



Note from the Chair of DSSG– 15 June 2024

When I joined the Diocesan Safeguarding Steering Group (DSSG) in April 2023, I was not sure of the structure I would find and what was the quality of the staff in the safeguarding team. I found dedicated, experienced professionals who had a valuable mix of safeguarding related backgrounds. The team was well led and supported and governance was well set and, thankfully, complacency did not seem to be a problem.

There will, however, always be challenges no matter how skilled the safeguarding arrangements are. The DSSG membership is strong, although there could be helpful additions. My growing feeling throughout the year was that there were empty chairs on the DSSG, the filling of which would enhance our work. Anecdotally, when I chaired local authority safeguarding (now partnership) boards for several years there was little or no reference to church safeguarding. We were somewhat of an invisible partner in that community. In my view, given my understanding of our work now, this has to change for several reasons. Firstly, more recognition of our work will help the community understand our role. Secondly, economies of scale are more possible in areas like shared training, data and good practice. More openness and transparency can be encouraged with regular guests contributing to the growth of the DSSG's knowledge.

We too should seek invitations for DSSG members to visit other safeguarding teams or statutory groups. Bishop Viv has kindly agreed to host a gathering of key leaders and workers in the community and let our team explain our role and function.

The overarching remit of safeguarding in the Diocese was to investigate and monitor risk to and from all those employed, volunteering or just associated with church business. It is not the team's job to investigate crime. Statutory partners are charged with this.

Training is rightly seen as a fundamental part of the work both online and in person. In the last year the take up has significantly increased and the Training and Development Officer has maintained an excellent workload.

The courses offered are valuable and well tested with some areas such as domestic abuse training increasing by 66%. I came to the conclusion as the year progressed that there were some areas either not being touched or, in my opinion, not focussed on enough. These include what I refer to as either newly emerging or growing types of complex safeguarding. For example; internet safety awareness, human trafficking, modern day slavery and child abduction to name a few. These involve millions of vulnerable people today and we should help staff and volunteers, as well as parishioners, to be more aware as eyes and ears in the community. Currently there are one or two online training modules available but nothing to address the scale of the risks.

I'm pleased that the DSSG members agreed to my idea of including good news stories from all as a standing item to the agenda of each meeting. Too often people focus on difficulties and problems to the exclusion of successful work.

The safeguarding communications plan is robust and welcome with training being planned for the senior leadership team in the coming months. I've always been of the opinion that having an up to date media plan prepared, with key people available and confident while speaking to the media, is prudent. I have witnessed first hand over the years, as I delivered media and reputation management training, the benefit of being fully prepared to managing crises as they arise.

All in all I have found excellent commitment to safeguarding in the Diocese. There are many challenges ahead in responding to any new initiatives arising out of recent reports, audits and national restructuring. I am confident, however, that the safeguarding team and the and senior leadership in Bristol are fully committed to provide thoroughly good safeguarding practice and continue to look for opportunities to improve.

David Niven
Independent Chair, Diocesan Safeguarding Steering Group
May 2024