

# How we keep people safe in our churches

Safeguarding in the Church of England has hit the headlines. But how does it actually work when it comes to church activities?

IT is always devastating when someone suffers abuse, whether it is physical, sexual, emotional or spiritual. When the perpetrator is a person from a church who you trusted, it may well affect how you view the Christian faith.

Recent events in the Church of England have put safeguarding in the headlines like never before. The publication of the Makin Report, the unprecedented resignation of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the resignation of the Bishop of Liverpool have put its safeguarding practices under the spotlight.

Although safeguarding policies and practices in our diocese and across the whole of the Church of England have been transformed over the past 20 years, many have called for responsibility for safeguarding to be taken away from the Church and given to an independent body.

Our professional safeguarding team has been expanded over those years and is now led by former social worker Emily Hassan as our Head of Safeguarding. Our four safeguarding advisers, who deal with specific cases, include former police officers and social workers. There's also a safeguarding trainer and two co-ordinators in the team.

They work alongside and support our clergy and parish safeguarding officers to ensure that all those working with children, young people and vulnerable adults – paid and voluntary – are recruited safely



and given appropriate training. They also deal with specific issues, working directly with survivors who disclose abuse and anyone about whom a concern is raised.

**'I wouldn't do this job unless I was confident our processes are robust'**

In our diocese, Bishop Jonathan has reaffirmed his commitment to the primary importance of safeguarding in the wake of the Makin Report, which examined the horrific abuse by John Smyth and the failure of individuals within the Church to take appropriate action.

He said: "My thoughts and prayers

continue to be for the survivors, in the UK and in Africa, who are still living with the consequences of John Smyth's abhorrent abuse.

"I am profoundly grateful for this independent report and for those who have spoken out and disclosed what happened to them. Their courage is inspiring and will enable us to understand how to prevent this happening in future.

"Safeguarding is the responsibility of everyone in the Church, those at the grass roots communities of the Church of England and those whose calling is to support the life of those communities through leadership and service. I am shocked to the core by the failures in leadership brought to attention by Keith Makin – and will, on a personal level, seek

## Our officers support our parishes

ONE of the things Karen Johnson likes about her job with our diocese is the variety.

Her previous role as a social worker largely involved working with children and their families, often directly. Now that she is working for our diocese, she is involved with a variety of other safeguarding work – including work with vulnerable adults, training and preventative work.

Karen started working as a family support worker in Surrey in 2004, and progressed to become a social worker and then a senior social worker. She helped children who were at risk of harm and those at risk of missing developmental expectations. And then she worked for the Surrey Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), which was the first port of call for those with safeguarding concerns.

In 2019 she moved to Hampshire, so worked initially for Hampshire County Council and then for the Army Cadets in safeguarding roles. But by 2023 she was ready to move away from public bodies, and joined our diocese as one of our safeguarding officers.

"I'd done a number of years in the statutory sector and fancied

to glean every ounce of learning from the Report's findings and recommendations.

"I know that churches and church schools in our diocese will continue to do their utmost to ensure children, young people and vulnerable adults are kept safe, by engaging with safeguarding training, fostering a safe culture, and putting into practice the appropriate policies and procedures.

"The safeguarding culture within the Church of England is being



Safeguarding officer Karen Johnson at work

a new challenge," she said. "My skill set is in risk assessment and working with people, and this job seemed to involve areas I was familiar with. There is greater variety than in Children's Services, because the queries that you get are more diverse.

"My role involves answering initial queries via the duty phone or email. We would advise on referrals to statutory agencies such as social services or the police, or one of our safeguarding officers.

"Our casework might include risk assessments, working directly with survivors or individuals of potential concern, and following up those DBS reports where there is a blemish.

"Each of us has a geographical patch as well, so I visit parish safeguarding officers (PSOs) in the Bishop's Waltham, Petersfield and Havant areas.

"These days, their induction

transformed, but we cannot be complacent. In this foundational area of our life, we should think of ourselves as a 'work in progress', ceaselessly open to the voice and experience of survivors and ready to improve our practices. I'd urge anyone who has any concerns to come forward and report what they know, to help us keep our churches as safe as possible."

Immediately after the Makin Report came out, three of our churches – Newport Minster, St Luke's in Southsea, and Holy Trinity in Fareham – held services of

into the job will be 1-1. By visiting them in person, we get to know them and their skills, and can support them as a critical friend. It helps us to understand what is going well in their parishes as well as what challenges remain.

"I'm amazed that we have volunteer PSOs with experience as Ofsted inspectors, headteachers, social workers, HR officers, and those who work in safeguarding for other organisations.

"My job is to make sure that any safeguarding concerns they have are dealt with in an appropriate way. I don't want PSOs to go to bed at night worrying – they should ring us or thirty-one:eight outside office hours. The PSO role is a big one, but we are there to serve them."

For details of our safeguarding team, see: [www.portsmouth.anglican.org/safeguarding/contacts](http://www.portsmouth.anglican.org/safeguarding/contacts)

reflection in solidarity with survivors, where worshippers prayed and re-dedicated themselves to the work of keeping vulnerable people safe.

Safeguarding is already top of the agenda in our meetings of decision-making bodies – the Bishop's Staff Team, Bishop's Council and Diocesan Synod – to emphasise its importance.

Our safeguarding team has now put together a formal action plan, in response to the Makin Report, which aims to learn the lessons from its specific recommendations.