



Report of The Independent Chair of The Safeguarding Reference Group To The Dean & Chapter

FOR 12 MONTHS: 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018

CHAPTER MEETING: January 2019

Introduction and Outline of Report

This report has been prepared for the Dean and Chapter by Peter Spindler, the independent chair of the Safeguarding Reference Group, and provides assurance on how well the Abbey is performing on the issue of safeguarding. It draws upon data provided by Lee Elliot the Abbey Safeguarding Officer (ASO) and summarises the work undertaken by the Abbey to safeguard the vulnerable throughout 2018. The following six sections detail how the Abbey is working to ensure the wellbeing of vulnerable groups and strive for excellence in ensuring the safety of those who may be at risk of harm. This is the second safeguarding annual report to be submitted to the Dean and Chapter and is supported by the register of risks and the up to date action plan, both of which are attached as appendices to this report.

Safeguarding Governance Structures and Resources

On behalf of the Dean and Chapter, the safeguarding lead (Canon Steward) continues to exercise general oversight of all safeguarding policy and its implementation across Westminster Abbey, St Margaret's Church, Westminster Abbey Choir School and the Abbey's ancillary buildings and grounds. He is supported by the ASO, the designated safeguarding lead for the Choir School and the St Margaret's Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator. External support is provided by the Abbey Safeguarding Adviser (ASA) from the Diocese of London and the independent chair of the Abbey's Safeguarding Reference Group (WASRG).

The WASRG met quarterly throughout 2018, providing a forum for the discussion of issues, sharing of best practice as well as scrutiny, test and challenge on safeguarding matters. It now has fourteen standing members representing the Abbey, church and choir school together with external advisors who specialise in areas of child protection and adult mental health. It has benefitted this year from the addition of the Abbey's deputy head of security, Jon Reeves; Angela McDonald, the newly appointed lead for St Margaret's; and the now dedicated ASO. Meetings have been well attended and the discussions lively. The ASO provides a quarterly report on key areas of performance, which has been revised in format and contains more specific measures. The group has considered issues such as the report by Sir Roger Singleton on past case reviews and the newly revised Safeguarding Policy and Procedures from the Diocese of London.

The most significant resource development has been the appointment in May 2018 of Lee Elliot, a former Metropolitan Police child abuse investigator into the role of ASO, freeing up the HR lead to focus on more strategic issues. This has significantly reduced the 'very high' resourcing risk highlighted in my report for 2017.

Policy and Procedures

The Abbey safeguarding processes are set out in the *Policy for Safeguarding in Westminster Abbey & St Margaret's Church*. This document remains fit for purpose and is kept under constant review by the SAG, with only minor amendments made in 2018. The current Policy and Procedures will be reviewed in 2019 once the Church of England House of Bishops completes the process of revising the national safeguarding guidance and when the findings of a proposed independent audit are known.

Summary of Safeguarding Activity in 2018

Safer Recruitment – These practices form part of a network of checks and balances which will minimise the possibility of appointing inappropriate individuals to work with vulnerable groups. The HR department has continued to try to ensure that the Abbey adheres to the national *Practice Guidance: Risk Assessment for Individuals who may Pose a*

Risk to Children or Adults. The Abbey's Recruitment Policy takes account of the Church of England's policy framework, and no incidents of concern have been raised in 2018. A review of the current process is underway with a view to ensuring that a consistent approach is taken to selection of both staff and volunteers as well as increasing the number of trained staff to support the interview stage.

Vetting and Barring Checks – The Abbey has been using the company U-check for its Disclosure and Barring Service access to expedite the checking process for roles which involve working with the vulnerable. 125 applications were submitted in 2018 of which 97 were at the basic level and 28 enhanced checks were completed. All applicants received satisfactory certificates and none are outstanding.

Work is still underway to ensure that a robust process is put in place to check that all the visiting clergy, such as duty chaplains, have the correct vetting and have undergone the necessary safeguarding training. It had been hoped that this would be completed in 2018, and although significant progress has been made and there aren't believed to be any issues, it remains a priority for 2019.

Training – In general, whilst getting personnel working at the Abbey trained remains a challenge it should be noted that completion of courses is significantly up on the previous year. This is a significant achievement, but this area will still require commitment and strong leadership to maintain momentum throughout 2019 and further reduce the backlog.

Incident Reporting – A revised Safeguarding Incident Report Form was developed by the ASO, and I am very pleased to report that the uptake in identifying and reporting concerns has been significant, with an increase from 10 incidents in 2017 to 40 in 2018. This process now provides an evidence base for analysis.

This is the first time that we have had such a detailed profile of incidents within the Abbey, and it provides a useful platform on which to base future safeguarding activity. Additionally, this has led to a review for the Abbey on the response to mental health issues by Neil Bunker, the mental health liaison officer.

Multi Agency Working/Core Groups – The Abbey continued throughout 2018 to be represented at a National Core Group constituted to address the issues from a criminal case which has now been discontinued.

Risk Register

The SRG has continued to manage a detailed, 16-point risk register following the Abbey's standard format for the management of risk. It is linked to the Safeguarding Action Plan and allows for cross referencing of issues between the two documents. None of the risks are judged to be 'very high' and only two score at the bottom of the 'high' category. I am satisfied all are being addressed appropriately, and the deputy head of security has produced a very comprehensive review of the Abbey estate in a safeguarding context which has led to a number of improvements.

Safeguarding Action Plan

The Action Plan is designed to drive the business of improving safeguarding at the Abbey. It is a list of longer term activities underway and is additional to the routine actions arising from the SRG meetings. A total of 43 substantive actions have been generated since the formation of the SRG, and 32 of these have now been completed. The remaining 11 are all being progressed with clearly defined leads and timescales set for completion. This is a good indicator of how much work has been undertaken by those responsible for safeguarding at the Abbey.

National Issues

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) is continuing its hearings and in April published an interim report with 18 recommendations, none of which applied directly to the Church. In November a further request for information by IICSA was made to every Diocese via the National Safeguarding Team. At this stage, there is no evidence to suggest the Abbey will feature significantly in this and it remains that no one related to the Abbey has core participant status in the Inquiry.

In February 2018, Sir Roger Singleton provided a report to Synod on the adequacy of the Church of England's past case review. He made nine recommendations and these have been reviewed by the SRG, as direct comment was made about Cathedrals. The ASO produced the report mapping the Abbey's response which had thankfully already been covered by Hedley Review of 2016. No further action is required at this stage.

Concluding Remarks

I am pleased to report that the Abbey's approach to safeguarding has continued to improve throughout 2018, and the level of activity in the second half of the year has noticeably increased with the appointment of a dedicated safeguarding officer. It is clear that the Abbey is making good progress against the Action Plan and in mitigating risk to the vulnerable. Planning for an independent audit of the Abbey's safeguarding procedures is well underway and expected to take place in the first half of 2019. We can look forward to learning from any observations made.

I would like to conclude by thanking Helen Averill, the former head of HR and operational lead safeguarding, who left her role in the Spring. Her dedication and commitment to safeguarding at the Abbey was significant, as was her contribution to the establishment of the current safeguarding framework.

Peter Spindler
January 2019
