

CATHOLIC SAFEGUARDING STANDARDS AGENCY

Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle

Audit Report

February 2025

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1. Introduction

1.1 This is an audit of the Safeguarding arrangements for the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, undertaken as part of the Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency's (CSSA) programme of audits of all 22 Dioceses of England and Wales. The audit was undertaken in accordance with the contractual agreement between the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle and the CSSA. Public accountability and transparency are provided by the publication of this full report.

1.2 The Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle have been the subject of a full review of safeguarding and combined audit in the first quarter of 2023 which achieved an overall grade of Early Progress, and a subsequent interim review of Safeguarding in Leadership, Governance, Ministry and Culture which was not subject to grading, in May 2024, both of which are available on the CSSA and Diocesan websites.¹

1.3 The Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle consists of 135 parishes (including 173 churches), which are organised into 18 parish partnerships and five episcopal areas. Parishes are served by approximately 112 priests and 42 deacons, with some of the 32 retired priests also providing supply ministry. Pope Francis appointed Bishop Stephen Wright the fifteenth Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle on the 14 June 2023. The Episcopal Installation of the Right Reverend Stephen Wright took place at the Cathedral Church of St Mary, Newcastle on Wednesday, 19 July 2023.

1.4 Safeguarding governance is provided by the Board of Trustees who delegate some areas of responsibility to the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee. The Safeguarding Team consists of the Safeguarding Coordinator, who has been in post since 2022 and was previously a Safeguarding Advisor with the Diocese, and two full time Safeguarding Advisors, a senior Safeguarding Administrator and one full time and two part time Safeguarding Administrators (two full time equivalent). The Safeguarding Team are based at St. Vincent's Diocesan Offices, St. Cuthbert's House, West Road, Newcastle.

1.5 Formal notification of the CSSA's intention to audit was initially provided to the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle on the 3 September 2024, along with the self-assessment document with an agreed completion and return date of 4 November 2024. A guide of additional required evidence and supporting documentation was also supplied by the CSSA, and a secure method of sharing the material was

¹ <https://catholicsafeguarding.org.uk/audits-and-reports/cssa-audit-reports/>

agreed. The self-assessment was submitted on 4 November 2024, followed by supporting evidence on the 17 November 2024.

1.6 The baseline audit was completed between the 24-29 November 2024. The lead analyst spent three days in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, and the remaining audit work was completed remotely by both the lead and second analysts, and a third analyst has supported with casework, observations of ministries and interviews.

2. Scope and Methodology

2.1 A pilot baseline audit phase had highlighted the need to assess all Eight National Safeguarding Standards at the baseline level, and this was the method employed in the re-audit of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle. In advance of the formal audit week, the Diocese completed an audit self-assessment tool providing information on Diocesan adherence to the individual safeguarding standards and progress in the overall implementation of said standards. Information provided within this self-assessment has been reviewed by the analysts, alongside key documentary evidence to support the self-assessment. The Diocesan website² was also accessed to facilitate analysis of the self-assessment.

2.2 The Safeguarding Coordinator provided the CSSA with a list of all safeguarding cases relevant to the previous twelve-month period, seven of which were chosen to be audited in detail using the approved CSSA case audit tool. The seven cases which were chosen were a representation of the range of casework activity by the Safeguarding Team, and remote access was provided to the electronic case management system operational within the Diocese. Some case work audits were supplemented by brief liaison with the Safeguarding Team. Case audit judgements were then finalised, before being submitted to the Quality Assurance Manager for moderation. The Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle also uploaded a sample of contact notes, which are used to record low level concerns which, although they have not subject to individual casework audit, have been reviewed by the analysts to inform this audit.

2.3 Online surveys were sent to 166 Parish Safeguarding Representatives (PSRs) and 177 Clergy from across the Diocese to capture as wide a variety of views and opinions from those serving within the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle as

² <https://diocesehn.org.uk/>

possible, utilising open ended questions about their experiences of safeguarding within the Diocese over the past 12 months. Responses are received anonymously, and any self-identifying information included within free text answers was removed prior to sharing with the Diocese.

2.4 Surveys for clergy and parish safeguarding representatives (PSRs) were open for completion between the 14 October- 21 November 2024. Responses were received from 55 members of the clergy, which constitutes a response rate of 31% from the 177 clergy members who were sent the survey link and 64 PSRs which constitutes a 39% response rate from the 166 PSRs who were sent the survey link. The response figures constitute fair response rates and enable the Diocese to draw some conclusions from the survey data.

2.5 In addition to the surveys, two focus groups were conducted online during the formal audit week with a small number of clergy and PSR participants. The focus groups comprised of informal group conversations which focused on key areas of safeguarding.

2.6 As part of ongoing development the CSSA have piloted observations of Parish ministries in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle. The Diocese were invited to identify Parish ministries, and individuals engaged with the Safeguarding Team who would be willing to meet with analysts. Analysts observed a Mass, Children's Liturgy, formation facilities, and the Justice and Peace Project³, in addition to individual informal discussions which were held with Parish Priests, a survivor of abuse, two respondents subject to safeguarding plans, PSRs and Parish and curial staff. Analysts were also contacted directly by two survivors of abuse and their contributions have been included.

2.7 Interviews have also taken place with key Diocesan individuals, including:

- Bishop Stephen Wright
- Director of Education
- Safeguarding Advisor 1
- Safeguarding Senior Administrator
- Safeguarding Advisor 2
- Safeguarding Coordinator
- Episcopal Vicar for care of the Clergy
- Lourdes Pilgrimage core group
- Lay Trustee

³ <https://diocesehn.org.uk/services/caritas/justice-peace-refugee-project/>

- Chief Operating Officer
- Chancellor
- Diocesan Social Worker
- Director of Youth Ministry Team
- Safeguarding Committee Chair and Lay Trustee
- Lay Trustee Youth Ministry Team

2.8 The CSSA are grateful to all Diocesan clergy, employees, volunteers, and members of the public who facilitated the completion of the audit.

3. Audit Grading

3.1 Practice was assessed against the Eight National Safeguarding Standards⁴ adopted by the Catholic Church in England and Wales. The CSSA Diocesan Maturity Matrix was used to grade audit evidence, with scores from the individual sub-standards being used to calculate the overall standard gradings. Each standard was graded on an ascending seven-point scale of *Below Basic*, *Basic*, *Early Progress*, *Firm Progress*, *Results Being Achieved*, *Comprehensive Assurance*, and *Exemplary*. Grades for individual standards were combined to produce an overall grading.

OVERALL GRADING FOR HEXHAM AND NEWCASTLE DIOCESE	Results Being Achieved
Standard 1 - Safeguarding is embedded in the Church body's leadership, governance, ministry and culture	Comprehensive Assurance
Standard 2 - Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message	Results Being Achieved
Standard 3 - Engaging with and Caring for those who report having been harmed	Comprehensive Assurance
Standard 4 - Effective Management of Allegations and Concerns	Results Being Achieved
Standard 5 - Management and Support of Subjects of Allegations and Concerns (respondents)	Results Being Achieved
Standard 6 - Robust Human Resource Management	Results Being Achieved
Standard 7 - Training and Support for Safeguarding	Results Being Achieved
Standard 8 - Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement	Results Being Achieved

3.2 The key findings of this audit are that the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle has achieved an overall grading of Results Being Achieved at this time, with gradings of Comprehensive Assurance in Standards 1 and 3 attributed to the work of the Diocesan leadership in embedding a culture where safeguarding is seen as

⁴ [The Eight National Safeguarding Standards \(catholicsafeguarding.org.uk\)](https://www.catholicsafeguarding.org.uk)

everyone's responsibility, and the good work that has been completed with victims and survivors of abuse over the past 12 months.

4. Assessment against the Standards

4.1 Standard 1: Safeguarding is embedded in the Church body's leadership, governance, ministry, and culture

4.1.1 Strengths

- A zero-tolerance approach to abuse is observed in the Diocese
- Safeguarding governance is effective
- Safeguarding Action Plan in operation
- There is a culture of safeguarding
- The Bishop is committed to safeguarding
- The Safeguarding Team profile

4.1.2 The Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle has made a firm commitment to a zero-tolerance approach to abuse, referencing Vos Estis Lux Mundi ⁵and the declaration of Pope Francis on the safeguarding pages of the website. Observations of ministries and interviews with clergy, staff and volunteers evidenced that consideration is consistently given to the safety of all those that access the church. Health and safety and safeguarding are standing items on all meetings that are held across the Diocese, which was observed in the minutes of meetings held by the curial staff and Parish councils.

4.1.3 The Diocese have responded effectively to recommendation from the CSSA Safeguarding Review Report in 2023, as governance processes (as identified in the Interim Report published by the CSSA in September 2024) have been subject to review, and the Board of Trustees now has a higher numbers of lay trustees than clergy, a structure that has been formally ratified by the Bishop. The additional lay Trustees offer further professional expertise and guidance to the Diocese.

4.1.4 The Board of Trustees meet quarterly, following closely behind the meetings of the Safeguarding Committee. The Safeguarding Action plan and a suite of linked

⁵ Vos Estis Lux Mundi is a motu proprio issued by Pope Francis in May 2019 (and updated in 2023) which establishes procedural norms to combat sexual abuse and ensure that bishops and religious superiors are held accountable for their action: [20230325-motu-proprio-vos-estis-lux-mundi-aggiornato.pdf](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/procurator/2019/05/20190519-motu-proprio-vos-estis-lux-mundi-aggiornato.pdf)

Key Performance Indicators are reviewed by the Board of Trustees every quarter that includes compliance with both training and safer recruitment. The Safeguarding Coordinator prepares a report on safeguarding cases and attends the Board of Trustees meeting to answer any questions, written feedback of any actions are provided to the Safeguarding Coordinator shortly thereafter. The Board of Trustees meeting is followed by a joint lunch with staff in the curial offices, enabling relationships to be developed and an opportunity for any staff members to share concerns directly with members of the board.

4.1.5 Information flows easily within the governance structures due to the placement of key individuals such as the interim Chair of the Safeguarding Committee who is also a Trustee, and both the Vicar General and another member of clergy who are also members of the Board of Trustees and Safeguarding Committee. The Diocese have given careful consideration to the membership of the Safeguarding Committee, and in addition to the clergy representation and a parish safeguarding representative, there are a number of lay members who again offer a range of professional expertise, including legal, health, probation, education and a member with previous experience within faith-based organisations. The Bishop attends at least one meeting of the Safeguarding Committee annually. The Safeguarding Committee reviews all information prior to the Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees delegate additional responsibilities including reviewing policies and contact notes to a sub-group of the Safeguarding Committee.

4.1.6 The Safeguarding Action plan is aligned to the Eight National Safeguarding Standards and recommendations that have been identified as part of previous CSSA reviews, both nationally and specifically for the Diocese. The plan is RAG rated and owned by leaders, and actions are delegated as appropriate to departments or individuals. The Safeguarding Action plan, whilst subject to quarterly review by the Board of Trustees and the Safeguarding Committee, is also frequently reviewed by the Safeguarding Team. The Safeguarding Action plan was shared with the charity commission and was made available online for stakeholder feedback. The Safeguarding Action plan is driving positive developments in safeguarding practice and providing opportunities for additional consideration of activity that could enhance practice. The risk register is also reviewed by the Safeguarding Committee and the Board of Trustees on a quarterly basis, and there is evidence of steps taken to mitigate risks to the Diocese, including ensuring a more effective Safeguarding Committee, which by its terms of reference ensures role descriptors have been developed and that appointments to the Safeguarding Committee are time limited.

4.1.7 The culture of safeguarding was observed to be of particular strength in all areas of ministry observed by the analysts and is a testament to the importance that the Diocese has placed on culture as a result of the listening exercise, which will be discussed later in this report. Unplanned visits to the Cathedral evidenced volunteers working in pairs to safeguard one another, curial staff discussed considerations of safeguarding when re-designing confessionals and the finance team discussed potential risks of financial abuse when moving Parishes to online banking, advising analysts of links that are to be made for discussions with the Safeguarding Team. Similarly, within individual Parishes excellent risk management and the use of technology were observed to promote safeguarding. In the practice of volunteer visits, volunteers record their visits using an online form which is available on the Parish website, which once completed is immediately sent to the Parish Secretary who reviews this for any indications of potential safeguarding concerns and in turn shares this with the Safeguarding Team.

4.1.8 The culture of safeguarding can also be observed in the Diocesan management of the Lourdes Pilgrimage. Pilgrimage volunteers are recruited safely and are subject to role descriptions. In person training is provided by the Pilgrimage Core Group in conjunction with the Diocesan Safeguarding Team and a Registered Helpers handbook is provided. All helpers are identifiable by a red lanyard when travelling and there is a mobile phone that is used and managed by one of the Core Group members. Any concerns on Pilgrimage can be recorded on SharePoint ensuring the Safeguarding Team are kept fully aware. The youth volunteers work in pairs and sign a code of conduct regarding what is expected of them.

4.1.9 The Bishop has publicly set the tone of the importance of safeguarding within the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, and the senior leadership and the safeguarding department are delivering the work that consolidates this message. Both clergy and PSRs, in individual discussions and focus groups, highlighted that whilst safeguarding has always been a consideration of the Diocese, the current Bishop is driving the ethos that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, which is a term used in his homilies, safeguarding webpages and posters. The clergy have shared that their files are reviewed by the Bishop and Safeguarding Team before appointments are made, offering assurances to one another. A clergy respondent to the survey commented that *"The Bishop and Board of Trustees and Senior Clergy take their Safeguarding responsibilities very seriously and provide a clear and confident direction for Safeguarding across the Diocese"*.

4.1.10 The commitment and work of the Safeguarding Team has also received praise from clergy who shared that they felt well supported by the Safeguarding Team to discharge their safeguarding responsibilities, and whilst some survey respondents did not directly praise the work of the Safeguarding Team, equally there was no criticism offered. Similarly, the majority of PSR survey respondents and focus group participants shared that they felt well supported in their roles and found the Safeguarding Team to be approachable, and that sound advice was provided swiftly.

4.1.11 Areas for development:

- Monitor trends in low level concern reporting
- Additional stakeholder feedback to be sought on the Action and Implementation plan

4.1.12 It is positive to note that the Diocese have a low-level concerns policy which is encompassing of all those who minister, work or volunteer in any part of the Diocese and it clearly highlights that this includes clubs, associations and Parish groups. The definition of low level concerns is highlighted as *'Low level concern' is any safeguarding concern which is inconsistent with the standards of behaviour and conduct expected of Diocesan Personnel and the Diocesan Family including inappropriate conduct outside of Diocesan or parish activities but is otherwise not considered serious enough to make a referral to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), police, local adult and children services or the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). The term 'low-level' concern does not mean that it is insignificant'* The low -level concerns policy has been ratified and is publicly available on the website. Practice with managing low-level concerns has been observed to be appropriate as contact notes used to capture low level concerns are subject to oversight from a smaller cohort of the Safeguarding Committee. The low-level concerns policy has been operational since October 2024 and therefore needs time to further embed to measure its impact within the Diocese, a date for review has been agreed as September 2025. It is recommended that when reviewing the policy there is also analysis of what information is being reported and similarly where information is not being reported, examining trends in Parishes and ministries. It is also recommended that feedback from stakeholders is sought to ensure that the policy is effective in practice.

4.1.13 The Safeguarding Committee as previously highlighted is an area of strength for the Diocese with a good representation of skills and experiences. The current interim Chair will soon be replaced by a new permanent Chair, who has been

identified and who joined the Board of Trustees in September 2024. The Diocese have reported that the absence of a permanent Safeguarding Committee Chair has not impacted on progress being made, which is evidenced by the continued progression and development of the Safeguarding Action Plan. The appointment of a permanent Chair however will be welcomed by the Diocese and will offer further stability to the Safeguarding Committee.

4.1.14 The Safeguarding Action plan as previously identified can be seen to be developing and overseeing effective safeguarding practice, and the plan has been made publicly available for feedback and discussed with key groups such as PSRs. The Safeguarding Action plan will soon be the Safeguarding Implementation plan, which again the Diocese should ensure is published on their website. The Diocese may also want to give further consideration as to how stakeholder feedback from Parishioners can be obtained.

4.1.15 Standard 1 Graded: Comprehensive Assurance

4.2 Standard 2: Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message

4.2.1 Strengths:

- A safeguarding Communication plan is in place
- The leadership are seen to own safeguarding messages
- Safeguarding messages are delivered through a range of channels and widely accessible
- Up to date Safeguarding communications are delivered
- The Diocese has strong and effective links to other church bodies and organisations

4.2.2 A Safeguarding Communications plan has been drafted and ratified, and clearly aligns the Diocesan mission with the principles of safeguarding. The Communication plan highlights the purpose of safeguarding communications as *"to confirm that safeguarding in the Church is everyone's responsibility, both clergy and laity, in order to prevent issues arising – but also to ensure that people know what to do if they become aware of any allegations or concerns"*, and *"To reassure all stakeholders about the quality of our policies, professional practices and our use of a continuous learning approach"*. The Communication plan states that target audiences include all those who work, volunteer or minister in the Diocese, and also parishioners and victims and survivors of abuse. Key messages are shared in the

plan, in addition to who owns the messages and how the messages will be communicated including the channels of communication which will be utilised, it is highlighted that the messages will be subject to ongoing evaluation. The Safeguarding Communication plan has a review date of May 2025.

4.2.3 As identified in the Safeguarding Communications plan, leaders within the Diocese are observed to own safeguarding messages, analysts were consistently advised in interviews, focus groups and discussions with clergy, staff and volunteers that the Bishop leads on safeguarding. This is reinforced by the videos from the Bishop that are updated every 6 months on the safeguarding pages of the website, the most recent of which referenced the CSSA audit which was being completed.

4.2.4 Safeguarding communications have been observed through a range of channels and are widely accessible. A Mass held to thank PSRs for their service was supported by a Mass Booklet in which it is highlighted that their *"tireless efforts to keep our diocesan family safe are such a vital part of church life"*. Clergy interviews shared the importance of verbal communication through conversations and role modelling positive responses to concerns, which was also echoed by the Bishop. Analysts observed a curial office open day for clergy, in which various departments were displaying their work, again this was an opportunity for the Diocese to promote safeguarding communications which were observed not only within the Safeguarding Department, but also the Formation and Mission department who displayed safeguarding messages as part of a presentation that is used in their everyday practice.

4.2.5 Up to date safeguarding posters have been shared with Parishes by the Safeguarding Team in April 2024 and Parishes have been asked to confirm that these posters are displayed. Analysts observed safeguarding posters in all Churches and buildings that were visited, including Children's Liturgy and the Justice and Peace Project. Safeguarding also has a prominent position on the Diocesan website and the information is up to date and is inclusive of previous reviews of safeguarding practice. Within the website are sections for safeguarding news, support for survivors, how to report concerns, the Diocesan safeguarding commitment and PSR and Parish resources including promoting a culture of safeguarding and safer recruitment.

4.2.6 The Safeguarding Team has strong links with neighbouring Dioceses and the northern regional Safeguarding Coordinators who meet to discuss best practice in

safeguarding. The Diocese also enjoys strong links with external agencies, including the Universities of Durham, Sunderland, Newcastle and Northumbria, while the Safeguarding Coordinator is engaged in local Domestic Abuse forums.

4.2.7 Areas for development:

- Further consideration to be given to the accessibility of safeguarding messages for all
- Publication of the Communications plan and further engagement with key stakeholders to evaluate and develop safeguarding messages
- Consider information sharing agreements with statutory agencies

4.2.8 As previously highlighted analysts observed safeguarding communications within all observed ministries. Within the Justice and Peace project were posters about safeguarding topics such as spiritual abuse and there was evidence of some safeguarding communications in other languages. To ensure accessibility of safeguarding messages for all, the Diocese may wish to give consideration to further developing their safeguarding communications in other languages. Furthermore, the use of sign language interpreters on the Bishops videos, which have been successful in other Dioceses may also be beneficial within the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle. Similarly, within Children's Liturgy the Diocese may wish to consider child friendly/ accessible safeguarding communications.

4.2.9 Key stakeholders with roles on the Safeguarding Committee such as clergy and PSRs have contributed to the development of the Communications plan, and there are plans to engage the views of the Council of Priests, College of Consultors and LOUDfence⁶, however following publication of the Communication Plan the Diocese may wish to gather feedback more widely from key stakeholders such as children and parishioners and harder to reach groups such as victims and survivors who are not engaged with LOUDfence or the Safeguarding Team. The Diocese may also wish to consider what methods are going to be implemented to engage key stakeholders in the evaluation of safeguarding communications.

4.2.10 Information sharing protocols are now in place with the Diocesan Education department and there is evidence of use in practice to create safer environments across the Diocese, which in turn is promoting stronger working relationships. The Diocese will also wish to continue with plans to develop Information Sharing

⁶ 'LOUDfence' is an initiative promoted by the 'Survivors' Voices' organization, which involves people tying coloured ribbons and messages to a fence in a public show of support and solidarity with those affected by abuse. [LOUDfence](#)

Agreements (ISA) with statutory agencies, although there is evidence of information sharing with key agencies on casework.

4.2.11 Standard 2 Graded: Results Being Achieved

4.3 Standard 3: Engaging with and caring for those who report having been harmed

4.3.1 Strengths:

- The Bishop meets with survivors
- Annual LOUDfence events are planned for the Diocese
- A Victim and Survivor Commitment has been developed and published
- A range of bespoke services were signposted to in practice and via the Diocesan website.
- The Safeguarding Team Supports victims and survivors

4.3.2 The Bishop made an unequivocal public commitment to victims and survivors of abuse at his installation Mass, which was held with a LOUDfence event, where a survivor of abuse addressed the congregation. The ribbons of LOUDfence remain on the Bishop's chair within the Cathedral and is a symbolic message from the Diocese that there is no place for abuse within the Church. Within the safeguarding webpages is a short video where the Bishop, clergy and survivors of abuse share the importance of the event, and a survivor shares the significance of survivor voices being heard directly. Upon a visit to the Cathedral by analysts, a volunteer spoke unprompted about the installation Mass and the Bishop's embracing of victims and survivors of abuse. The Bishop continues to meet with victims and survivors of abuse, whether this is abuse suffered within Church organisations or structures or in wider society. The Bishop will meet with victims and survivors at a location of their choice to ensure that they are as comfortable as possible, and he has also shared that he respects the views of those victims and survivors who do not wish to meet with him. There is also evidence of the Bishop considering the views of victims and survivors with consideration to information presented on the website.

4.3.3 The Diocese have made a commitment to an annual LOUDfence event being held in the Diocese, this will be at various locations to support the message reaching as wider audience as possible. The Bishop is facilitating rooms within the Cathedral to be used for the organisation and production of the artwork for the LOUDfence event.

4.3.4 A Victim and Survivor Commitment has been operational within the Diocese since 2022 and can be located on the safeguarding pages of the Diocesan website and there is evidence of it being sent directly to victims and survivors engaged with the Safeguarding Team via email although it has recently been updated but is yet to be published. The updated Commitment states that *"The Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle acknowledges that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and has a zero tolerance approach to abuse."* Within the Victim and Survivor Commitment it is highlighted that every complaint made to the Diocese will be thoroughly examined, recorded and investigated, and there are 11 points highlighted that the Diocese is committed to ensuring, which includes a brief overview of how information will be managed and shared, and that funding for bespoke support will be considered on a case-by-case basis. The Victim and Survivor Commitment states how the Diocese will care for and support victims and survivors and invites comments from victims and survivors on the support that they have received. Where appropriate, and in line with the wishes of victims and survivors, case closure letters are used to finalise the support offered by the Diocese. The case closure letter welcomes feedback from survivors about the service that they have received.

4.3.5 The details of national support services for victims and survivors of abuse can be found on the safeguarding pages of the Diocesan website on which there are hyperlinks to services such as Minister and Clergy Sexual Abuse Survivors (MACAS) and Safe Spaces, the Diocese have also produced a small flyer available within Church buildings detailing support services. Within practice there is evidence of the Safeguarding Team developing relationships and agreements with local services and signposting and supporting victims and survivors to access those services as appropriate, bespoke services such as music therapy have also been commissioned, and the Diocese have advised that there are resources available for therapeutic interventions.

4.3.6 A survivor contributed to this audit by meeting with analysts and sharing that they received an overwhelmingly positive response from the Diocese on reporting their experiences. They shared that their Parish Priest was knowledgeable and had the immediate correct responses that allowed them to feel confident that their concerns would be dealt with appropriately. The survivor also spoke about being kept appropriately informed, and feeling safe to speak with the Safeguarding Coordinator, they reported that they valued the support that they received and shared that they just could not have predicted it to be such a positive response.

4.3.7 Areas for development:

- Further development of victim and survivor feedback processes to be considered

4.3.8 The 2024 Victim and Survivor Commitment will need to be updated on the website and whilst this is yet to be published the Diocese may wish to consider whether the Commitment document could be made more visually engaging to victims and survivors, and whether there is an opportunity for further expansion of the Commitment, with separation of the support that will be offered, from the processes which will be followed.

4.3.9 The Diocese is proactive in publishing safeguarding information on their website and seeking stakeholder feedback, and good practice has been observed by a victim and survivor reviewing the 2024 Victim and Survivor Commitment and policies that are operational within the Diocese. Consideration is being given by the Safeguarding Team and Safeguarding Committee as to how to engage victims and survivors more strategically within the Diocese, although the Diocese are conscious not to exacerbate any harm that victims and survivors have experienced. The Diocese are in the early stages of considering a survivor reference panel and ground rules have been established with one victim and survivor, further development of the survivor reference panel and creative methods in which victim and survivor feedback can be obtained will be invaluable to the progress of the Diocese in what is already good work with victims and survivors.

4.3.10 Standard 3 Graded: Comprehensive Assurance

4.4 Standard 4: Effective management of allegations and concerns

4.4.1 Strengths:

- Appropriate distinctions are made between low-level concerns and allegations, with proportionate responses provided and management oversight recorded
- A low-level concerns policy has been developed and shared
- The person-centred approach within case work was consistently good or outstanding
- Management oversight is being recorded

- Data is being managed appropriately and digitalisation of historical files has commenced

4.4.2 The Diocese has adopted the nationally agreed policy for the management of allegations and concerns that is published on the safeguarding pages of the website, and there is local guidance that has been shared with the clergy and PRSs about what information to obtain should they receive a disclosure. Low-level concerns are captured on contact notes by the Safeguarding Team that are later reviewed by a smaller cohort of the Safeguarding Committee to ensure that there is agreement with the actions taken and advice given. This is an excellent example of the management of low-level concerns to avoid escalation and allows for collective oversight and shared responsibility.

4.4.3 The Diocese have developed a comprehensive low-level concerns policy in which it is highlighted that all personnel are responsible for knowing the policy and ensuring compliance with it. Recordings in contact notes observed by analysts were compliant with the Diocesan guidance on how low-level concerns will be recorded. The low-level concerns policy highlights that concerns about clergy will be investigated and recommendations will be made by the Safeguarding Team to the Bishop, who will ensure that any sanctions are made are in accordance with canon law.

4.4.4 Casework audits reviewed by analysts have demonstrated significant strength in person centered practice with several cases being graded as outstanding in this area. It was clear from casework audits that the Safeguarding Team are resilient and skilled in engaging individuals and overcoming barriers to promote appropriate and proportionate engagement with the Church. Casework audits highlighted that the Safeguarding Team support the needs of individuals and they ensure good levels of communication are maintained.

4.4.5 Management oversight was observed to be consistently good in most cases audited by the analysts. Current practice dictates that the Safeguarding Committee will be advised of all new cases via a precis in a “case for consideration at Safeguarding Committee” document, the information provided is of sufficient detail for the Safeguarding Committee to make informed decisions about next steps. The Safeguarding Committee are also provided with updates of any cases where there has been a change of circumstances. Similarly, the Board of Trustees are advised of all new cases allowing appropriate charity commission referrals to

be made, although the actual contact will be made by the Chief Operating Officer or the Safeguarding Coordinator.

4.4.6 The use of an electronic case management system enables data to be appropriately stored and managed, ensuring confidentiality for both complainants and those subject to allegations and concerns. Digitalisation of historic files has commenced, and historic case records have been observed within current case files. The analysts have observed that essential confidential information held within Parishes and ministries is stored in lockable safes that are not accessible to the public. Similarly, where information is held on laptops these are password protected and locked away in safes when not in use. Management oversight and recording practices in casework audits have showed a marked improvement since the CSSA audit conducted in January 2023.

4.4.7 Areas for development:

- Consideration to recording low levels concerns within the electronic case management system.
- Consideration of formalising blemished DBS processes

4.4.8 Good practice has been observed in the management of low-level concerns, although the policy underpinning practice has only recently been approved by the Board of Trustees in October 2024 and will need further time to be embedded throughout the Diocese before its effectiveness can be fully measured. Whilst the recording practices of low-level concerns are effective, they are stored within Word documents and so the Diocese may wish to consider utilising the electronic recording system to capture and record concerns, which can be printed off and shared with the Safeguarding Committee and Trustees and or the Bishop as appropriate for clergy files.

4.4.9 Multi-agency liaison was seen to be effective in casework, and the case managers are all former police officers with a good working knowledge of statutory agencies and interventions. The Diocese, however, will be seeking to develop Information Sharing Agreements with statutory agencies to support an easier flow of information sharing.

4.4.10 Current processes as to whether the Safeguarding Committee and the Board of Trustees are notified about blemished DBS' is at the discretion of the Safeguarding Team who apply logic and reasoning as to when to share information. Good practice in managing blemished DBS has been observed in the

completion of risk assessments by the Safeguarding Team. It is recommended that the Diocese considers whether a formal policy or procedure would be beneficial as to when the Safeguarding Committee and Board of Trustees must be notified about a blemished DBS.

4.4.11 Standard 4 Graded: Results being Achieved.

4.5 Standard 5: Management and support of subjects of allegations and concerns

4.5.1 Strengths:

- There is support for clergy Respondents
- Safeguarding plans are in use.
- There is Support for the clergy and PSRs implementing safeguarding plans
- There is support for non-clergy Respondents

4.5.2 The Diocese has adopted national guidance for clergy subject to allegations of abuse and have developed local proformas to support this guidance. Standardised letters have been produced to support discussions with clergy in respect of temporary withdrawal from ministry and to inform clergy colleagues of the removal of a fellow priest, and there is information for both Parishes and school leaders. Clergy contributors to the focus groups shared that they feel that they would be supported if they were the subject of an allegation, and casework audits 1 and 6 evidenced good and outstanding support for clergy respondents, respectively. More recently the Diocese have developed the roles and responsibilities of a link person, defined as *"A link person will be offered to all clergy who are subject to a safeguarding concern/allegation which requires them to be requested to temporarily withdrawn from public ministry. The link person should be a member of clergy and trained in pastoral care"* The link person role has been subject to stakeholder feedback from the Council of Priests.

4.5.3 Casework audits 4 and 2 demonstrated good and outstanding practice, respectively, in the development and implementation of safeguarding plans. Safeguarding plans are being developed with knowledge and contributions from relevant statutory agencies and review dates were observed to recorded within safeguarding plans. Within case recordings there is evidence of the Safeguarding Coordinator periodically (every six months) liaising with the Safeguarding Advisors to check on the progression of plans. Safeguarding plans were observed to be updated to reflect emerging risks, and the roles of individuals are identified within

plans. Safeguarding plans are being signed by both those subject to them and those who are responsible for their implementation and oversight.

4.5.4 Clergy and PSRs overseeing and implementing safeguarding plans have shared that they are well supported by the Safeguarding Team, focus group participants and those who have contributed to interviews and discussions with analysts have shared that they have found meetings beneficial in understanding what is expected of them, they feel that they are provided with sufficient information to ensure the safety of respondents and parishioners and they are confident to challenge if they were unable to meet the expectations of the plan.

4.5.5 Analysts have met with two respondents subject to safeguarding plans, both of whom have shared that the initial anticipation and experience of working with the Diocese was overwhelming, however in the past 12 months both respondents shared that they have been kept informed by the Safeguarding Team and have felt included and listened to. There was also positive praise for the support of the Parish Priests in enabling them to continue to practice their faith.

4.5.6 Canon law advice is available via the Chancellor who is a member of the Safeguarding Committee and respondents will be signposted to canon or criminal legal advice via the Link Person.

4.5.7 Areas for development:

- Risk Information Frameworks to be consistently used to inform safeguarding plans. Diocese to consider a formal policy on case recording standards
- Safeguarding plan reviews to be completed in expected timescales
- Chronologies to be implemented on all cases
- Issuing of Celebrets to clergy on safeguarding plans

4.5.8 Casework audits 7 and 1 demonstrated that Risk Information Frameworks are not consistently being completed prior to the development of safeguarding plans. Case 1 has now been the subject of a comprehensive Forensic Risk Assessment that has been used when reviewing and amending the existing safeguarding plan, however the respondent was subject to a safeguarding plan prior to the completion of this assessment. Case 7 also highlighted that further consideration or safety planning is needed to manage risks when respondents do not engage. Whilst there is no concern that respondents are not being managed safely, for the benefit of consistency in practice and in line with the Management of Allegations and Concerns practice guidance Risk Information Frameworks should be

completed to inform safeguarding plans. The Diocese is also invited to consider whether a formal policy on case recording expectations would be beneficial.

4.5.9 Case 3 highlighted that the reviews of safeguarding plans consistently exceeded expected timescales although circumstances for the respondent had not significantly changed due to a prolonged police investigation. Untimely reviews were not observed to be common practice in casework audits.

4.5.10 The Safeguarding Team are aware of the importance of chronologies on casework and are working on ensuring that all casework is inclusive of a chronology, it is recommended that cases with significant and complex histories are prioritised.

4.5.11 A respondent working with the Safeguarding Team has highlighted what he believes to be a lack of support for the families of respondents, however he raised this to be what he feels is a national issue and not specific to the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, although the Diocese may wish to consider what, if any support could be offered to the families of respondents.

4.5.12 Discussions have been held with the Safeguarding Team and senior clergy regarding the issuing of a Celebret⁷ to a clergy respondent subject to a safeguarding plan. It has been shared by the Diocese that the respondent is compliant with both DBS and training expectations and as such a Celebret cannot be refused, this has raised a national issue which will require further consideration.

4.5.13 Standard 5 Graded: Results Being Achieved

4.6 Standard 6: Robust human resource management

4.6.1 Strengths:

- Support for Safe Recruitment
- Admin support and processes
- Heads of Department Meetings
- Resources within Safeguarding Team & Diocese
- Safer environments are being created and there is good use of technology
- Expectation of Overseas and visiting Clergy are well known

⁷ A celebret is a letter, or more commonly now an identification card, from a Bishop testifying that the bearer is a priest in good standing, thereby allowing him to seek permission to celebrate mass in another diocese within England & Wales.

- Whistleblowing Policy and Complaints Policy

4.6.2 There has been considerable time and effort across the Diocese to ensure robust human resource management. Training has been provided to PSRs to support safer recruitment and a comprehensive PSR induction pack is provided which includes statements of confidentiality, national guidance on safer recruitment, local safeguarding policies and procedures and information on data management. A volunteer census has been sent to all Parishes to gather a better understanding of the number and responsibilities of volunteers, and the Safeguarding Department have shared that they have received an excellent response rate to the census and the department have noticed an increase in DBS applications being made for volunteers. PSR vacancies are minimal with only 13 vacancies out of 166 roles, and support is offered by neighbouring Parishes whilst recruitment is underway. Employees and volunteers will be asked to operate within a code of conduct available within the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle Safeguarding Guidelines.

4.6.3 There is a capable Admin Team and Senior Administrator who ensures that the Safeguarding Team and the PSRs have a monthly overview of DBS that will be due for renewal within the next six months, ensuring excellent levels of DBS compliance across the Diocese and allowing for the mitigation of potential risks. The Admin Team identified that a significant number of DBS 'would be due for renewal at the same time and that both the Parishes and the Admin Team may struggle to meet the demand, the Admin Team then worked with Parishes to commence renewals earlier, reducing the impact across the Diocese, and enabling 77% of volunteers to be registered on the online update service. All clergy and staff are DBS compliant and there are only eight out of 3,116 volunteer DBS that are out of date and currently being processed, which is a significant improvement from the previous CSSA audit In the first quarter of 2023

4.6.4 Senior leadership meetings of curia staff take place every two weeks and will soon be moving to once a week, embedding safeguarding in all aspects of work across the curia and Diocese. Safeguarding and health and safety as previously highlighted are standing agenda items, and in January 2024 the Safeguarding Coordinator delivered an information session for senior leaders on the Safeguarding Action plan and this was later repeated for all staff.

4.6.5 The Safeguarding Team is well resourced to meet current demands. The Safeguarding Coordinator has two Safeguarding Advisors, one of which is her

delegated authority for when she is not available. Line management is provided to the Safeguarding Advisors by the Safeguarding Coordinator and the Safeguarding Coordinator is line managed by the Chief Operating Officer, and all three access external supervision. Recruitment is also under way for a Safeguarding Advisor for the Youth Ministry Team who will also support the training function of the Safeguarding Team. The dedication and commitment of the Safeguarding Team is evidenced in the development of safeguarding across the Diocese. To supplement the safeguarding responsibilities of the Diocese is the focus on wellbeing, the Bishop and clergy have shared the importance of ensuring effective support for Clergy so they in turn can support parishioners. The Bishop is currently considering the structure of the Diocese to ensure a pastoral approach and the Diocesan Social Worker is available to support all active and retired Clergy who may benefit from additional practical or emotional support, and there is written guidance on self-care for Clergy and information on the website.

4.6.6 The Safeguarding Action plan identifies that any activity or event planned and undertaken by the Diocese which involves children or vulnerable adults must have consideration of safeguarding in the planning phase with specific reference to CSSA practice guidance, 'Creating a Safer Environment' and 'Planning and Organising Parish Events and Groups', which is a good step by the Diocese to ensure that those organising activities are compliant with expectations. Analysts have observed good practice in the risk management of Diocesan activities such as the practical management of a Children's Liturgy. Children entering require a parent to provide consent on each visit, and at the end of Children's Liturgy children are transported to the adjoining Church by volunteers in high visibility Parish branded vests, creating a barrier between the children, the public and any traffic. There is also evidence of the Safeguarding Advisors visiting ministries to support the identification of potential safeguarding and health and safety issues.

4.6.7 The Diocese have good use of technology. The breatheHR app is in use for internal processes, in addition to Microsoft 365 and SharePoint which will be rolled out to all staff, clergy and PSRs. In addition to the good practice previously highlighted in 4.6.1 analysts have observed QR⁸ codes in use for volunteers to complete the volunteer census and for parents signing their children into Children's Liturgy.

⁸ A machine-readable code consisting of an array of black and white squares, typically used for storing URLs or other information for reading by the camera on a smartphone.

4.6.8 The arrangements for overseas Clergy are well understood with regular liaison between the Safeguarding Coordinator, Chancellor, Vicar General and Bishop. A checklist is in place for incoming Priests, that requires the signature and dates of key tasks being completed, such as the testimonial of suitability and DBS and overseas check have been completed. There is an expectation of incoming Priests to have completed online safeguarding training prior to arrival in the Diocese and a one to one induction to include safeguarding training when they arrive.

4.6.9 The Diocese has an appropriate Whistleblowing Policy in place that is there to support all staff and volunteers inclusive of the Board of Trustees, it is highlighted with whom concerns should be made and directs the concerns to be reported to the CSSA if the whistleblower does not feel confident to raise them with the Diocese. The Whistleblowing Policy is available on the website.

4.6.10 The Diocesan Safeguarding Service Complaints Policy and Procedure Complaints Policy is available on the website and has been periodically updated since December 2022, with a planned review in December 2024. The Complaints Policy highlights that it wishes to seek resolutions informally in the first instance, however there are clear guidelines on the formal stages of how complaints are investigated, and that the CSSA and Charity Commission can be contacted if complaints cannot be resolved. The Diocese have also provided guidance on how to complain about the senior Clergy and the Bishop, and have included the details of the Archbishop of Liverpool, this is excellent practice by the Diocese in encouraging transparency and accountability at every level. The Diocese have also fully cooperated with CSSA investigations of complaints emanating from their Diocese.

4.6.11 Areas for development:

- Formal Risk Assessments to be used to promote safety in parish events

4.6.12 The volunteer census, whilst not safeguarding specific, has provided an excellent understanding of the number of Diocesan volunteers and will be the foundation for safeguarding Parish audits that are being proposed for the first quarter of 2025, the content of which is yet to be fully determined.

4.6.13 The Diocese have nurtured an open culture where clergy, staff and volunteers have shared that they are confident to question practice, it is queried whether a

policy or guidance underpinning this may be beneficial for the clergy, although there is no national Whistleblowing Policy (which due to the unique nature of the role it is yet to be tested if it extends to clergy) or guidance for clergy who wish to raise a concern and so it is recognised this is a broader issue that needs consideration.

4.6.14 Analysts have observed good practice in the risk management of Diocesan activities, however further assurances about the safety of Parish activities could be promoted via the use of formalised risk assessments, and so it is recommended that the Diocese develop a pro-forma to support Parishes. It is however noted that informal risk assessments are constantly being considered, evidenced in the Parish activities that have not been completed due to the Parish not having enough time to ensure appropriate DBS compliance.

4.6.15 Standard 6 Graded: Results Being Achieved

4.7 Standard 7: Training and support for safeguarding

4.7.1 Strengths:

- The importance of training is role modelled by leadership
- Clergy training compliance & topics covered
- Training records are maintained & inform the issuing of Celebrets
- PSR zoom meetings are being held

4.7.2 The importance of safeguarding training is modelled by leadership, the Bishop ensures that emails are sent to all clergy highlighting the importance of training for all those who are in active ministry, but also for retired clergy who are offering to supply covering ministry, and it is clearly detailed that there will be implications for individuals who do not comply. Similarly, the Bishop, Trustees and leaders within the curia are all up to date with safeguarding training, attending with the clergy.

4.7.3 Clergy safeguarding training has been prioritised and 100 per cent of clergy are training compliant. Retired clergy who are offering covering ministry and were not able to attend formal training have been provided with bespoke training by the Safeguarding Team. The Diocese have received CSSA Victim and Survivor focused training ensuring that all those in ministry have the skills and knowledge to conduct

their practice safely. Hexham and Newcastle have also exceeded expectations in rolling out training modules for volunteers offered by the CSSA⁹.

4.7.4 A record of safeguarding training compliance is managed by the Safeguarding Team, this an excel spreadsheet which is divided into generic and safeguarding training. Training compliance as previously highlighted is subject to review by the Safeguarding Committee and Board of Trustees, and the Chancellor is able to access the training record in line with the issuing of Celebrets. Celebrets are not issued without a valid DBS and up to date training recorded.

4.7.5 Regular Zoom meetings are held with PSRs who shared that there are usually two sessions offered in quick succession to maximise attendance. PSRs shared that they felt the sessions were beneficial and provided an opportunity to share best practice and discuss any concerns, and there was praise for the Safeguarding Team's sensitive management of the differing needs and abilities of the group.

4.7.7 Areas for development:

- Training needs analysis and training plan to be developed and implemented
- Additional training opportunities for those managing or overseeing safeguarding plans to be provided
- Develop feedback into future training

4.7.8 Upon the completion of the volunteer census, a training needs analysis and subsequent training plan will be developed to consider training expectations and further training required. The Safeguarding Coordinator has completed bespoke training on the management of those on safeguarding plans and she has shared this knowledge with colleagues in the Safeguarding Team. In line with the Eight National Safeguarding Standards the Diocese may wish to consider additional training for members of the Safeguarding Team, clergy and PSRs on managing and overseeing safeguarding plans.

4.7.9 The Diocese are seeking feedback on the training that is being provided, next steps will be to use the feedback in the development of future training.

4.7.10 Standard 7 Graded: Results Being Achieved

⁹ The CSSA provides online safeguarding training for anyone with a role in the Church:
<https://training.catholicsafeguarding.org.uk/about>

4.8 Standard 8: Quality assurance and continuous improvement

4.8.1 Strengths:

- The Diocese have been subject to extensive review
- The Safeguarding Action plan is publicly available
- Listening exercises have been completed
- Casework is reviewed internally and externally

4.8.2 The Diocese have undergone extensive review by the CSSA since requesting the Safeguarding Review which was published in June 2023. The Safeguarding Review has since been followed up by an Interim Review Report of Safeguarding In Leadership, Governance, Ministry and Culture which was published in September 2024, in addition to “check ins” that have taken place in the intervening months, in which the Diocese have utilised the Safeguarding Action plan to evidence their compliance with identified actions and recommendations. It is evident that the Diocese are motivated to ensure that improvements are made.

4.8.3 The Safeguarding Action plan is a comprehensive high-quality plan can be observed to be developing practice an example of which is the development of the safeguarding network, which has seen the expansion of the Safeguarding Committee membership to include a PSR representative and representation from the Youth Ministry Team. Plans are in place for the Safeguarding Action plan to become the Safeguarding Implementation Plan. The Safeguarding Action plan is available on the website, and it is accompanied by a short message that highlights, questions, comments and feedback are welcomed.

4.8.4 A listening exercise commissioned by Archbishop McMahon during his time as Apostolic Administrator has been conducted throughout the Diocese and there are several examples of where the learning from this has been responded to and is now directly impacting practise, for example the separation between clergy and curial staff was highlighted, and this has been responded to with several events throughout the year to build relationships where messages of safeguarding are reinforced. Similarly, significant feedback was received about the transparency of the Diocese, and now every effort is being made to ensure that information is easily accessible and regularly updated on the safeguarding pages of the website.

4.8.5 The Diocese have good structures in place for casework review as all new cases are presented to the Safeguarding Committee and all low-level concerns are overseen by a smaller cohort of Safeguarding Committee members. In

In addition, peer reviews have been completed by neighbouring Diocesan Safeguarding Teams, and the Safeguarding Team will be invited to reciprocate this, all of which provide opportunities for quality assurance and continuous improvement.

4.8.6 Areas for development:

- Further expansion of the learning log to capture and share learning

4.8.7 As previously highlighted the CSSA audit of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle and subsequent review have been published on the Diocesan website alongside the Safeguarding Action plan that have rendered an annual safeguarding report somewhat obsolete, however moving forward and to complement the Safeguarding Implementation plan the Diocese may want to provide a publicly available Annual Safeguarding Report on Diocesan activity over the previous 12 months.

4.8.8 The listening exercise has highlighted that clergy felt somewhat isolated in their roles and not supported during particularly difficult times, as a response to this the Bishop has given careful consideration to the structure of the Diocese and has proposed the introduction of five Deans to support five Deaneries. The new structure will allow for a closer alignment of clergy within the Deaneries and regular meetings will be organised to promote clergy well-being and share pertinent information and best practice inclusive of safeguarding.

4.8.9 The listening exercise and discussions held with survivors of abuse evidence that there is still work needed in the Diocese to build trust and reassure the wider community that the Diocese is committed to learning and improving safeguarding practice.

4.8.10 The Diocese have developed a safeguarding learning log, which to date has recorded one piece of learning for consideration, although discussions in interviews have highlighted that the Diocese are constantly learning and using this to develop practice.

4.8.11 Standard 8 Graded: Results Being Achieved

5. Summary of overall findings

5.1 The re-audit of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle has evidenced good practice across all eight of the National Safeguarding Standards, with significant strength observed in Standard 1 Safeguarding is embedded in the Church body's leadership, governance, ministry, and culture and Standard 3 Engaging with and Caring for those who report having been harmed.

5.2 There is a zero-tolerance approach to abuse in the Diocese and a culture where safeguarding is viewed as everyone's responsibility. Clergy, staff and volunteers embrace their responsibilities and spoke passionately about wanting to ensure that the Church is a welcoming and safe place to all. Safeguarding governance is effective and the recommendations from previous CCSA audits and reviews have been actioned, resulting in a greater representation of lay professionals within the Board of Trustees and Safeguarding Committee. There is sufficient oversight of the Safeguarding Action plan which is being used to improve and promote safeguarding practice. Low level concerns are managed appropriately to avoid escalation, and the responses are subject to scrutiny by a smaller cohort of the Safeguarding Committee, the further embedding of the low-level concerns policy will enable greater opportunity to review its effectiveness. The Bishop, senior leaders and the Safeguarding Team are committed to building positive relationships with the clergy, staff and lay faithful and securing confidence in the Diocesan abilities to conduct the mission of the Church.

5.3 Safeguarding communications are available on a multitude of platforms and safeguarding messages are owned by the leadership. The Bishop's videos available on the Diocesan website are updated every 6 months and ensure that safeguarding is central to messages. Safeguarding information and news are regularly updated on the website, and all previous CSSA audits and reviews and any internal learning, as a result of the listening exercise, are all publicly available and feedback is welcomed. The Communications plan which underpins practice is yet to be published, and the Diocese has been invited to consider further promotion of safeguarding communications for harder to reach groups to facilitate the ongoing evaluation and development of its safeguarding communications.

5.4 The Diocese is committed to engaging with and caring for those who report having been harmed and the Bishops Installation Mass affirmed his unwavering alignment with victims and survivors of abuse, and he has continued to meet with victims and survivors at their pace since his appointment. A Victim and Survivor

Commitment, which outlines the Diocesan approach to working with victims and survivors of abuse, has been developed and publicised on the website, and there is evidence of its impact on practice within casework. The Diocese is proactive in seeking stakeholder feedback and this is evidenced by a victim and survivor reviewing the Victim and Survivor Commitment and accompanying privacy notice, and the closure letters which are sent when the Diocese is no longer supporting victims and survivors. Further expansion of creative methods in which victim and survivor feedback can be obtained will be invaluable to the progress of the Diocese in what is already good work with victims and survivors.

5.5 Observations of casework and reviewed contact notes evidenced that the Diocese are making appropriate distinctions between low-level concerns and allegations, and proportionate responses are provided, and management oversight is recorded. Consideration should be given to embedding the recording of low level concerns within the electronic case management system. Person centred practice was observed to be a significant strength of the Diocese with all casework audits being graded as good or outstanding in this area. The Diocese have evidenced effective information sharing practices with statutory agencies, however no formal information sharing agreements are in place, although it is the plan of the Diocese to establish ISA. Current practice with blemished DBS is to conduct a risk assessment, however senior leadership oversight of blemished DBS is at the discretion of the Safeguarding Team and so it is recommended that the Diocese considers whether a formal policy or procedure would be beneficial.

5.6 There is support for clergy and lay respondents in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle and again person-centred practice was observed to be either good or outstanding. The Diocese are implementing safeguarding plans although there is further opportunity for safeguarding plans to be routinely informed by risk information frameworks, and for all safeguarding plans to be reviewed in a timely manner, as a small number were observed to be reviewed outside of expected timescales. Ensuring that chronologies are recorded on all cases is a priority for the Diocese, and work is being undertaken in respect of this. Management oversight on casework was observed to be consistently good on the majority of cases reviewed by analysts with one complex case evidencing outstanding management oversight by the Safeguarding Committee, and contributions from the Bishop. The Diocese may wish to consider a formal policy on case recording standards.

5.7 The Diocese has good processes in place for managing human resources, with training and guidance on safer recruitment being made available to PSRs and

excellent administrative support, which have enabled the Diocese to proactively manage DBS applications. PSR vacancies are minimal and are managed effectively as support is offered by neighbouring Parish PSRs. Meetings across the curia include safeguarding and health and safety as standing agenda items and fortnightly heads of department meetings ensure that safeguarding is constantly considered and embedded in all Diocesan activity. Safer environments and the good use of technology were observed during Parish visits, where informal risk assessments are being considered, formalising risk assessments would be another opportunity for the Diocese to ensure safer practices. Where safe environments cannot be created analysts were advised that activities do not take place. Good practice has been observed in the publication of appropriate whistleblowing and complaints policies and in the practices of supporting overseas and visiting clergy. Parish audits due to be completed in the first quarter of 2025 will further ensure the Diocese of safeguarding practices within Parishes.

5.8 Training compliance is excellent with all active clergy being up to date with training and the Diocese has exceeded expectations in rolling out training modules for volunteers. The importance of training is role modelled by the Bishop and senior leaders and a comprehensive list of all training is recorded and managed by the Safeguarding Team and accessed by the Chancellor in line with the issuing of Cebrets. A training needs analysis and training plan which will follow on from the volunteer census will enable the Diocese to consider training expectations for all roles and any further training required. Similarly, the Diocese need to consider additional training opportunities for those managing or overseeing safeguarding plans. The Diocese will need to gather feedback from all training completed and use this to inform and develop future training.

5.9 The Diocese created a Safeguarding Action plan following the first CSSA audit in 2023 and have used this in addition to a suite of key performance indicators to implement any recommendations and develop practice further. In addition, the Diocese have completed a listening exercise in which an opportunity was provided to staff, clergy and the laity to share their experiences and feel heard, which has since enabled the Diocese to respond effectively to some of the lessons learnt, evidenced in the actions taken to close the gap between the curial staff, clergy and senior leaders. Further work in this area is being considered as the Bishop is proposing a new Deanery structure which will allow for a greater pastoral response to be provided to clergy. The Diocese should now seek to develop its existing processes for feedback and learning into further development of the existing safeguarding learning log.

6. Recommendations

6.1 The Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle has a good understanding of its own strengths and areas for development and the recommendations below are aligned with many of the areas for improvement outlined by the self- assessment by the Diocese. As the recommendations are aligned to the Safeguarding Action plan, no timescales have been recommended as the Diocese are invited to consider the recommendations alongside the timescales identified in the Safeguarding Action plan.

- Stakeholder feedback to be sought on the Action & Implementation plan
- Further consideration of the accessibility of safeguarding messages for all
- Publication of the Communications plan and further engagement with key stakeholders to evaluate and develop safeguarding messages.
- Further development of victim and survivor feedback processes to be considered
- Consideration to recording low levels concerns within the electronic case management system.
- Consideration of formalising blemished DBS processes
- Consideration to developing case recording expectations
- Risk Information Frameworks to be consistently used to inform safeguarding plans
- Safeguarding plan reviews to be completed in expected timescales
- Chronologies to be implemented on all cases
- Formal Risk Assessments to be used to promote safety in parish events
- Training needs analysis and training plan to be developed and implemented
- Additional training opportunities for those managing or overseeing safeguarding plans to be provided
- Gather feedback from training and use this to develop and inform future training
- Further expansion of the learning log to capture and share learning

6.2 National issues for consideration

- National guidance on whistleblowing procedures for clergy

- Issuing of Celebrets to members of the clergy who are subject to safeguarding plans, allegations and concern

7. Arrangements for Follow-up

7.1 In line with the audit follow-up pathway, because of achieving an overall grade of Results Being Achieved the minimum period prior to a reaudit will be two years, (the fourth quarter of 2026), subject to there being no indications of increased risk. The Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle will be invited to submit its action plan arising from this audit and six-monthly 'check-in' conversations will be held with the lead auditor to establish progress against the recommendations. A yearly self-assessment will be required.