



## Terms of reference

# Diocese of Bristol Safeguarding Steering Group (DSSG)

---

## Introduction

Key Roles and Responsibilities of Church Office Holders and Bodies: Practice Guidance (2017) outlines the Diocesan Bishop's responsibilities as regards Safeguarding. Amongst these it is the responsibility of the Bishop of Bristol to ensure that the Diocese has a Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel. In the Diocese of Bristol this panel is called the Diocesan Safeguarding Steering Group. Within this requirement is that the group should have clear terms of reference and be directly accountable to and regularly report to the Diocesan Bishop and other diocesan bodies: Bishop's Council, Board of Directors and the Diocesan Synod.

The Bishop of Bristol will appoint an Independent Chair of the DSSG.

The Bishop of Bristol will hold responsibility for approval of the DSSG Terms of Reference and membership. The Bishop of Bristol will use the recommendations of the DSSG in safeguarding decision making. The Bishop will maintain overall responsibility for decision making in this area.

## Role and Function of the DSSG

The DSSG will oversee<sup>1</sup> safeguarding arrangements within the Diocese of Bristol. To achieve this the DSSG will:

1. Provide independent advice and expertise on sound safeguarding policies, procedures and practices to the diocesan bishop and other senior clergy and officials.
2. Review and agree all changes to safeguarding policy and procedure ensuring that they are consistent with statutory requirements and House of Bishops' policy and practice guidance.

---

<sup>1</sup> Liability and the ultimate responsibility for safeguarding arrangements within the Diocese of Bristol lie with the Bishop of Bristol.

- In particular, to advise the bishop on any circumstances where it is proposed to depart materially from any provision within the House of Bishops' safeguarding policies.
  - To advise the National Safeguarding Team via the Independent Chair (having informed the bishop) if the DSSG considers that a safeguarding matter is not being dealt with properly within the Diocese or other church body.
3. Review and agree safer recruitment policy and procedures and use of DBS disclosures and any changes as required by relevant statutory changes and House of Bishops policy and practice guidance.
  4. Review and agree the annual safeguarding training plan, ensuring that it enables the implementation of the National Safeguarding Learning and Development Framework, review safeguarding training evaluation and impact reports.
  5. Ensure that there are rigorous procedures in place for managing the church's response to safeguarding allegations and concerns about church officers including proper reference to and liaison with relevant statutory agencies.
    - Receive anonymised casework management information and advice and support given to parishes in relation to case work to ensure effective oversight.
  6. Advise on and ensure the implementation of arrangements to promote the welfare of children and vulnerable adults in relation to persons who may pose a risk of harm, due to known or alleged offences or behaviour which would indicate a person may harm a child or vulnerable adult
  7. Have regard to the Diocese's responses to survivors and victims of abuse, particularly when perpetrated by church officers.
  8. Commission and consider subsequent learning from any lessons learnt reviews and advise on the diocesan response highlighting any learning specific to local, or national policy and guidance.
  9. Advise on diocesan arrangements to support and monitor implementation of good safeguarding practice in parishes in accordance with parish, diocesan and national policy, procedure and practice guidance.

10. Advise on the mechanisms that the Diocese and parishes have in place to hear the views of children and vulnerable adults regarding arrangements to safeguard and promote their welfare whilst engaged in church activities.
11. Ensure that there are clear safeguarding arrangements in place between the diocese and those parts of the Church in the diocese with their own decision-making bodies e.g. the Cathedral, Religious Communities, Theological Education Institutions and advise on any necessary action.
12. Review whistleblowing and complaints procedures and the outcome of any matters arising out of these processes.
13. Advise the Bishop of Bristol and DBF Board of Directors of the adequacy of resourcing for the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer and team: ensuring, via the Diocesan Safeguarding Lead, that there is professional supervision; relevant professional training; sufficient support to review work undertaken by the DSO/Team.
14. Consider relevant matters referred by the Bishop, Bishops Staff Team, Diocesan Safeguarding Lead. Including, where possible, advising on diocesan responses to safeguarding consultations from government, National Church bodies and other relevant parties<sup>2</sup>.
15. Adopt and adhere to the safeguarding improvement plan to ensure that diocesan safeguarding strategy is effectively implemented and to ensure an annual review of the plan highlighting issues that are impacting on progress to the Bishop of Bristol.
16. To provide an Annual Safeguarding Report to the Bishop of Bristol, Diocesan Synod and Board of Finance: To publish the report on the Diocese of Bristol website.

## **Independent Chair of the DSSG**

The DSSG will have an independent chair appointed for an initial term of three years (with an additional three-year term permitted following a review).

Independence refers to the person appointed being a lay person; not previously having been employed in any other role within the Diocese or having discharged any managerial functions within the Diocese or have been commissioned to provide individual professional advice or service to the Diocese. Having no conflicts of loyalty that would potentially impact on their being able to undertake the role. It is envisaged that the independent chair will

---

<sup>2</sup> May include: Local Safeguarding Boards or similar bodies.

have extensive professional safeguarding experience having held a senior level appointment within a relevant statutory or voluntary agency.

The Independent Chair will be advised by the DSO.

*(A Vice Chair will be appointed to the DSSG by the Bishop of Bristol from within the membership of the group or if a suitable person is not available from within the current membership will be appointed by the Bishop of Bristol from outside the membership on the advice of the DSA, Diocesan Safeguarding Lead and Independent Chair.*

### **Duties of the chair**

1. Agree the agenda and minutes of the DSSG, chair the meetings and monitor follow up actions as recorded in an action log.
2. Undertake the responsibilities of the Independent Chair as specified in [Key Roles and Responsibilities of Church Office Holders and Bodies: Practice Guidance \(2017\)](#) – Appendix 3.
3. Conduct the meetings of the DSSG in such a way that enables all members to contribute their knowledge and skills, clearly identifying matters identified for action and by whom and referring as necessary issues for consideration to other diocesan or national bodies. Ensuring that the outcome of each action or referral is clearly recorded and accounted for.
4. To work effectively with the Bishop of Bristol (meeting regularly), Bishop's Staff Team and Diocesan Safeguarding Officer to support and maintain good safeguarding practice within the Diocese.
5. To engage in the independent chairs' national network meetings as required.

### **Membership of the DSSG**

Membership of the DSSG, is on a voluntary, unpaid basis and has tenure of 3 years.

- Independent Chair
- *(Vice Chair (an individual with extensive experience in child and /or adult safeguarding from a professional perspective).*
- Archdeacon (at least one)
- Bishop's Nominated Safeguarding Lead (Director of People and Safeguarding)
- Bishop's Chaplain
- Diocesan Safeguarding Officer
- Local Authority representatives (*1 x children and young people and 1x adults*)

- Police representative
- Parish Safeguarding Officer x2
- Member of Clergy
- Parish Officer
- Senior Cathedral Representative
- Senior Trinity College TEI Representative

Additional members maybe appointed by the Bishop of Bristol on a permanent or ad hoc basis as required.

### **Attendance**

In addition to the above membership the Diocesan Safeguarding Co-ordinator, the Diocesan Safeguarding Training and Development Officer and the Diocesan Communications Officer will attend DSSG meetings. The Diocesan Registrar and Regional safeguarding Lead are invited to attend every DSSG meeting in an advisory capacity.

DSSG members who wish to relinquish their role are requested to give notice at or before the last meeting they attend to provide sufficient time for a replacement member to be found. The Bishop will be notified of any notice given and will approve any new DSSG member.

### **Meetings**

The DSSG is to meet quarterly with dates agreed and published annually.

- Each meeting shall have an agenda and be minuted, with the minutes of the last meeting being agreed at the next. A standing point on the agenda will be a declaration from the group members regarding whether they have any conflict of interest.
- Meetings will be considered quorate so long as at least one third of the membership is in attendance.
- Members may request inclusion of an agenda item up to 2 weeks prior to the next meeting or have it covered under '*any other business*' where time allows, at the discretion of the Independent Chair.
- All papers related to agenda items will be collated and provided to DSSG members at least 1 week prior to the meeting.
- At each meeting the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer will report on activities undertaken since the last meeting a log of actions identified and their progress will be maintained.
- Following each meeting the DSSG Chair and Diocesan Safeguarding Officer will meet with the Bishop of Bristol to communicate the recommendations of the DSSG and any relevant issues.

## **Confidentiality and Whistle Blowing**

It is essential that where case discussion occurs within DSSG meetings and records or in correspondence outside of those meetings that the right of individuals to confidentiality is maintained. To this end individuals and parish will be anonymised. The Chair will ensure that this standard is maintained.

The Diocese of Bristol has a firm commitment to ensuring that children, young people and adults at risk are effectively safeguarded within its churches and associated activities. To achieve this the Diocese will work in accordance with multi agency safeguarding children and adult procedures.

Should any member of the DSSG become concerned that the Diocese has failed to react effectively to a safeguarding concern or has concerns that the standard of safeguarding activity within the Diocese has failed to keep vulnerable individuals safe from harm then it is expected that the following procedure will be followed:

- In most cases The DSSG member should raise any concern with the Independent Chair - who will communicate this to the Bishop of Bristol, the Bishop's Safeguarding Lead and the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer (unless the concern is about one of these individuals).
- A response will be formulated and agreed with the Chair and the progress of any agreed action plan will be monitored through DSSG meetings.

Alternatively, if an individual or individuals potentially remain at risk of harm the DSSG member will raise this as a safeguarding alert with the relevant authority in line with local multi agency safeguarding procedures and alert the DSSG Chair to this. The Chair will communicate this to the Bishop of Bristol, the Bishop's Safeguarding Lead and the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer (unless the concern is about one of these individuals). The advice of the relevant Local Authority the concern was alerted to will then be followed and any subsequent action plan monitored via the DSSG meetings.

## **Annual Report**

It is a requirement of the Church of England that each Diocese present a yearly audit of safeguarding activity undertaken.

This audit will be shared with the DSSG in the form of an annual report which will contain information regarding safeguarding cases, training activity and safer recruitment activity across the year. Information will be drawn from

- the Quarterly Metrics,
- Parish Dashboard Summaries, and
- National Audits, diocesan self-evaluation audit report and any further auditing of relevant safeguarding related information.

<b>Document Control Information</b>		
Document Issued By	Adam Bond	Diocesan Safeguarding Officer
Document Issued Date	April 2014	
Review Frequency	Biannual	
Last Review	September 2024	
Changes at last review	Refresh and details about quoracy included.	
Next Review Due	September 2026	