

On the vine

A Longer read: Making the Diocese of Salisbury a Safer Place

Our Safeguarding Chair Steve Long opens up about 'Ensuring the Diocese of Salisbury provides a safe and caring environment for everyone but especially children, and adults who may be at risk of abuse and neglect'.

When I retired from Wiltshire Police in 2012, I was looking forward to working part time at Salisbury District Hospital and spending more of my leisure time cycling around quiet country roads in Wiltshire. So how I found myself meeting Bishop Nicholas in 2014 and agreeing to Chair the Diocese Safeguarding Management Board (DSMG) is still a bit of a mystery!

I don't think it is too harsh to say that in 2014 the Church of England had a bit of catching up to do to satisfy a commitment to provide a safe and caring environment to children and vulnerable adults and to ensure that this commitment was understood by everyone and reflected in policies and practices. While I am not saying we have cracked it, I do think here in the Diocese of Salisbury we have made good progress and it is worth, in 2020, reflecting on what has changed in the last 6 years.

Leadership

The term safeguarding was in 2014, I would suggest, relatively new to many people and it has taken time to raise the level of awareness and understanding of what action is necessary to support and protect victims of abuse. My view today is that leaders in the Diocese have embraced the importance of safeguarding through their words and actions. Most importantly Bishop Nicholas has led the way - he has been ready to listen and learn throughout and has given his personal support to me and the Safeguarding Team. To be honest, if he hadn't, I wouldn't still be here!

The Safeguarding Team

I was fortunate in that I took up my post at the same time as Heather Bland was appointed as the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser (DSA). Heather, as we know, is hugely experienced and highly conscientious and the Diocese has benefitted enormously from her contribution. Since 2014 the team has been expanded to include in 2016 a Trainer (Jonathan Whiter), in 2017 an administrator (but also our IT genius) Adrian Smale and (in 2020) a second DSA, Jem Carter (recently retired as a Superintendent in Wiltshire Police) to work in a job-share with Heather. The Safeguarding Team is now part of the DBF People, Safeguarding and Learning wider team.

Since 2014 the National Safeguarding Team has developed and implemented a wide range of policy and guidance documents as well as a comprehensive set of training modules. The implementation of all these national initiatives as well as delivering the day to day safeguarding service could not have been achieved as effectively as they have without such a dedicated and hard-working team (and one which I know is highly regarded not just within the Diocese but nationally and regionally).

Training

As I referred to above, the training commitment over the past 6 years has been considerable. A staggering number of staff and volunteers (more than 5,000!) have now received safeguarding training in accordance with the national framework. This has been achieved due to the hard work and leadership of Jonathan and others in the Safeguarding Team but also as a result of the willingness of a significant number of volunteers to be trained as lay trainers. We really couldn't have done it without their help.

But it is not only the number of people who have been trained which is impressive - the quality of the training is demonstrated in the consistently excellent feedback given by attendees. A major challenge we now have (as does every other diocese) is to show that all this training has made a real difference to the attitudes, behaviour and actions of the clergy and all others with safeguarding responsibility. This is an issue we have discussed at the DSMG and with the National Safeguarding Team and will be tackled in the coming months.

Parishes

Parishes have a vital role to play in safeguarding. Over the last 6 years the increased priority given by parishes to safeguarding has been impressive. We can now be confident that each parish has in place a safeguarding policy which is in accord with Diocese guidance and has appointed a Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO). We know that safeguarding is regularly discussed at many PCC meetings and most have included it on their web site.

Of particular note is the contribution of the Lay Trainers and the PSOs. They have an important role to play in key areas such as monitoring Disclosure Barring Service (DBS) checks and providing a focal point in the parish for safeguarding activity. Every 6 months a workshop is held for the lay trainers and PSOs at which the safeguarding team give updates but most importantly, attendees have the opportunity to ask questions or raise concerns with me and the team.

Technology

Not so long ago DBS checks relied on a paper system and lots of chasing by a member of staff in Church House. Now applications are made electronically, reminders are sent out automatically and continuous monitoring of who has or hasn't had their checks done is possible. Further development by Adrian Smale and the IT team has enabled this information to be made available at Parish level. Work is hoped to proceed that will provide similar information and monitoring of training so that the Diocese (and Parishes) will know who should attend what module and when.

Our Priorities

Each year a set of priorities or objectives are discussed at the DSMG (see below) meetings and presented to Bishops Council for approval. Examples of objectives over the last few years include taking action to support Parishes and PSOs and the development and implementation of a communication strategy to raise awareness of changes in safeguarding policy and the benefits improved practice has delivered. There is no doubt that agreeing annual priorities has helped the safeguarding team and myself to focus on those areas where we need to improve but we do still need to be better at measuring or demonstrating progress.

Diocesan Safeguarding Management Group (DSMG)

The original intention was for this group to include representatives of statutory agencies to provide an independent oversight of safeguarding actions across the Diocese. However, attendance was such that we could have held meetings in the nearest telephone box! Moreover, it became apparent that we needed to increase the involvement of parishes and improve engagement with the safeguarding agenda across the Diocese.

Following a review of membership and terms of reference of the group, the quarterly meetings are now attended by clergy and PSOs from parishes, diocesan representatives including Archdeacon Sue Groom who represents the Bishop, as well, of course, as the Safeguarding Team. Since his arrival the Diocesan Secretary David Pain has also attended our meetings which demonstrates not only his personal commitment but reminds everyone how important safeguarding is to the Diocese.

We are presently in discussion with all the statutory agencies as to how they can help us keep on track and I can also announce that we have someone who works for the charity Splitz (which provides support to victims of sexual abuse and domestic violence across the south west) who has agreed to join the group. This will be of huge help in ensuring we always consider the perspective of the victim.

Culture

Underpinning all our objectives is a determination to *promote a culture in the Diocese where Safeguarding is recognised as core to providing a safe and caring environment for everyone.*

While I would argue that good progress has been made in the implementation of safeguarding policies and practices, some of which I have referred to in this article, it is legitimate to ask the question, 'Has the culture changed in a way which has helped to make the Diocese a safer and caring environment?'

There are many definitions of culture but a simple one is 'a way of life' of groups of people, meaning the way they do things. So has safeguarding become a way of life within the Diocese of Salisbury? Is safeguarding routinely considered when we go about our daily tasks? Crucially, has our way of life become such that the abuse of children or vulnerable adults within the Diocese has become less likely and are victims confident that when abuse does happen they will be listened to and that appropriate, timely and robust action will follow?

We will all have our opinions based on our own experiences and perceptions but I think the culture has improved and we can answer the above questions positively. This has been achieved as a consequence of the actions and commitment of many people in the Diocese including the Safeguarding Team and those with leadership responsibilities but also many others who have played their part in taking positive action to help us achieve our goals, including, crucially, the Parish Safeguarding Officers.

There remains much to do and there will be new challenges, but I am confident now of a depth of understanding of what is meant when we say *safeguarding is core to providing a safe and caring environment for everyone.*

On a personal note, I have enjoyed being involved with the Diocese and being a member of the Safeguarding Team. I have derived a lot of satisfaction from what has been achieved and seeing the change in culture. (And I am still finding time to get out on my bike whenever I can!)

If you have questions or want to get involved with safeguarding in the Diocese please email me at DSMG.Chair@salisbury.anglican.org.uk.

Steve Long

Chair Diocese Safeguarding Management Group