behaviour and practice, enabling it to evidence how safeguarding learning contributes to safer cultures and improved safeguarding outcomes.

8.7 Although typically delivered on a case-by-case basis, individual coaching and support in relation to safety plans and offender management is in place within the Diocese and is recognised as a strength, particularly in its responsiveness to need and its focus on those managing complex and high-risk situations. The DBF has also taken positive steps to strengthen this area through engagement with Northwest Probation and other ecumenical partners, demonstrating a commitment to developing more consistent and informed practice. Whilst there are recommendations at a national level around the provision of Church-wide training, Chester's current provision remains largely reactive and there is an opportunity to further formalise and extend this support. Given the complexity and risk associated with safety plans, there is a need to ensure that accessible, consistent guidance and resources are available to all those who may be required to manage such situations.

Recommendation D25: The DBF should build on its existing partnerships and casework support by developing a more structured approach to learning in the area of offender management, including accessible guidance materials, training inputs, and clear signposting to advice and support, ensuring that all relevant Church officers are equipped to manage safety plans consistently.

Clergy Support

8.8 The Diocese of Chester provides a range of support mechanisms for clergy and lay leaders, reflecting a clear commitment to wellbeing and sustainable ministry. Pastoral support is available through established diocesan structures, including oversight from Archdeacons, engagement with the Ministry team, and access to diocesan and inter diocesan counselling services, Health Assured Employee assistance programme, Wisdom and Thrive.

8.9 There is evidence of supportive working across departments, particularly where

safeguarding intersects with wider issues such as parish culture, vacancy, and workload. The Diocese has also identified the need to strengthen its response to concerns that fall below safeguarding thresholds, with a planned HR review to better support welfare, relational, and employment related matters.

- 8.10 The relational and local approach taken by the DBF has resulted in positive feedback from clergy and parish officers, indicating that safeguarding learning is increasingly embedded in practice. Clergy described a shift towards clearer processes, with an emphasis on reporting rather than managing concerns alone, which has increased confidence and reduced uncertainty in decision making. PSOs also reflected that safeguarding awareness has significantly improved in recent years, with clergy demonstrating stronger engagement and leadership in safeguarding matters. INEQE's survey data further supports this position, with the majority of respondents agreeing that safeguarding is taken seriously and understood within their roles.
- 8.11 Induction processes appear to prioritise safeguarding more clearly than in the past, with newer clergy experiencing safeguarding as an integral part of their role from the outset. This is reinforced by consistent messaging from diocesan leadership and the visibility of safeguarding expectations. However, there is an opportunity to strengthen this further through more routine and systematic review of the induction process to ensure it remains current, consistent, and effective.

Recommendation D26: The Diocese should establish a regular review cycle for clergy induction processes, ensuring safeguarding content remains up to date, consistent with national guidance, and responsive to emerging risks and learning. This should include mechanisms for gathering feedback from newly ordained or appointed clergy to inform continuous improvement.

8.12 Whilst structures for support are in place, it appears to rely in part on local leadership and self-identification of need, which may create variability in experience and potential barriers to access.

Recommendation D27: The Diocese should ensure that all available clergy support pathways, including pastoral, wellbeing, and specialist support, are clearly articulated and consistently communicated, particularly at key points such as induction, training, and following safeguarding incidents.

8.13 Whilst MDR process documentation is a positive and appropriately includes guidance on safeguarding those undertaking the review, it is equally important that safeguarding knowledge and practice are explicitly considered as part of the MDR itself. This provides a valuable opportunity to strengthen reflective practice, reinforce accountability, and enhance oversight of safeguarding competence within clergy ministry.

Recommendation D28: The Diocese should expand the safeguarding learning, and practice prompts currently embedded within the MDR process and documentation to better support the individual's personal development. While recording administrative information on training compliance remains valuable, the process must move beyond basic prompts to maintain a personal focus. Documentation and review discussions should actively explore the individual's safeguarding journey by reflecting on the experience gained in previous roles, examining how they currently apply that knowledge to their active ministry, and identifying actionable steps to enhance their understanding of safeguarding for the roles they aspire to in the future. To support this, the process should include structured criteria that encourage meaningful reflection on personal safeguarding responsibilities, alongside appropriate support to actively identify tailored learning opportunities.

Supervision and Support of Safeguarding Roles

8.14 Supervision arrangements within the safeguarding team appear to benefit from

professional expertise, with senior staff bringing backgrounds in social work, policing, and safeguarding training.

8.15 The Audit found that safeguarding staff within the Diocese of Chester benefit from regular team engagement, accessible leadership, and a developing culture of professional support. The Diocese has also demonstrated flexibility in enabling individuals to access additional support where needed, reflecting a clear awareness of the emotional impact of safeguarding practice.

8.16 Support for PSOs is a recognised strength. The Diocese delivers safeguarding training through its safeguarding officers, which supports relationship building and contextual understanding. There is also evidence of ongoing engagement with parishes, advice provision, and support in managing safeguarding concerns. However, the scale and complexity of the Diocese present challenges in maintaining consistent support, particularly as demand increases. The Audit also identified that clergy confidence in relation to managing offenders and complex cases, remains variable. This highlights the importance of continued support, guidance, and practical training for those in frontline roles.

Recommendation D29: The Diocese should review the resourcing and structure of support available to parish safeguarding officers and clergy, ensuring it is sufficient to maintain consistent engagement, advice, and guidance across the Diocese. Consideration should be given to strengthening capacity to support frontline safeguarding decision making.

9 Conclusion

- 9.1 After navigating a period of significant challenge, the Diocese of Chester has established a robust safeguarding foundation upon which it can confidently build. This Audit reveals an organisation that has not only learned from its complex history but has actively transformed its approach. The overarching trajectory is positive, driven by dedicated leadership and a capable team.
- 9.2 A major cultural shift within the DBF has been the promotion of a 'safeguarding first' ethos. This focus has cultivated an environment where the overwhelming majority of those engaged during the audit reported feeling safe and sharing a distinct sense of collective responsibility for safeguarding.
- 9.3 This cultural shift is supported by highly effective operational practices. The DST operates a commendable low-threshold model that encourages early intervention and dialogue. Risk management is thorough and analytical, and the transition to the digital NSCMS marks a welcome step forward in professionalising record-keeping.
- 9.4 Furthermore, the Diocese excels in its preventative efforts and education. Initiatives like the 'Speak Out, Stay Safe' campaign, rigorous safer recruitment processes, and highly adaptable, context-specific training demonstrate a dynamic and integrated approach to safeguarding awareness.
- 9.5 To further strengthen policy and practice, our recommendations focus initially on bridging the gap between the DBF workforce and the wider parish worshipping community. While the internal culture is strong, confidence in raising concerns and the deep integration of safeguarding principles are not yet universally felt among all congregations.

- 9.6 Administratively, the Audit recommends establishing clearer governance boundaries, particularly to distinguish the legal safeguarding responsibilities of the DBF trustees from those of the broader Bishop's Council. Addressing capacity constraints will also mitigate lingering risks, evidenced by current backlogs in transferring historic paper records to the digital system and the heavy workloads carried by Archdeacons and the DST.
- 9.7 Crucially, the Audit encourages the Diocese to further refine its engagement with victims and survivors. Current approaches to listening to victim and survivor voices rely too heavily on individual representatives rather than a collective, peer-supported working group. While the DBF's empathetic, trauma-informed approach is recognised and valued, communication must remain consistently high to prevent further distress to victims and survivors. Reviewing available support resources is an essential step toward improving this vital area of work.
- 9.8 Additionally, to close existing operational gaps, the Diocese should enhance its mechanisms for professional oversight and continuous learning. Implementing structured, standardised evaluations for safeguarding training and clergy MDRs will ensure that safeguarding principles remain firmly embedded in practice.
- 9.9 The Diocese of Chester has demonstrated a willingness to confront historic issues with transparency, paving the way for meaningful cultural change. Implementing the recommendations from this audit will provide the structural adjustments necessary to further strengthen its safeguarding framework, specifically through more robust governance, enhanced survivor support models, and increased operational capacity. By continuing on this positive trajectory, the Diocese is well placed to ensure that its improved safeguarding standards become deeply ingrained within every parish and community setting.

Part Two - Chester Cathedral

10 Context

- 10.1 Chester Cathedral was founded as a Benedictine Abbey in 1092. With a rich history and exciting future, the Cathedral aims to be a place for discovery, encounter, and faith; enriching the soul. As a landmark of international significance, Chester Cathedral preserves heritage from Roman and Saxon origins through to the 20th century. The current Gothic masterpiece is the result of a monumental 275-year reconstruction begun in 1250. Today, the site encompasses monastic foundations, the city's largest green space (Dean's Field), and the remains of Roman barracks, making it the premier free-to-enter heritage attraction in Cheshire, with over 700,000 people visiting annually.
- 10.2 Located within the heart of the city of Chester, it has established itself as a premier venue for world-class art and social commentary, hosting events such as the 2017 ARK Exhibition, and more recent installations such as the Knife Angel, Peter Walker light installations and The DEEP exhibition made from LEGO® bricks. The 2021 '*Global Images of Christ*' exhibition directly addressed systemic racism and the Black Lives Matter movement, challenging traditional perceptions of faith through a diverse lens.
- 10.3 The city of Chester is considered relatively affluent, with some areas of deprivation. Located in close proximity to the Welsh border, it also attracts staff, volunteers, congregations and visitors who are Welsh speaking.
- 10.4 Chester's religious landscape is a compelling blend of deep-rooted tradition and modern global diversity. According to the 2021 census, a clear majority of the population in Chester West and Cheshire, approximately 55%, identify as Christian. This faith is expressed through a dense network of 180 different churches within the city boundaries. These congregations are characterised in collaboration, supported by two primary networks that allow for significant public witness. A prime example of this unity is the City Passion play,

a large-scale event that periodically transforms the city streets and draws thousands of attendees from across the region.

- 10.5 Chester's historic identity is enriched by a diverse Muslim community of 900 worshippers speaking over 40 languages, centred at the local mosque. This global character extends to the University of Chester, where 3,000-4,000 international students bring a wide array of faith traditions to the city. To sustain this pluralistic environment, both the university and the local hospital maintain dedicated multi-faith chaplaincy teams, ensuring inclusive spiritual care and helping the city balance its cathedral heritage with the needs of a modern, multi-cultural society.
- 10.6 Chester Cathedral is one of the top performers for commercial income generation, with its income dependent on donations, visitor-related commercial activity and income from property estate. The Cathedral is also a striking and distinctive venue for dinners and conferences. The Kings School was located on the cathedral site until the 1960s. The current Dean remains a governor of the school.
- 10.7 The city of Chester is home to circa 120,000 inhabitants, with an average 896 routinely attending the Cathedral each week, along with an average 3,017 joining each week online. In terms of visitors, the Cathedral received an average of 9,329 in 2024, with an average of 8,613 per week for the first seven months of 2025.
- 10.8 Chester Cathedral has two mixed choirs (children and adults): the Cathedral Choir and the Nave Choir. All the children are recruited from a variety of local schools as the cathedral does not maintain a dedicated choir school. The musical community is further broadened by a Saturday Singing Club for primary-age children, providing diverse pathways for choral participation.

11 Progress

- 11.1 Chester Cathedral was audited by the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) and participated in the Diocese's Past Cases Review 2 (PCR2).
- 11.2 All 39 considerations put forward in the Cathedral's SCIE audit in 2020 were accepted. The CSO's predecessor created an action plan based on these considerations which was overseen by Cathedral Safeguarding Advisory Group (CSAG). The Audit notes that setting up an independently chaired CSAG was an ongoing piece of work during the time of SCIE and following. Initial actions were carried out and the current CSO has recently completed a review of actions arising from SCIE and appraised their current status. Chapter sees the action plan at least once per year and receive reports from CSAG after each meeting.
- 11.3 The Cathedral was included in the Diocesan PCR2 review, with the CSO involved in oversight of the action plan developed in response via the SEG. A specific recommendation to improve the Cathedral's relationship with the Diocese has been met, and the Audit confirms these links are now much stronger. A final review of outstanding cases is nearing completion; the Cathedral notes that historical difficulties in Diocesan engagement delayed this process.
- 11.4 An overarching Cathedral Safeguarding Action plan exists covering 2024-2,7 using the National Safeguarding Standards as a benchmark for quality assuring the Cathedral's practice. This piece of work acts as a key planning document for the CSO, working in conjunction with the CSAG and Chapter. The Audit was informed that outstanding actions from reviews are captured and incorporated into this overarching plan.

12 Culture, Leadership and Capacity

- 12.1 The Audit found evidence that Chester Cathedral is making substantial progress and experiencing a positive cultural shift regarding its safeguarding environment. Feedback gathered through surveys, one to one discussions and focus groups indicated that an overwhelming majority of the workforce and a considerable proportion of the worshipping community have observed improvements in overall safeguarding arrangements. Most respondents from both groups believe that this culture is now becoming firmly embedded, a sentiment reflected in the words most frequently chosen to describe the atmosphere: 'Welcoming', 'Supportive', and 'Respectful'. However, stubborn challenges remain; notably, a small but significant number of the Cathedral Worshipping Community described the environment as 'cliquey'.
- 12.2 That said, the Audit found a clear sense of psychological safety surrounding safeguarding matters. An overwhelming majority of both groups reported feeling secure and stated they felt empowered to raise concerns about conduct without fear of reprisal.
- 12.3 This positive transformation is being driven by the active efforts of the leadership team to enable open communication. Indeed, the Volunteer Focus Group credited the current Dean's appointment with a marked step towards unity between staff and volunteers.
- 12.4 To reinforce this progress, the Cathedral has implemented several beneficial initiatives, including the CSO providing individual and small-group sessions for mandatory training compliance, alongside wellbeing and trauma-awareness workshops that encourage dialogue and empathy across the wider community.
- 12.5 To build upon these foundational successes and directly address the lingering perception

of 'cliquishness' the Audit makes the following recommendation.

Recommendation C1: Building upon existing informal forums and regular post-service gatherings, the leadership team should continue to champion direct engagement with the worshipping community. To proactively dismantle social barriers, reach those who may not currently participate, and enable deeper inclusivity, leaders should introduce additional mechanisms for dialogue, such as a biennial anonymous congregational survey and dedicated follow-up workshops. This enhanced approach will help ensure all congregants feel equally valued and integrated into the Cathedral's evolving culture.

Cathedral Leadership

- 12.6 The Dean holds ultimate responsibility for safeguarding at the Cathedral. During discussion he was unambiguous about his responsibility and accountability.
- 12.7 The Audit saw and heard evidence that he is both reflective and considered in his approach and he and the Diocesan Bishop have a good (frequent and routine) working relationship underwritten by an ability to engage, listen, challenge and reflect.
- 12.8 The Dean is supported by an experienced and able Chief Operating Officer (COO). They operate a close and collegiate working relationship and it is clear that there is a level of mutual respect that benefits the overall leadership and management of the Cathedral. This is complemented by the drive, determination and work ethic of the Canon Precentor. During discussions it was clear that they had a firm grip on their area of responsibility, key areas of risk and policy and practice expectations for those who worked with and or report to them.
- 12.9 The Leadership team is further complemented by a CSO. The CSO provides an authoritative safeguarding presence, has wide ranging and contextually relevant experience, alongside an excellent and mature working relationship with the DSO and

DST. She is an asset to the Cathedral and key to their ongoing safeguarding journey. She brings professional safeguarding expertise to the leadership team and those she supports across the cathedral.

Cathedral Leadership Team (CLT)

12.10 The Cathedral Leadership Team (CLT) ensures that safeguarding remains the fundamental priority underpinning all daily operations and the management of the physical office. During the operational rollout of recent Chapter decisions, the team maintained a strict focus on welfare while updating organisational structures and job roles. This commitment to public safety was particularly vital when directing major events with high footfall, such as the 'Making Tracks' exhibition and the busy Christmas services. To guarantee a secure environment for staff, volunteers, and visitors alike, the CLT proactively evaluates its duty of care across all Cathedral activities. Crucially, this operational scrutiny has prompted the team to conduct comprehensive reviews of their critical safeguarding procedures, specifically concentrating on refining the Cathedral's lone working, wheelchair access, and vulnerability policies.

Cathedral Governance

12.11 Following its reconstruction in recent years, the Cathedral Chapter operates a robust governance and oversight framework that fully meets the statutory and regulatory expectations of both the Church and the Charity Commission. A key strength of this model is the mature, collegiate working relationship between the Chapter, the Senior Non-Executive Member (SNEM), and the Dean, which facilitates effective collaboration while maintaining appropriate boundaries.

12.12 The practice of strategic delegation and co-chairing of Chapter meetings represents good practice that actively mitigates perceived conflicts of interest. By having the Dean lead strategic elements while the SNEM chairs the substantial 'Reports' section, often half or

more of the agenda, as well as the final feedback session, the Executive Team's accountability to the Chapter is significantly strengthened. This arrangement goes well beyond the requirements of the Cathedrals Measure 2020, demonstrating that the Dean and Cathedral Leadership actively welcome accountability and ensure all voices and concerns are fully heard and considered. This is good practice.

12.13 The Chapter exhibits a clear, proactive commitment to safeguarding, underpinned by strong leadership and rigorous quality assurance. The appointment of a suitably qualified Non-Executive Director (NED) as the Chapter Safeguarding Lead (CSL) has enhanced scrutiny, an effort further reinforced by the active involvement of the Canon Precentor and the CSO. Additionally, the Cathedral benefits from independent oversight via the Cathedral Safeguarding Advisory Group. Chaired by a retired judge whose professional curiosity, eye for detail, and capacity for appropriate challenge are evident, this group serves as a significant asset to the Cathedral's risk management strategy.

12.14 In terms of policy and partnership, the Chapter has successfully formalised key preventative frameworks. This includes a MoU that clearly defines the working relationship between the Cathedral and the DST. The Chapter has also proven responsive to legislative changes, promptly adopting updated policies concerning Health and Safety, the Recruitment of Ex-Offenders, and Anti-Sexual Harassment. This institutional dedication to continuous improvement is further evidenced by ongoing quality assurance and historical file reviews, demonstrating the robust handling of casework and a willingness to learn from past practices.

12.15 Alongside these governance achievements, the Chapter continues to drive forward significant operational and heritage initiatives, reflecting strong strategic decision-making. Recent approvals include a new lease agreement with the Abbey School, the selection of

Nicholson & Co for a major organ rebuild, and the progression of "Project Discovery". This major initiative, backed by a National Lottery Heritage Fund grant, aims to establish a new volunteer hub and facilitate a Cathedral move.

12.16 While strategic oversight remains effective, a recent internal review highlighted areas for development regarding organisational culture and staff welfare. A recent survey indicated a decline in employee satisfaction, specifically concerning management communication and the current rewards structure. The Audit welcomes the Chapter's immediate initiation of a review into these issues, including staff benefits.

Recommendation C2: The Chapter should ensure that communication channels between management and staff are formalised and improved, and that the outcomes of the benefits review are transparently actioned to help restore morale and support staff retention.

Recommendation C3: To ensure a cohesive approach to continuous improvement, formal mechanisms for collaboration across the diocese and cathedral should be further strengthened. This should involve an annual joint planning event bringing together the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP), the Cathedral Safeguarding Advisory Group (CSAG), the Archdeacons, and the respective safeguarding teams (CSO, DSO, and DST). This forum will align work on key safeguarding themes and facilitate an annual joint scrutiny exercise to ensure rigorous, shared oversight.

Recommendation C4: Strategic oversight and quality assurance should transition to a multi-year framework to enable deeper, more impactful evaluation. The Chapter should set overarching safeguarding themes on a rolling three-year cycle. Concurrently, the Cathedral Safeguarding Advisory Group (CSAG) quality assurance team should implement an aligned three-year programme of thematic reviews, focusing on critical areas such as organisational culture, prevention, and victim engagement, to provide ongoing reassurance and drive improvement.

Recommendation C5: To preserve the operational independence of safeguarding scrutiny and to avoid any perception that the CSAG is influenced or controlled by the Cathedral's leadership, the Dean should step back from all participation and attendance at CSAG meetings. This is not a reflection on the current Dean, but a necessary structural boundary to eliminate the reality of unconscious deference to the most senior member of the cathedral. Removing the Dean from the room ensures a definitive split between governance accountability and the independent scrutiny of operational issues.

Additionally, the CSAG Terms of Reference should be updated to explicitly state that any other Cathedral Executive Team members attend CSAG meetings solely at the invitation of the Chair and do not hold voting rights.

Recommendation C6: CSAG should broaden its membership and representation by actively recruiting diverse voices from beyond the Cathedral or diocese. To this end they should conduct a skills, inclusion and diversity review using the opportunity to identify external representatives from the wider community, for example, local charities, victims' advocates, leaders of local foodbanks, members of other denominations and local business representatives.

Recommendation C7: The authority and integration of independent scrutiny must be reinforced at the highest levels of Cathedral governance. The Chapter should explore appointing the independent CSAG chair as a formal member of the Cathedral Chapter. This will further strengthen oversight and accountability.

Recommendation C8: To reflect the professional demands of the role and reinforce its absolute independence in line with best practice across similar church bodies, the CSAG Chair's position should be appropriately remunerated.

Capacity

12.17 The current CSO holds dual responsibility for both safeguarding and wider organisational culture. Although the CSO plays a key role in embedding a culture of safeguarding, the primary responsibility for developing, maintaining, and monitoring the overall organisational culture should not sit with them. Promoting a healthy workplace is in everyone's interest; however, as a dedicated function, this belongs with HR. Keeping this separate from Safeguarding prevents blurring the lines between specific safeguarding issues and general staff conduct. To this end the Audit makes the following recommendation.

Recommendation C9: The responsibility for developing, maintaining, and monitoring broader organisational culture should be transferred from the CSO to Human Resources (HR).

12.18 The Cathedral, alongside the DBF, has made significant investments in growing its safeguarding resources, recognising the critical importance of creating and maintaining safer environments. While the Cathedral currently benefits from the dedicated support of its CSO, there is a strategic opportunity to enhance this provision.

12.19 The wider DST is well-led and comprises credible professionals with complementary expertise. By working closely together, they currently deliver effective safeguarding support and training, an approach this Audit recognizes as good practice.

12.20 To capitalise on these combined strengths and optimise the Cathedral's safeguarding operations, the current structure should evolve. Formally embedding the CSO within a wider professional network will enable greater contingency, provide uniform professional supervision, and shared best practice, while maintaining bespoke support for the Cathedral. To achieve this, the Audit makes the following recommendations:

Recommendation C10: To ensure independent operational responsibility, support and robust accountability for safeguarding at the Cathedral, existing safeguarding resources, namely the CSO and the DST, should be restructured into a Consolidated Safeguarding Directorate. To maximise the benefits of this integration for the Cathedral, the Chapter and DBF should:

- a) Appoint a Director of Safeguarding: This role will lead the new Directorate, providing overarching, independent operational responsibility and single professional line management/supervision for all specialist safeguarding resources, including the CSO. As the most senior authoritative operational voice regarding safeguarding, the Director must not be line-managed by a single church officer. Instead, they will be directly accountable to the Cathedral Chapter and the DBF, thereby strengthening Cathedral governance.
- b) Bring all professional resources together by formally embedding the CSO into the new Directorate. This ensures the CSO benefits from uniform supervision, peer support, and team contingency. Crucially, the CSO should continue to provide bespoke safeguarding advice and direction to the Cathedral and remain physically situated within it, while being professionally line-managed by the Director.

Recommendation C11: To broaden the Directorate's skill base and ensure the long-term sustainability and efficiency of safeguarding in a consolidated directorate, proactive strategies should be adopted. These should include:

- a) Benchmark current salaries against market rates to ensure the Cathedral and the wider Directorate can attract, engage, and retain high-quality safeguarding personnel.
- b) Establish professional development pathways by creating clear career progression routes for safeguarding staff. For the CSO and the wider team, this builds internal capability, broadens collective skills, and ensures the Cathedral continuously benefits from evolving, up-to-date safeguarding expertise.

Chorister Safeguarding

- 12.21 Chester Cathedral Choir comprises boys and girls, including probationers, drawn from schools across the county. Choristers attend multiple rehearsals and services each week, supported by a small music department and a team of matrons who provide supervision.
- 12.22 Safeguarding within this context is particularly important due to the frequency of contact, the intensity of the commitment, and the cathedral's open environment, which includes high visitor numbers and shared spaces.

Scheduling and Wellbeing

- 12.23 The commitment required of choristers is considerable, with rehearsals and services taking place several times per week. Staff recognise the complexity of coordinating attendance across multiple schools and family schedules, and there are established systems to communicate timetables and changes to parents.
- 12.24 There is evidence of a positive pastoral ethos within the music department. Singing teachers and staff described the importance of encouragement, confidence building, and recognising effort, particularly where choristers may be tired or unwell.

Parent and Chorister Views

- 12.25 Feedback from parents is largely positive, with strong appreciation for the opportunities provided and the social benefits for children. Choristers indicated to the Audit that they felt safe and supported by the Cathedral, and described the choir as "like being part of a family".

Chaperoning and Staffing

- 12.26 The Canon Precentor has taken on a more pastoral role in relation to choristers, and this

has had a notably positive effect on both pastoral care and the consistency of oversight. The presence of dedicated matrons, who demonstrate a clear understanding of the individual needs of the children, also contributes significantly to this strength.

12.27 There is evidence of appropriate supervision arrangements, with matrons present during rehearsals and responsible for ensuring safe arrival and departure. Additional roles, such as staff and adult voluntary youth mentors, are used to support ratios in specific contexts. This is good practice.

12.28 That said, the music department is small, and while staff demonstrate commitment and awareness of safeguarding responsibilities, limited administrative capacity may place pressure on maintaining oversight and consistency.

Recommendation C12: The Cathedral should review staffing capacity within the music department to ensure safeguarding responsibilities, supervision, and record keeping are sustainable and not overly reliant on a small number of individuals.

Physical Environment (including toilets and CCTV)

12.29 The Cathedral is a large, open site with significant public footfall, which presents inherent safeguarding challenges. Security measures, including controlled access systems and CCTV, are in place and continue to be developed. There is evidence that public access is managed during activities involving children, such as outreach events, with staff monitoring positioning and requesting that no photographs are taken.

12.30 The Cathedral's plans to enhance CCTV coverage for the Song School are supported by the Audit team, and this expansion should also consider coverage for the more secluded area of the organ loft.

Recommendation C13: The Cathedral should continue to develop its CCTV provision, ensuring that planned enhancements for the Song School are delivered and extended to include coverage of more secluded areas, including the organ loft, to strengthen oversight and reduce potential safeguarding risks.

12.31 A section outside the Cathedral, near the boiler room is being misused and remains close to a chorister access point. This presents an avoidable risk.

Recommendation C14: The Cathedral should secure this area with an appropriate gate to prevent public misuse and reduce the risk to choristers.

12.32 The Cathedral displays a range of safeguarding and safety-related posters across the site, including materials linked to counter-terrorism awareness. While these contribute to a broader culture of vigilance, they are not consistently designed with children in mind.

12.33 Children benefit from clear, visible reminders that help them to understand who they can speak to if they are worried and how they can make contact in a way that feels safe. Where posters are not presented in child-friendly language, positioned at an appropriate height, or supported by simple visuals, their effectiveness is reduced. There is emerging good practice in the use of more discreet locations, such as toilet areas, where children may feel more able to access information privately.

Recommendation C15: The Cathedral should improve the safeguarding signposting in the Song School areas and ensure they are specifically designed for children and young people. Posters should be displayed at child height in key areas, including the Song School and toilet facilities, and should identify trusted adults in a way that children can easily recognise and understand. The design and content of these materials should reflect the voice of the child, with

input from choristers where possible, to ensure they are accessible, meaningful, and used in practice.

Information Sharing and Recording

12.34 Information sharing within the music department, and between the Cathedral and schools attended by choristers, is established and takes place on an informal basis. This reflects positive working relationships and a shared commitment to supporting choristers. There is an opportunity to strengthen these arrangements by introducing greater consistency in how information is recorded, reviewed, and shared, to support oversight and ensure that all relevant staff have access to appropriate safeguarding information.

Recommendation C16: The Cathedral should strengthen its information-sharing arrangements by introducing more formal processes for recording and reviewing safeguarding information. This should include the development of clear information-sharing agreements with schools attended by choristers, to support consistency, clarity, and effective communication.

Safeguarding Training (including neurodiversity and behaviour management)

12.35 Whilst choristers reported feeling safe and supported overall, they expressed a wish for stronger behaviour management within the choir. Staff reflected varying levels of confidence in this area, particularly where behaviour is linked to neurodiversity. The Audit believes that Chester is carrying a degree of risk in this area, however there is positive practice in place, with Matrons providing thoughtful and sensitive support. There is an opportunity to build greater consistency across all staff so that choristers experience a shared and confident approach.

Recommendation C17: The Cathedral should strengthen staff confidence and understanding of behaviour management, including responding to neurodiversity, through tailored training and opportunities for reflective supervision. This should build on the existing chorister code of conduct and the positive practice already demonstrated within the team.

Policies (including trips and tours, mobile phones, lone working)

12.36 The Cathedral has developed a robust set of policies and guidance that support the safeguarding and wellbeing of choristers. These include clear expectations around behaviour, anti-bullying, and online safety for both staff and young people. This reflects a proactive approach and a clear commitment to addressing the range of issues that may arise within the choir context.

12.37 There is an opportunity to strengthen specific areas to ensure clarity and consistency in practice. The section on illness within the chorister handbook would benefit from clearer wording to confirm that, while the Cathedral maintains a structured and disciplined schedule, choristers who are unwell are supported appropriately and not expected to attend. In the absence of clear guidance, some choristers may feel an unspoken pressure to be present, even when unwell, which can have a negative impact on their health and wellbeing.

Recommendation C18: The Cathedral should review and update the chorister handbook to ensure that expectations around illness and attendance are clear, explicitly reassure choristers that they will be supported when unwell, and prioritise their wellbeing.

12.38 Online safety policies are a particular strength. The policies and agreements in place reflect the realities of young people's lives and the online safety agreement is accessible to choristers. This strong foundation can be built upon further by ensuring that children, staff, and parents are consistently signposted to additional sources of support and reporting mechanisms.

Recommendation C19: The Cathedral should strengthen its online safety approach by including clear signposting within policies, agreements, and visible materials to external support services, such as Childline's Report Remove for young people, and raising awareness among staff and parents of the Internet Watch Foundation.

13 Prevention

- 13.1 The Cathedral has implemented a series of preventative measures as part of its safeguarding arrangements. These include a focus on safer recruitment, the establishment of clear codes of conduct, and mechanisms for raising awareness among all stakeholders. Collectively, these demonstrate the Cathedral's ongoing commitment to prioritising the well-being and safety of its staff, volunteers and visitors.
- 13.2 Cathedral has a good system in place to support safer recruitment and various policies and procedures that define practice expectations. As an example, a range of checks are undertaken to ensure the suitability of applicants such as references, Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and confidential declaration forms for eligible roles. There is also relevant messaging on job descriptions reference the Cathedral's commitment to safeguarding, relevant questions are asked at interview and there is training for those involved in the recruitment process. All these measures help to create an environment that deters those who might be unsuitable or pose a risk to the young and vulnerable from working in the Cathedral.
- 13.3 The Cathedral follows the House of Bishops' Safeguarding Policy 'Promoting a Safer Church' alongside having its own Safeguarding Policy and safeguarding handbook. The Audit highlights that both documents require review and updates to align with current policies and procedures. This process will incorporate the latest requirements for NST Safeguarding Standards, the Modern Slavery policy, and Whistleblowing protocols. Additionally, the documents must reflect the updated Code of Practice for managing allegations (published September 2025). This objective has been formally scheduled as part of the Safeguarding Action Plan.
- 13.4 As established in Part One of this report, there are processes designed to bridge the DST

and the Cathedral. These ensure that good safeguarding practices are not only maintained but are collaboratively developed and shared across both entities.

- 13.5 The Cathedral's Education and Families team actively builds and maintains professional networks to facilitate the exchange of good practices. Locally, the team collaborates with the Cheshire Heritage Learning Network, engaging in regular updates through a mix of in-person meetings and digital forums. On a national level, Chester Cathedral is an active member of Cathedrals Plus, which provides a valuable platform for peer-to-peer learning and the sharing of insights during their annual conferences.
- 13.6 Beyond educational networks, the Cathedral maintains a robust presence within local safeguarding and community safety forums. This includes active participation in the Storyhouse Chester 'City Links' meetings and the Chester Against Business Crime (CABC) briefings, both of which are attended by the police. These sessions focus on addressing youth-related disturbances and the impact of local crime on the business community, while placing a high priority on individual welfare and victim support.
- 13.7 Furthermore, the CSO works closely with the local authority, Cheshire West and Chester (CWAC). By attending CWAC launch days, such as those focused on tackling child abuse, and engaging with the Safeguarding Children Partnership newsletters, the CSO ensures the Cathedral's practices remain current. This professional development is reinforced by specific training, including Psychological First Aid and upcoming LADO briefings. While the CSO also holds membership in the Mental Health Alliance, the Cathedral continues to monitor capacity to ensure this partnership is utilised effectively alongside its other safeguarding commitments.
- 13.8 The Audit identified a significant volume and diverse range of signage throughout the

Cathedral, all designed to promote safeguarding awareness and related initiatives. This included resources, such as the "Speak Out, Stay Safe" campaign materials.

13.9 These initiatives are further strengthened by the active presence of the CSO, whose consistent engagement ensures that safeguarding remains a central priority. By providing regular briefings and updates across various forums, including the Dean's Breakfast, the Dean's Staff Breakfast, and wider congregational meetings, the CSO maintains high visibility and accountability. This proactive approach is supplemented by the use of newsletters and dedicated safeguarding religious services, ensuring the message reaches all levels of the community. Furthermore, these discussions are extended to informal settings such as staff and volunteer lunches. This is good practice.

13.10 Although much of the current social media content is not directly related to safeguarding, the Audit noted high levels of reach and engagement across these platforms. The Audit is of the opinion that there are opportunities to enhance these channels as a mechanism to connect, inform and share important safeguarding information.

Recommendation C20: The Cathedral should develop a communication plan which aims to embed key safeguarding messages throughout its online and digital channels. Consideration should be given to understanding the needs of followers, adopting different techniques specific to the platform in use and utilisation of relevant awareness days, campaigns and events to amplify the message.

13.11 The safeguarding webpage on the Cathedral's website provides a central and useful resource which is user-friendly, well organised, accessible, and up to date. There is a mechanism to report a safeguarding concern, with relevant contacts and associated guidance provided. Whilst the webpage is positive overall, some minor improvements could help further strengthen it.

Recommendation C21: To ensure the Cathedral's safeguarding webpage is as effective and accessible as possible, it is recommended that the hierarchy of information be reviewed. Crucial instructions, such as the directive to call 999 for cases involving immediate danger and the guidance on how to report a safeguarding concern, should be given greater prominence to ensure they are immediately visible to users.

Furthermore, as the information is currently presented in a lengthy list format, the review should explore ways to optimise the layout for better readability. Implementing design elements such as section dividers or clear headings would help break up the text, making the content far more logical and easier for visitors to navigate during a time of need.

13.12 In respect of hearing the voices and learning from the experiences of victims / survivors of abuse, see the Victims and Survivors section of this report.

13.13 Arrangements are in place to manage safeguarding risks that are associated with the layout of the Cathedral building and its broader working environment. This can be seen in the risk assessments for different activities and the availability of Lone Working procedures. Despite these foundations, Audit feedback suggests that safety could be further enhanced by reinforcing these protocols amongst staff and volunteers. Increasing general awareness of existing procedures would ensure more consistent compliance across the workforce. For example, safety and connectivity for the gardening team could be improved by making the use of two-way radios a mandatory requirement.

Recommendation C22: The Cathedral should review and take steps to raise awareness and further embed the Lone Working Procedures such as use of two-way radios throughout the Cathedral.

13.14 In response to the Audit's survey of the Cathedral's staff and volunteer workforce regarding their understanding of professional boundaries, a vast majority of respondents expressed confidence in the boundaries expected of them, with the most significant portion strongly agreeing and nearly a third also in agreement. In contrast, only a slight minority of participants felt uncertain or uninformed, consisting of a small fraction who disagreed and a handful who remained neutral.

13.15 CCTV monitoring plays a crucial role in enhancing the overall security of the Cathedral. Whilst not monitored around the clock, the Cathedral's Verger Team oversees the footage, ensuring a vigilant eye on critical areas. CCTV coverage could be expanded to several areas identified as vulnerable 'blind spots'.

Recommendation C23: CCTV at the Cathedral should undergo a review with particular attention given to extending the system to include identified 'blind spots' where vulnerability is highest.

14 Recognising, Assessing and Managing Risk

14.1 The Audit observed a considered approach to safeguarding at the Cathedral aimed at identifying, managing and mitigating risk. This framework includes having the relevant policies, procedures and guidance in place, as well as promoting a culture where everyone is aware of and responsible for safeguarding.

14.2 The Cathedral's overarching Risk Register covers legal, missional, financial and reputational risks. While safeguarding risks are currently held in a separate register, the Cathedral is updating its central records to align with national safeguarding standards. The Audit identifies an opportunity to increase the pace of this work, and the following recommendation is to support a more timely completion.

Recommendation C24: The cathedral should establish a clear completion timeline and assign the necessary resources to finalise the register. Once in place, the Chapter, the CSAG or a designated safeguarding sub-group should take formal responsibility for risk oversight.

14.3 The CSO is a full-time registered social worker in Wales based at the Cathedral. As the primary point of contact for all safeguarding matters, the CSO receives formal report forms and meets individuals who present with concerns. When a case meets the required threshold, the CSO informs the DST. The two parties then collaborate on the case, which will be logged on the shared NSCMS platform. The Diocese and Cathedral are currently developing a joint recording protocol aligning with the national guiding principles and GDPR requirements.

14.4 If a matter is clearly not a safeguarding issue, such as an HR dispute, the decision is noted on a safeguarding contact sheet and the case is closed. These sheets are stored on a restricted-access drive accessible only to the CSO, the Executive Director, and the Dean.

In cases that fall into a 'grey area', the CSO consults the DSO to decide whether to log the matter on NSCMS or file it on the Cathedral's secure drive.

14.5 There are currently 12 active safeguarding cases involving the Cathedral. Eight of these are managed through the NSCMS system, while the remaining four are held on the Cathedral Secure Drive. Of the cases recorded in the last 12 months, eight resulted in a referral to statutory authorities.

14.6 The Cathedral uses the NSCMS for active cases, but the transfer of past records into the digital system remains unfinished. During the Audit, it was noted that the Cathedral operates across two separate platforms: the NSCMS and a secure internal drive. To ensure that there is a single source of information in one platform, the Audit makes the following recommendation

Recommendation C25: The Cathedral should create a formal timeline to finalise the migration of legacy data into the NSCMS. This action will centralise all safeguarding information and improve record-keeping consistency by providing a single point of entry. Moving these records will end the reliance on the secure drive and ensure the cathedral no longer operates across two systems.

Recommendation C26: The Cathedral should commission an external resource to comprehensively review, cleanse, and curate the inputting of existing data into the NSCMS. This activity should operate under terms of reference set by the CSO, and adhere to the 'Guiding Principles' for the NSCMS.

14.7 There are five active plans currently in place at the Cathedral. These consist of two Church Safety Plans for specific individuals and two risk management plans designed for transient visitors who pose a risk to others. Additionally, one risk management plan is in place for a

member of the workforce. Such plans are reviewed annually by the CSO and DST.

- 14.8 The Audit identified inconsistencies in the cathedral's past arrangement around safety plans. Although the recent introduction of detailed risk assessments shows a move towards more robust procedures, the Audit emphasises that the information within these documents must be kept current. One specific case revealed a discrepancy between an individual's safety plan and their actual activity. The environmental context had shifted because children were present, which contradicted the original agreement that the individual would not be around children within the cathedral.

Recommendation C27: In collaboration with the DBF and DSO, the DST should review the existing Cathedral risk assessments risk management plans and safety plans. The findings of this review should serve to strengthen identified vulnerabilities and oversee the improvement of these processes within the Cathedral.

- 14.9 The Audit was advised there have been no SCMG at the Cathedral over the past 12 months.
- 14.10 The Cathedral is a registered charity and therefore has a legal requirement to submit Serious Incident Reports to the Charity Commission. The Audit was informed that one case had met the threshold for a safeguarding SIR in the last 12 months. The referral to the Charity Commission aligned with national guidance and the NST was appropriately informed.
- 14.11 The CSO receives quarterly supervision from an external supervisor. Additionally, the DSO provides regular practice supervision to the CSO which is formalised through a supervision agreement. This agreement also establishes the necessary escalation procedures to address and resolve any safeguarding disputes that may arise.

- 14.12 The Cathedral ensures that the security and storage of all personal data adheres to UK data protection legislation and the UK GDPR. To maintain these standards, all relevant clergy, staff, and volunteers undergo data protection training via the iHASCO platform. Regarding internal communication, safeguarding information is shared exclusively through the Cathedral's own network. Cathedral email systems are secured with two-factor authentication (2FA) to ensure end-to-end protection. Furthermore, sensitive documents are stored on a secure server within restricted folders, where access is strictly limited to authorised key personnel.
- 14.13 There is a MoU in place between the DBF and the Cathedral. This sets out clear parameters governing the legal and good practice requirements for information sharing. This agreement is effective and supported by close collaboration between the CSO and DST. Additional arrangements with external bodies, including the police, further assist in the exchange of relevant data.

15 Victims and Survivors

- 15.1 The Cathedral follows the House of Bishops' guidance set out in 'Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse'. Through a MoU with the DBF, the DST and the Cathedral together offer an integrated response to victims and survivors of abuse.
- 15.2 On the Cathedral's website, a message from the Dean affirms a commitment to providing pastoral care for survivors of abuse according to established practice guidance. The Dean has publicly emphasised the importance of reporting abuse, acknowledging that rebuilding trust takes time. He has expressed a commitment to listening and learning from victims and survivors to strengthen safeguarding practices. This is positive.
- 15.3 The Cathedral was also involved in the launch of the 'Speak Out Stay Safe' campaign with the DST and actively promote it in communications. The Audit was informed that a series of Survivors Voices leaflets were also due to roll out in September 2025. Strategically, the CSAG benefits from two members with lived experience of abuse. Cathedral leadership recognise the value of victim and survivor engagement for institutional learning. That said, the Cathedral also acknowledge that outside of this, despite a desire to do so, current engagement is limited due to a lack of formal structures and opportunities.

Recommendation C28: The Cathedral should work closely with the DBF to host diocese-wide listening events, providing a platform to hear from a diverse range of voices to inform local practice.

- 15.4 Despite limited opportunities for structured engagement, the Audit has viewed evidence of sensitive engagement from the current CSO. This support and engagement included conducting welfare checks. Further, the Audit has viewed evidence of liaison with external agencies to provide a multidisciplinary approach to victim / survivor care.

15.5 Featured on the Cathedral website's 'Safeguarding' webpage, is an apology to those who have not found the Cathedral to be a safe or caring place and a commitment to responding well to allegations of abuse and providing appropriate support. Reporting and disclosure routes are clearly defined, including contact information for the CSO and DST and instruction to contact the police in emergencies. Current signposting covers key national organisations (e.g., NSPCC, Childline, Safe Spaces). To improve accessibility, the Audit recommends expanding the repository to include a wider variety of options, including local support.

Recommendation C29: The Cathedral should expand the existing repository of national resources to include a more diverse range of local support options. This will ensure survivors have access to comprehensive and accessible pathways for disclosure and assistance.

15.6 The Cathedral should develop a dedicated 'Victim and Survivor Engagement and Support' webpage to provide clear, accessible guidance for those seeking information or support. Incorporating direct links to the House of Bishops' *'Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse'* guidance and embedding national support videos would further demonstrate the Cathedral's commitment to survivor care and improve resource visibility.

Recommendation C30: The Cathedral should establish a dedicated 'Victim and Survivor Engagement and Support' webpage to centralise resources and improve user confidence. This should include the incorporation of direct links to House of Bishops' *'Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse'* guidance and national videos to enhance the visibility and credibility of available support.

15.7 The Cathedral provides a welcoming environment that serves as a vital sanctuary for the local community, particularly for adults at risk who seek informal support and conversation. This culture of inclusivity is bolstered by active outreach and robust partnerships with local support services. Specifically, the Cathedral has established successful collaborations

with Share SHAC and maintains close working relationships with the Council's Refugee and Asylum Support team to assist those experiencing homelessness or seeking asylum. The CSO also attends Cheshire West and Chester Safeguarding Children Partnership open days, which has included hearing from a guest speaker with lived experience of abuse.

- 15.8 Practical support is further demonstrated through a lunch donation initiative at the Cathedral Refectory, which provides meals to rough sleepers via a local homelessness charity, Share Shop. Additionally, the Cathedral maintains strong, reciprocal ties with local authority mental health and domestic abuse services, ensuring a holistic approach to safeguarding and pastoral care for the most vulnerable members of the community.

16 Learning, Supervision and Support

Safeguarding Learning

- 16.1 Safeguarding learning at Chester Cathedral is embedded within day-to-day practice and is supported by visible and engaged safeguarding leadership. The Audit found that safeguarding training is understood as a core responsibility across staff and volunteers, with a clear emphasis on accessibility and responsiveness to need. There is a developing culture where safeguarding is increasingly seen as part of everyone's role.
- 16.2 The Cathedral delivers safeguarding learning primarily in line with the national Church of England pathways, with a combination of online training and locally facilitated sessions. The Audit found evidence of flexibility in delivery, particularly in supporting those who may find online systems less accessible, with additional group sessions and one-to-one support provided where required.
- 16.3 The Audit found that the CSO plays a key role in reinforcing learning through informal engagement, advice, and visibility across the Cathedral. This includes regular presence in key areas such as the Song School and direct engagement with staff, volunteers, and choristers, supporting both awareness and confidence in safeguarding processes.
- 16.4 INEQE's survey data supports this position, with the majority of respondents to the Cathedral workforce survey indicating that they have received safeguarding training appropriate to their role and feel confident in recognising and responding to safeguarding concerns. The vast majority were also able to identify the CSO and describe appropriate reporting routes, demonstrating that learning is being translated into practice.
- 16.5 A notable strength is the Cathedral's commitment to supporting contextual understanding of safeguarding. This includes tailored discussions within training settings, opportunities

for staff and volunteers to ask questions, and the use of real-life scenarios to explore complex issues such as boundaries, forgiveness, and offender management.

- 16.6 Whilst the Cathedral demonstrates a responsive and person-centred approach to training, there remains an opportunity to further formalise and evidence the impact of safeguarding learning. Current approaches rely heavily on informal feedback, observation, and ongoing engagement, with limited use of structured evaluation tools to assess how learning is embedded in behaviour and practice.

Recommendation C31: The Cathedral should build on its existing strengths by introducing a more structured approach to the evaluation of safeguarding learning, including consistent post-training feedback and mechanisms to identify themes, measure impact, and inform future development.

Clergy Support

- 16.7 The Cathedral benefits from a range of support mechanisms for clergy, staff, and volunteers. INEQE's survey data indicates that the majority of respondents feel supported in their roles. Many respondents highlighted positive experiences of raising safeguarding concerns, noting that these were taken seriously, responded to promptly, and handled with sensitivity and professionalism.

- 16.8 However, support arrangements appear to rely significantly on the availability and capacity of key individuals, particularly the CSO. Whilst this relational model is effective, it presents potential risks in terms of sustainability and consistency as demand increases.

Recommendation C32: The Cathedral should review the structure and capacity of safeguarding support arrangements to ensure they are sustainable, clearly understood, and not overly reliant on individual roles. Consideration should be given to strengthening wider ownership of safeguarding support across leadership and departments.

Supervision and Support of Safeguarding Roles

- 16.9 The CSO and their background brings relevant professional expertise, including a background in social work and experience of managing complex and high-risk cases. This provides a strong foundation for safeguarding practice within the Cathedral.
- 16.10 The Audit found that supervision arrangements have developed over time, with increased access to external support and professional consultation. This includes engagement with independent professionals and structured opportunities to discuss complex cases, which supports reflective practice and decision-making.
- 16.11 There is evidence that earlier experiences of professional isolation have been mitigated through the development of these arrangements, alongside stronger links with diocesan safeguarding structures. This represents positive progress and reflects a growing recognition of the importance of supervision in safeguarding roles.
- 16.12 Support for those undertaking safeguarding responsibilities more broadly, including staff and volunteers, is largely delivered through advice, guidance, and training. Whilst this is effective in many cases, the complexity of the Cathedral environment, including high visitor numbers, events, and diverse activities, means that safeguarding challenges can vary significantly.
- 16.13 INEQE's survey data indicates that whilst many respondents feel confident in responding to safeguarding concerns, there remains some variability in confidence, particularly in relation to more complex situations.

Recommendation C33: The Cathedral should continue to strengthen supervision and professional support for safeguarding roles, ensuring that regular, structured supervision is embedded and accessible. Consideration should also be given to extending opportunities for

reflective learning and case discussion to those in frontline roles, to support confidence and consistency in safeguarding practice.

17 Conclusion

- 17.1 Chester Cathedral has demonstrated substantial progress in its safeguarding journey, underpinned by a pronounced and positive cultural shift. Under the clear accountability of the Dean, alongside the collaborative governance of the Cathedral Chapter and the CSAG, safeguarding is increasingly embedded as a core institutional priority. The Cathedral has shown a steadfast commitment to compliance and continuous improvement, successfully implementing the recommendations of the 2020 SCIE audit and establishing a robust safeguarding action plan for 2024 to 2027.
- 17.2 This positive cultural trajectory is reflected in the audit's engagement with staff and volunteers, via surveys, one-to-one discussions, and focus groups, which indicated a high level of psychological safety and workforce confidence. A central driver of this success is the visible and highly qualified CSO, who has encouraged a welcoming and supportive environment where a significant majority of personnel feel empowered to raise concerns.
- 17.3 Furthermore, the Cathedral's approach to prevention is evidenced by rigorous safer recruitment practices, conscientious data handling, and active engagement with local community safety and education networks. Pastoral care for choristers is highly regarded by parents, whilst broader outreach, including dedicated support for the homeless and asylum seekers, reflects a lived commitment to inclusivity and the active protection of vulnerable people.
- 17.4 The Cathedral demonstrated a commitment to safeguarding and community care by maintaining robust, active collaborations with local services. This is further supported by leadership's active promotion of the 'Speak Out Stay Safe' campaign and the integration of survivor-focused messaging on the Cathedral website. While there is a clear desire to

deepen engagement with survivors, current efforts are hindered by a lack of formal structures and opportunities for involvement. To address this and improve overall support, the Audit recommends establishing formal pathways and broadening the Cathedral's signposting resources to include more localised support options alongside national organisations.

- 17.5 While these foundational elements are commendable, the audit identified key areas where policies and practices require strengthening to ensure long-term sustainability. Foremost among these is the need to address capacity bottlenecks and an over-reliance on key individuals. Currently, the CSO carries an unsustainable breadth of duties; separating broader human resources and cultural responsibilities from this role is essential to allow a dedicated, vital focus on complex safeguarding matters. Similarly, the music department requires enhanced administrative support to maintain rigorous chorister supervision and record-keeping without risking staff burnout.
- 17.6 To support this operational resilience, systemic and administrative processes require targeted modernisation. The Cathedral's oversight is currently hampered by a fragmented digital infrastructure. Consequently, the migration of legacy data into the unified NSCMS and the finalisation of a central risk register are priorities. Alongside this digital consolidation, several core policies require revision to align with current national standards. For example, overarching risk management plans must be regularly reviewed to reflect any change in context, and the chorister handbook should be updated to explicitly prioritise welfare, reassuring children that they are not pressured to attend when unwell.
- 17.7 Culturally, leadership is encouraged to take proactive steps to dismantle lingering perceptions of exclusivity or 'cliquishness' within the worshipping community. Additionally, recent dips in staff morale concerning communication and reward structures warrant attention to maintain stability and trust across the workforce.

17.8 Overall, Chester Cathedral has successfully evolved from a phase which focused on getting the basics right, into a mature, proactive, and compassionate safeguarding environment. The dedication of the leadership team, the CSO, and the wider workforce ensures that public safety and pastoral care remain paramount. To sustain this trajectory and resolve the remaining pressures, the Cathedral must now focus on structured actions. By modernising data systems, updating core policies, establishing formal listening events, and prominently highlighting local pathways for victims and survivors, the Cathedral can maintain an accessible and resilient safeguarding culture.

Appendices

18 Appendix 1 – DBF Recommendations

Recommendation D1: To ensure uniformity of understanding and confidence across the Parish community the DBF, supported by the Diocesan Safeguarding Team (DST) and in consultation with Parochial Church Councils (PCC) should engage in creating ‘You Spoke, We Listened’ Feedback Loops. To this end, leadership should regularly publish anonymised, high-level summaries of community concerns that have been raised alongside the specific actions taken to resolve them. Furthermore, to enhance confidentiality, the practice should include relevant, anonymised examples of good work from other areas.

Recommendation D2: Adapt current staff-level training (e.g. trauma-informed practices) into bite-sized, highly accessible workshops for clergy, ordinands, licensed lay workers, volunteers, DBF and parish staff, and any other relevant personnel.

Recommendation D3: The DBF should Establish:

- a) That Archdeacons and the DSO should establish a regular meeting cycle to plan the safeguarding elements of all parochial engagements, ranging from informal parish and deanery visits to formal Parish Inspections. To maximise these opportunities and streamline the flow of information, the Archdeacon and DSO should collaborate to produce formal pre-visit and post-visit briefing templates. This will guarantee that Archdeacons receive full advance briefings and systematically return comprehensive feedback following all visits.
- b) Establish clear deconfliction processes for choosing who chairs specific SCMGs. To minimise conflicts of interest, an SCMG should be chaired by an Archdeacon other than the one with local responsibility for the parish involved, while the ‘local’ Archdeacon should remain on the SCMG as a participant to provide background knowledge. Furthermore, ensure that Archdeacons or others tasked with chairing such groups receive appropriate levels of training and support. This should include the provision of legal advice and ‘clinical’ supervision, with the

specification that clinical supervision is solely in respect of their safeguarding responsibilities as chairs of SCMGs.

c) A case for the Appointment of Assistant Archdeacons. This would relieve considerable pressure and boost overall capacity, thereby freeing up the Archdeacons' time for safeguarding related matters.

Recommendation D4: To address this, the Diocesan Bishop and the DBF should formally delineate the roles of these two bodies. Firstly, an independent lay member should be appointed as Chair of the DBF (if not already in place). Moving forward, the stewardship of charity trusteeship and specific safeguarding responsibilities must be explicitly defined and recorded as distinct, separate items within the DBF agendas and minutes. This will ensure clear legal accountability, proper oversight, and transparent governance.

Recommendation D5: Should the recommendation for the appointment of a Director of Safeguarding be accepted, they should co-chair the SEG to align the leadership of the Bishop advocating for safeguarding with the operational lead.

Recommendation D6: To further strengthen existing good practice, and enhance safeguarding information flows between statutory partners and to expand membership to become more inclusive and diverse the DSAP should:

- a) The Chair of the DSAP should work with the chairs of Local Authority children's and adults' boards to develop practical engagement methods. This will enable them to consider current safeguarding issues and share relevant feedback with the wider panel.
- b) Broaden its membership base beyond traditional Church and statutory boundaries. By proactively recruiting representatives from local community organisations, such as food banks and survivor advocacy groups, the DSAP will directly integrate independent, diverse viewpoints into its core governance, ultimately amplifying the voices of victims and vulnerable individuals.

Recommendation D7: To mitigate the risk of catastrophic data loss, the DBF should review and upgrade the physical security of sensitive Clergy files. Management should evaluate and implement protective measures such as on-site fireproof storage, secure third-party off-site archiving, or a specialist fire risk assessment of the current storage facility.

Recommendation D8: To ensure independent operational responsibility, support, and robust accountability for safeguarding across the Diocese, existing safeguarding resources, namely the DST and the CSO, should be restructured into a Consolidated Safeguarding Directorate. To maximise the benefits of this integration for the Diocese, the DBF and Chapter should:

- a) Appoint a Director of Safeguarding: This role will lead the new Directorate, providing overarching, independent operational responsibility and single professional line management for all specialist safeguarding resources, including the CSO. As the most senior authoritative operational voice regarding safeguarding, the Director must not be line-managed by a single church officer. Instead, they will be directly accountable to the DBF and the Cathedral Chapter, thereby strengthening Diocesan governance.
- b) Work with the Cathedral to bring all professional resources together by formally embedding the CSO into the new Directorate. This ensures the CSO benefits from uniform supervision, peer support, and team contingency. Crucially, the CSO should continue to provide bespoke safeguarding advice and direction to the Cathedral and remain physically situated within it, while being professionally line-managed by the Director.

Recommendation D9: To address capacity constraints, build contingency, and allow specialists to focus on their core competencies, specific roles and functions should be redefined by:

- a) Increasing Assistant Diocesan Safeguarding Officer (ADSO) capacity by appointing an additional 0.5 FTE ADSO.
- b) Create a Safeguarding and Parish Support Officer post. Establish a new full-time role dedicated to frontline triage and support, specifically handling filtering, Parish Dashboards, training evaluation, and direct support for Archdeacons when carrying out specific visits with a safeguarding focus.

Recommendation D10: To broaden the team's skill base and ensure the long-term sustainability and efficiency of the directorate, proactive workforce strategies should be adopted. These should include:

- a) A Remuneration Review to benchmark current salaries against market rates ensuring the directorate can attract, engage, and retain high-quality safeguarding personnel.
- b) Establish clear professional development and career progression routes for safeguarding staff to build internal capability and broaden team skills.

Recommendation D11: The DBF should evaluate and implement measures to improve the depth of content and resources within the safeguarding webpages, ensuring that accessibility and ease of navigation are prioritised. A primary focus should be on providing Parish Safeguarding Officers (PSOs) with more intuitive access to essential support, tools, and guidance, including, for example direct links to national templates. Furthermore, the DBF should undertake a comprehensive review of all current supporting materials to ensure they are consolidated into a single, streamlined repository on the Diocesan website.

Recommendation D12: The DBF should develop and implement a structured communications plan for safeguarding messages across its digital channels. This plan should include a content calendar outlining timely, considered safeguarding messages for regular inclusion in email newsletters (e.g., a dedicated section or recurring feature) and scheduled posts on relevant social media platforms. Content should be varied, covering topics such as policy updates, training opportunities, real-life examples (anonymised), reminders of reporting mechanisms, and messages promoting a culture of vigilance and support. The DBF should assign responsibility for content creation, approval, and scheduling, ensuring all messages are consistent, accessible, and align with current safeguarding guidelines. Regular review of engagement metrics should inform future content strategy to maximise reach and impact.

Recommendation D13: The DBF should develop engagement mechanisms to consider the needs, experiences and voices of children, young people and vulnerable adults within safeguarding prevention planning. Such children and youth initiatives could be led by, and build upon the existing work of, the Family Children and Youth Adviser.

Recommendation D14: It is recommended that the DBF formally adopts and communicates the House of Bishops' Guidance Codes of Practice as its interim standard for appropriate boundaries. To ensure long-term clarity and local relevance, the DBF should formally bridge the existing policy gap by explicitly signposting staff and stakeholders to the House of Bishops' documentation via the relevant documentation or website. Furthermore, the DBF should develop local supplementary guidance in the form of a brief "Local Code of Conduct." This document will ensure that the national standards set by the House of Bishops are effectively aligned with the specific operational context and requirements of the DBF.

Recommendation D15: The DBF should include defined review dates for all risks described within its Risk Register(s). Risks should be reviewed on a quarterly basis or as a minimum, at a six-monthly basis, with any changes (and the rationale for these) being documented in relevant meeting minutes.

Recommendation D16: The Audit recommends implementing targeted training programmes specifically designed for reference groups and the wider personnel responsible for monitoring individuals on safety plans. It is essential that the DBF ensures all training pertaining to risk assessments, safety planning, and broader offender management is contextually appropriate and tailored for use within a faith-based environment.

Recommendation D17: To ensure national oversight, facilitate consistent practice and learning across the Church of England, and support strategic policy development, the DBF should share copies of all safeguarding-related Serious Incident Reports (SIRs) with the National Safeguarding Team (NST).

Recommendation D18: Chester DBF should consider how to ensure both online and offline promotion of its dedication to House of Bishops' guidance 'Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse', can achieve optimal effectiveness. For example, offline signposting could be complemented by QR codes on printed materials to ensure guidance reaches those who do not regularly access the dedicated webpage.

Recommendation D19: The DBF should transition from individual representation to a collective survivor working group model. This will ensure that strategic governance is informed by a diverse range of lived experiences within a peer-supported framework.

Recommendation D20: The DBF should establish formal mechanisms for ongoing engagement with victims and survivors of abuse and their families. This should include the facilitation of diocese-wide listening events and implementing accessible feedback options, such as surveys.

Recommendation D21: The Diocese should digitise and expand its offline directory to include localised support and currently missing dementia-specific resources. This update will provide victims, survivors, and those at risk with immediate, face-to-face assistance tailored to their specific mental health and community needs.

Recommendation D22: The DBF should implement a diarised schedule of check-ins to ensure consistent communication and duty of care. During high-workload periods, staff must proactively inform stakeholders of any potential delays to manage expectations and minimise distress.

Recommendation D23: The Diocese should build on its existing reflective and responsive approach by introducing a consistent and structured evaluation framework, including standardised post course feedback and mechanisms to collate and analyse themes across training provision.

Recommendation D24: The Diocese should further develop its evaluation processes to include measures of impact on behaviour and practice, enabling it to evidence how safeguarding learning contributes to safer cultures and improved safeguarding outcomes.

Recommendation D25: The DBF should build on its existing partnerships and casework support by developing a more structured approach to learning in the area of offender management, including accessible guidance materials, training inputs, and clear signposting to advice and support, ensuring that all relevant Church officers are equipped to manage safety plans consistently.

Recommendation D26: The Diocese should establish a regular review cycle for clergy induction processes, ensuring safeguarding content remains up to date, consistent with national guidance, and responsive to emerging risks and learning. This should include mechanisms for gathering feedback from newly ordained or appointed clergy to inform continuous improvement.

Recommendation D27: The Diocese should ensure that all available clergy support pathways, including pastoral, wellbeing, and specialist support, are clearly articulated and consistently communicated, particularly at key points such as induction, training, and following safeguarding incidents.

Recommendation D28: The Diocese should expand the safeguarding learning, and practice prompts currently embedded within the MDR process and documentation to better support the individual's personal development. While recording administrative information on training compliance remains valuable, the process must move beyond basic prompts to maintain a personal focus. Documentation and review discussions should actively explore the individual's safeguarding journey by reflecting on the experience gained in previous roles, examining how they currently apply that knowledge to their active ministry, and identifying actionable steps to enhance their understanding of safeguarding for the roles they aspire to in the future. To support this, the process should include structured criteria that encourage meaningful reflection on personal safeguarding responsibilities, alongside appropriate support to actively identify tailored learning opportunities.

Recommendation D29: The Diocese should review the resourcing and structure of support available to parish safeguarding officers and clergy, ensuring it is sufficient to maintain consistent engagement, advice, and guidance across the Diocese. Consideration should be given to strengthening capacity to support frontline safeguarding decision making.

19 Appendix 2 – Cathedral Recommendations

Recommendation C1: Building upon existing informal forums and regular post-service gatherings, the leadership team should continue to champion direct engagement with the worshipping community. To proactively dismantle social barriers, reach those who may not currently participate, and enable deeper inclusivity, leaders should introduce additional mechanisms for dialogue, such as a biennial anonymous congregational survey and dedicated follow-up workshops. This enhanced approach will help ensure all congregants feel equally valued and integrated into the Cathedral's evolving culture.

Recommendation C2: The Chapter should ensure that communication channels between management and staff are formalised and improved, and that the outcomes of the benefits review are transparently actioned to help restore morale and support staff retention.

Recommendation C3: To ensure a cohesive approach to continuous improvement, formal mechanisms for collaboration across the diocese and cathedral should be further strengthened. This should involve an annual joint planning event bringing together the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP), the Cathedral Safeguarding Advisory Group (CSAG), the Archdeacons, and the respective safeguarding teams (CSO, DSO, and DST). This forum will align work on key safeguarding themes and facilitate an annual joint scrutiny exercise to ensure rigorous, shared oversight.

Recommendation C4: Strategic oversight and quality assurance should transition to a multi-year framework to enable deeper, more impactful evaluation. The Chapter should set overarching safeguarding themes on a rolling three-year cycle. Concurrently, the Cathedral Safeguarding Advisory Group (CSAG) quality assurance team should implement an aligned three-year programme of thematic reviews, focusing on critical areas such as organisational

culture, prevention, and victim engagement, to provide ongoing reassurance and drive improvement.

Recommendation C5: To preserve the operational independence of safeguarding scrutiny and to avoid any perception that the CSAG is influenced or controlled by the Cathedral's leadership, the Dean should step back from all participation and attendance at CSAG meetings. This is not a reflection on the current Dean, but a necessary structural boundary to eliminate the reality of unconscious deference to the most senior member of the cathedral. Removing the Dean from the room ensures a definitive split between governance accountability and the independent scrutiny of operational issues.

Additionally, the CSAG Terms of Reference should be updated to explicitly state that any other Cathedral Executive Team members attend CSAG meetings solely at the invitation of the Chair and do not hold voting rights.

Recommendation C6: CSAG should broaden its membership and representation by actively recruiting diverse voices from beyond the Cathedral or diocese. To this end they should conduct a skills, inclusion and diversity review using the opportunity to identify external representatives from the wider community, for example, local charities, victims' advocates, leaders of local foodbanks, members of other denominations and local business representatives.

Recommendation C7: The authority and integration of independent scrutiny must be reinforced at the highest levels of Cathedral governance. The Chapter should explore appointing the independent CSAG chair as a formal member of the Cathedral Chapter. This will further strengthen oversight and accountability.

Recommendation C8: To reflect the professional demands of the role and reinforce its absolute independence in line with best practice across similar church bodies, the CSAG Chair's position should be appropriately remunerated.

Recommendation C9: The responsibility for developing, maintaining, and monitoring broader organisational culture should be transferred from the CSO to Human Resources (HR).

Recommendation C10: To ensure independent operational responsibility, support and robust accountability for safeguarding at the Cathedral, existing safeguarding resources, namely the CSO and the DST, should be restructured into a Consolidated Safeguarding Directorate. To maximise the benefits of this integration for the Cathedral, the Chapter and DBF should:

- a) Appoint a Director of Safeguarding: This role will lead the new Directorate, providing overarching, independent operational responsibility and single professional line management/supervision for all specialist safeguarding resources, including the CSO. As the most senior authoritative operational voice regarding safeguarding, the Director must not be line-managed by a single church officer. Instead, they will be directly accountable to the Cathedral Chapter and the DBF, thereby strengthening Cathedral governance.
- b) Bring all professional resources together by formally embedding the CSO into the new Directorate. This ensures the CSO benefits from uniform supervision, peer support, and team contingency. Crucially, the CSO should continue to provide bespoke safeguarding advice and direction to the Cathedral and remain physically situated within it, while being professionally line-managed by the Director.

Recommendation C11: To broaden the Directorate's skill base and ensure the long-term sustainability and efficiency of safeguarding in a consolidated directorate, proactive strategies should be adopted. These should include:

- a) Benchmark current salaries against market rates to ensure the Cathedral and the wider Directorate can attract, engage, and retain high-quality safeguarding personnel.
- b) Establish professional development pathways by creating clear career progression routes for safeguarding staff. For the CSO and the wider team, this builds internal capability, broadens collective skills, and ensures the Cathedral continuously benefits from evolving, up-to-date safeguarding expertise.

Recommendation C12: The Cathedral should review staffing capacity within the music department to ensure safeguarding responsibilities, supervision, and record keeping are sustainable and not overly reliant on a small number of individuals.

Recommendation C13: The Cathedral should continue to develop its CCTV provision, ensuring that planned enhancements for the Song School are delivered and extended to include coverage of more secluded areas, including the organ loft, to strengthen oversight and reduce potential safeguarding risks.

Recommendation C14: The Cathedral should secure this area with an appropriate gate to prevent public misuse and reduce the risk to choristers.

Recommendation C15: The Cathedral should improve the safeguarding signposting in the Song School areas and ensure they are specifically designed for children and young people. Posters should be displayed at child height in key areas, including the Song School and toilet facilities, and should identify trusted adults in a way that children can easily recognise and understand. The design and content of these materials should reflect the voice of the child, with input from choristers where possible, to ensure they are accessible, meaningful, and used in practice.

Recommendation C16: The Cathedral should strengthen its information-sharing arrangements by introducing more formal processes for recording and reviewing safeguarding information. This should include the development of clear information-sharing agreements with schools attended by choristers, to support consistency, clarity, and effective communication.

Recommendation C17: The Cathedral should strengthen staff confidence and understanding of behaviour management, including responding to neurodiversity, through tailored training and opportunities for reflective supervision. This should build on the existing chorister code of conduct and the positive practice already demonstrated within the team.

Recommendation C18: The Cathedral should review and update the chorister handbook to ensure that expectations around illness and attendance are clear, explicitly reassure choristers that they will be supported when unwell, and prioritise their wellbeing.

Recommendation C19: The Cathedral should strengthen its online safety approach by including clear signposting within policies, agreements, and visible materials to external support services, such as Childline's Report Remove for young people, and raising awareness among staff and parents of the Internet Watch Foundation.

Recommendation C20: The Cathedral should develop a communication plan which aims to embed key safeguarding messages throughout its online and digital channels. Consideration should be given to understanding the needs of followers, adopting different techniques specific to the platform in use and utilisation of relevant awareness days, campaigns and events to amplify the message.

Recommendation C21: To ensure the Cathedral's safeguarding webpage is as effective and accessible as possible, it is recommended that the hierarchy of information be reviewed. Crucial instructions, such as the directive to call 999 for cases involving immediate danger and the

guidance on how to report a safeguarding concern, should be given greater prominence to ensure they are immediately visible to users.

Furthermore, as the information is currently presented in a lengthy list format, the review should explore ways to optimise the layout for better readability. Implementing design elements such as section dividers or clear headings would help break up the text, making the content far more logical and easier for visitors to navigate during a time of need.

Recommendation C22: The Cathedral should review and take steps to raise awareness and further embed the Lone Working Procedures such as use of two-way radios throughout the Cathedral.

Recommendation C23: CCTV at the Cathedral should undergo a review with particular attention given to extending the system to include identified 'blind spots' where vulnerability is highest.

Recommendation C24: The cathedral should establish a clear completion timeline and assign the necessary resources to finalise the register. Once in place, the Chapter, the CSAG or a designated safeguarding sub-group should take formal responsibility for risk oversight.

Recommendation C25: The Cathedral should create a formal timeline to finalise the migration of legacy data into the NSCMS. This action will centralise all safeguarding information and improve record-keeping consistency by providing a single point of entry. Moving these records will end the reliance on the secure drive and ensure the cathedral no longer operates across two systems.

Recommendation C26: The Cathedral should commission an external resource to comprehensively review, cleanse, and curate the inputting of existing data into the NSCMS. This activity should operate under terms of reference set by the CSO, and adhere to the 'Guiding Principles' for the NSCMS.

Recommendation C27: In collaboration with the DBF and DSO, the DST should review the existing Cathedral risk assessments risk management plans and safety plans. The findings of this review should serve to strengthen identified vulnerabilities and oversee the improvement of these processes within the Cathedral.

Recommendation C28: The Cathedral should work closely with the DBF to host diocese-wide listening events, providing a platform to hear from a diverse range of voices to inform local practice.

Recommendation C29: The Cathedral should expand the existing repository of national resources to include a more diverse range of local support options. This will ensure survivors have access to comprehensive and accessible pathways for disclosure and assistance.

Recommendation C30: The Cathedral should establish a dedicated 'Victim and Survivor Engagement and Support' webpage to centralise resources and improve user confidence. This should include the incorporation of direct links to House of Bishops' *'Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse'* guidance and national videos to enhance the visibility and credibility of available support.

Recommendation C31: The Cathedral should build on its existing strengths by introducing a more structured approach to the evaluation of safeguarding learning, including consistent post-training feedback and mechanisms to identify themes, measure impact, and inform future development.

Recommendation C32: The Cathedral should review the structure and capacity of safeguarding support arrangements to ensure they are sustainable, clearly understood, and not overly reliant on individual roles. Consideration should be given to strengthening wider ownership of safeguarding support across leadership and departments.

Recommendation C33: The Cathedral should continue to strengthen supervision and professional support for safeguarding roles, ensuring that regular, structured supervision is embedded and accessible. Consideration should also be given to extending opportunities for reflective learning and case discussion to those in frontline roles, to support confidence and consistency in safeguarding practice.

20 Appendix 3 – Glossary of Abbreviations

ADSO	Assistant Diocesan Safeguarding Officer
CABC	Chester Against Business Crime
CCTV	Closed-Circuit Television
CLT	Cathedral Leadership Team
CofE	Church of England
COO	Chief Operating Officer
CSAG	Cathedral Safeguarding Advisory Group
CSL	Chapter Safeguarding Lead
CSO	Cathedral Safeguarding Officer
CWAC	Cheshire West and Chester
DBE	Diocesan Board of Education
DBF	Diocesan Board of Finance
DBS	Disclosure and Barring Service
DSAP	Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel
DSO	Diocesan Safeguarding Officer
DST	Diocesan Safeguarding Team
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HR	Human Resources
LADO	Local Authority Designated Officer
LLR	Learning Lessons Review
MDR	Ministerial Development Review
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NED	Non-Executive Director
NSCMS	National Safeguarding Case Management System

NST	National Safeguarding Team
PCC	Parochial Church Council
PCR2	Past Cases Review 2
PSO	Parish Safeguarding Officer
QA	Quality Assurance
QAG	Quality Assurance Group
RSL	Regional Safeguarding Lead
SCIE	Social Care Institute for Excellence
SCMG	Safeguarding Case Management Group
SEG	Safeguarding Executive Group
SIR	Serious Incident Report
SNEM	Senior Non-Executive Member



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