



**REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT CHAIR
OF THE SAFEGUARDING REFERENCE GROUP
TO THE DEAN & CHAPTER**

1st January 2022 – 31st December 2022

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 (SRG). It provides detail of safeguarding activity in 2022 and offers assurance on how well the Abbey is performing, drawing upon data provided by David Pate, the temporary Abbey Safeguarding Officer (T/ASO). The following seven sections detail how the Abbey is working to ensure the wellbeing of vulnerable groups and the safety of those who may be at risk of harm. This is my sixth safeguarding annual report and, whilst much of the information below will not be new to the Dean and Chapter and the data is an amalgam of that contained in the ASO's quarterly reports, it is a report written for publication as part of the ongoing commitment to openness and transparency by the Abbey in its approach to safeguarding.

1. Safeguarding Governance Structures and Resources

As Dean, The Very Reverend Dr David Hoyle has retained the lead on the oversight of all safeguarding policy and practice and its implementation across Westminster Abbey, St Margaret's Church, Westminster Abbey Choir School and the ancillary buildings and grounds. The ASO has continued to work with the Chapel of St Mary Undercroft in the Palace of Westminster, and the SRG will be considering extending its remit to assist the Dean in exercising his ecclesiastical oversight of arrangements there.

The Dean has been supported throughout 2022 by Juliette Curtin the ASO and subsequently from September by the T/ASO, who has been employed on a part-time basis to cover for her maternity leave. There was a seamless handover of responsibility between the two, and I am very pleased with the ease at which Mr Pate has been able to take on the role, building on his previous experience as safeguarding co-ordinator at St Paul's Cathedral.

Additional internal support has been provided by the Receiver General (RG) who is a key member of the SRG, external support is provided by the Abbey Safeguarding Adviser (ASA) from the Diocese of London as well as a local authority representative at SRG and me as the independent chair of the Abbey's SRG. Life at the Abbey has returned to a near but different normality after the pandemic restrictions lifted in the Spring and I am pleased to report that the momentum of safeguarding has been maintained, with the SRG meeting on four occasions, in January, April, July and October.

2. Policy and Procedures

The Abbey safeguarding processes are set out in the *Policy for Safeguarding in Westminster Abbey & St Margaret's Church*. These documents will be reviewed and updated as necessary in 2023. Dean and Chapter will be advised of any amendments prior to approval. A draft safeguarding policy and procedure is currently being prepared to support the proposed girls' choir at St Margaret's church. It is important that the Abbey continues to

ensure that safeguarding is considered in the planning for all significant events, and the T/ASO will be working with Dean and Chapter to enable that to happen.

3. Summary of Safeguarding Preventative Activity in 2022

Safer Recruitment – These practices form part of the framework of checks and balances to minimise the possibility of appointing inappropriate individuals to work with those at risk of harm. Recruitment during the pandemic was minimal but resumed in June 2022, and no issues or concerns have arisen. Safer recruitment training continued, and three members of staff completed the course in 2022.

Vetting and Barring Checks – The Abbey continues to employ U-Check for its Disclosure and Barring Service access to expedite the safeguarding vetting process. It has been decided to renew checks every three rather than five years which is a positive step forward. The following points summarise the activity in the reporting year (excluding volunteers)

- 219 DBS checks were requested.
- 3 DBS checks were returned marked.¹
- 10 DBS checks are outstanding and are being processed by HR and U-check.

Training – The following table provides a detailed breakdown of what training (excluding Westminster Abbey Choir School) has been delivered in 2022:

Training	Departments identified to be trained	Total completed in 2022	Number of people outstanding
Basic Safeguarding Awareness	All staff and volunteers	75	25
Foundation	Selected Staff and volunteers	78	10
Leadership	Selected leadership staff	2	0
Senior leadership	Dean and Chapter HoDs	8	1
Mental Health First Aid	Selected job roles across departments	0	0
Safer Recruitment	Managers with recruitment responsibilities	3	0
Suicide Prevention	Selected job roles across departments	0	0

Training attendance is overseen by the HR department, and it remains a challenge to ensure all departments keep their staff at the required level of training compliance, with the RG intervening on one occasion to ensure the need was fully understood by department heads. HR are working even more closely with the T/ASO to maintain standards in particular with regard to the training of volunteers.

Collaboration in training with St Paul's Cathedral has continued, and in October staff from the Abbey joined with colleagues from across the Cathedrals' Network for a two day awareness raising event at St Paul's focussing on mental health and malign influences existent in a faith context.

Incident/Concern Reporting – The identification of possible safeguarding incidents, concerns or issues and bringing them formally to notice is a good indicator of the safeguarding culture of an organisation. The pandemic unfortunately inhibited our ability to make a meaningful

¹ The marked checks relate to DBS renewals for existing staff who have not had any further criminal activity

year on year comparison of reports, but footfall at the Abbey increased significantly in 2022, and there has been a return to activities, such as educational visits, that were in place prior to the COVID pandemic. Unsurprisingly, there has been an increase in reporting this year, with the number of incidents recorded more than doubling to 51 from 23 in 2021. The following table highlights the emerging pattern of reporting for the last six years:

Year	Safeguarding concerns/incidents reported	Of which were concerns over mental health matters
2017	10	N/K
2018	40	20
2019	35	N/K
2020	23	10
2021	23	11
2022	51	35

Issues with adult visitor’s perceived mental health and wellbeing is the main driver for increased reporting. This is the highest total since recording in this format began, but rather than a concern, it is more a reflection of a healthier safeguarding culture. Thankfully, only three of these cases were significant. One was managed through a Serious Case Management Group (CSMG), the response to a non-recent case as a result of a Past Case Review 2 submission, and two by Local Authority processes.

The T/ASO is working with the Diocese of London to explore how the Abbey can link in with the new national case management system and thereby improve the recording and managing of case files at the Abbey as well as potentially providing external scrutiny and resilience. Progress on this will be reported to Dean and Chapter in 2023. A review of the safeguarding pages on the Abbey website has led to a simplification of the process for external reporting of concerns, and work to develop an improved on-line reporting form is underway.

Multi Agency Working – Nine cases have been referred to statutory services for their information and follow-up action. The Abbey did not convene any new Serious Case Management Groups in 2022 (formerly known as core groups) apart from maintaining the one noted above.

Safeguarding Agreements/Plans – 14 individuals are currently on the Abbey’s ‘adults to notice’ record, an increase of four in 2022. Safeguarding and risk mitigation arrangements have been put in place to support them, and each has a permanent exclusion, suspension, arrangements for additional support or a safeguarding agreement in place to ensure the safety and support of all Abbey users. This scheme has been reviewed by the T/ASO and the files brought up to date; however clarity from Chapter on the admission of individuals who present differently from the norm is still required.

4. Risk Register

There is a detailed, eight-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. One of the risks is judged to be ‘very high’ and relates to the complexities of volunteer management across departments. Three score at the bottom of the ‘high’ category and four are deemed low risk.

5. 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 initiatives and is now managed by the T/ASO and delivered through

the Safeguarding Action Group. Currently there are 17 actions on the plan, but it should be noted that progress has been limited against these due to resource constraints.

6. Additional Safeguarding Activity and Forward Look

There have been a number of additional safeguarding developments during 2022 worthy of bringing to the Dean and Chapter's attention:

- The debate on unaccompanied minors' access to the Abbey has now been resolved and agreed by Dean and Chapter, ensuring a safer, more consistent approach.
- The system of on-call cover by Deputy Safeguarding Officers introduced in 2021 has not been as effective in providing out-of-hours cover in the absence of the T/ASO as hoped. This has led to a more robust arrangement being put in place, with support from the diocese if required.
- Work with the volunteers at the Brotherhood, led by HR, has continued to ensure their policies and procedures complement those of the Abbey.
- The Abbey took part for the first time in the Safeguarding Sunday event initiated by the National Safeguarding Team in November.
- The Service Level Agreement with the Diocese of London has now been formally signed and is enhancing collaborative working.
- An information-sharing agreement with the Church of England has now been signed, enabling a more compliant process for referrals and cross-checking of databases.
- A single point of contact with the Metropolitan Police Service has been identified to enable closer liaison and information sharing.
- There has been a strengthening in the operational support provided to the Choir School, which has enhanced their resilience in safeguarding matters.

7. Concluding Remarks

I am pleased to report that the Abbey's positive approach to safeguarding has remained consistent throughout 2022 despite the challenges posed by significant national events. There continues to be a clear commitment from those I engage with to enhance the Abbey's safeguarding responses and ensure those most at risk of harm are safe to visit and worship at this iconic British institution. The T/ASO has been a particularly strong appointment, bringing a fresh perspective to the Abbey, and is remaining in contact with the ASO as part of the Keeping in Touch programme.

As ever, there remain opportunities to build on and enhance the existing safeguarding arrangements, and I am encouraged by the efforts of the T/ASO in driving up the levels of reporting of incidents or concerns. I am, however, slightly worried about resilience in the ASO role post-pandemic and urge the Abbey to monitor the capacity of a part-time postholder in this vital role.

One area of risk, not unique to the Abbey, which Dean and Chapter will want to continue to monitor is the compliance of the volunteer cohort with safeguarding requirements and the challenges faced by HR and department heads in ensuring consistency in application of policies relating to the recruitment, training and vetting of volunteers.

Peter Spindler
Independent Safeguarding Advisor
February 2023