

Safeguarding Audit Report: Diocese of Portsmouth and Cathedral

Introduction

In 2025, the independent safeguarding group INEQE conducted a comprehensive audit of safeguarding practices within the Diocese of Portsmouth and its cathedral. This audit formed part of a nationwide series commissioned by the Archbishops' Council to assess safeguarding across the Church of England.

Audit Process

The audit took place in two phases:

- Survey Phase: Conducted during the first half of 2025.
- On-Site Visit: A week-long visit in June 2025.

Key activities included:

- Examination of 360 documents.
- Analysis of 642 anonymous surveys.
- 130 interviews with clergy, staff, and volunteers.
- 6 focus groups involving diverse stakeholders.

Key Findings

The audit revealed significant progress in safeguarding culture across the diocese and cathedral:

- Strong Recognition of Improvements: An overwhelming majority of respondents—both within and outside the Church—acknowledged improvements and expressed confidence in raising concerns.
- Robust Safeguarding Culture: Evidence shows safeguarding principles are firmly embedded in diocesan operations and spiritual life.

Leadership and Commitment

The report highlighted the Rt Rev Jonathan Frost, Bishop of Portsmouth, as a central figure in this transformation:

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“His unwavering commitment, explicit prioritisation of, and tangible investment in safeguarding have played a crucial role in integrating safeguarding principles throughout the diocese’s operational and spiritual fabric.”

The Bishop was described as “an exemplar” in safeguarding leadership, ensuring it is treated as a core theological concern and gospel imperative.

Parish and Cathedral Contributions

- **Parish Safeguarding Officers:** The report praised the network of volunteers who ensure safety for children, young people, and vulnerable adults during parish activities.
- **Annual Safeguarding Conferences:** Commended for fostering continuous development and best practice.
- **Cathedral Safeguarding:** Recognised for its strong preventative measures, particularly around choristers, supported by experienced staff, consistent supervision, and pastoral care.

Overall Conclusion

Published in September 2025, the INEQE report concluded:

“The Diocese of Portsmouth has undergone a substantial and positive transformation in its safeguarding culture, establishing a firmly embedded and robust framework.”

This success is attributed primarily to clear, committed, and effective leadership, combined with the strategic positioning of safeguarding as a theological priority.

Next Steps

The report includes recommendations to help the diocese and cathedral continue strengthening safeguarding practices and maintain momentum in this vital area.

A summary of the recommendations is as follows:

Leadership & Governance

1. **Appoint a Suffragan Bishop** to support the Diocesan Bishop in safeguarding leadership (D1).
2. **Strengthen Archdeacons’ role** with structured safeguarding frameworks for parish visits and improved Core Group procedures (D2).

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3. **Provide training for Archdeacons** on chairing sensitive meetings and implement conflict-of-interest checks (D3).
 4. **Develop the DSO's leadership skills** through mentoring and strategic development opportunities (D4).
 5. **Enhance DSAP oversight** by diversifying membership, engaging survivors, using data-driven frameworks, and formalising authority (D5).
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Records & Risk Management

6. **Improve Blue Files management:** tracking access, using content sheets, adding safeguarding tags, updating MDRs, managing duplicates, and installing fireproof cabinets (D6).
 7. **Create a unified Safeguarding Directorate** led by an independent Director of Safeguarding, consolidating all professional safeguarding resources (D7).
 8. **Strengthen DST capacity:** appoint Isle of Wight coordinator, review roles, set KPIs, outsource DBS processing, and evaluate the Patch Work Approach (D8).
 9. **Transfer DBS administration** to HR with clear protocols for information sharing (D9).
 10. **Introduce Parish Dashboard quality assurance** through dip sampling and verification (D10).
 11. **Develop engagement mechanisms** to include voices of children, vulnerable adults, and survivors in prevention planning (D11).
 12. **Create a standalone operational safeguarding Risk Register** for focused scrutiny (D12).
 13. **Require approval of all triage decisions** by Head of Safeguarding or Deputy DSO (D13).
 14. **Move to direct caseworker allocation** with defined timescales after Deputy DSO appointment (D14).
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Victims & Survivors

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15. **Signpost directly to the full 'Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse' guidance** in the e-manual (D15).
 16. **Expand local support signposting** to include mental health and homelessness services (D16).
 17. **Introduce structured check-ins** with victims/survivors for consistent support (D17).
 18. **Include the Cathedral in survivor engagement plans** for dedicated groups and projects (D18).
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Learning & Development

19. **Continue specialist training** for those managing safeguarding agreements or Safety Plans (D19).
20. **Revise the Lead Safeguarding Trainer's title** to reflect strategic and supervisory responsibilities (D20).

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