**CATHOLIC SAFEGUARDING STANDARDS AGENCY**

**Diocese of Brentwood**

Baseline Audit Report

**July 2024**

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**Contents**

[1. Introduction 3](#_Toc146871784)

2. Audit Grading 4

3. Summary of overall findings 5

4. Recommendations 9

5. Arrangements for follow-up………………………………………………………………………………………………………………….12

**1. Introduction**

**1.1** This is an executive summary of the baseline safeguarding audit report for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brentwood. The audit was undertaken by the Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (CSSA) as part of its programme of baseline audits throughout the 22 Roman Catholic Dioceses of England and Wales. The audit was undertaken in accordance with the contractual agreement between the Diocese of Brentwood and the CSSA. The full version of this report has been provided to the Trustees of the Diocesan charity[[1]](#footnote-2).

**1.2** The audit is based on information drawn from various sources, including:

* A self-assessment and supporting evidence provided by the Diocese of Brentwood;
* Case audits of individual safeguarding cases and lower-level concerns;
* Individual and small-group interviews with key Diocesan personnel;
* Online surveys of Clergy and Parish Safeguarding Representatives (PSRs); and
* Focus groups with Clergy and PSRs.

**1.3** The Diocese of Brentwood is situated in Southeast England and covers the Administrative Council of Essex, the Unitary Authorities of Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea, as well as the London Boroughs of Waltham Forest, Havering, Barking & Dagenham, Newham, and Redbridge. The Diocese currently consists of 82 parishes, which are served by 173 clergy members (including Deacons and a number of Priests from Religious Orders), who have been led by Bishop Alan Williams since 2017. The Safeguarding Team comprises a full-time Safeguarding Coordinator, who has been in post for some 20 years, a part-time Personal Assistant to the Safeguarding Coordinator, and a part-time DBS[[2]](#footnote-3) Administrator, all of whom are based primarily at Cathedral House in Brentwood.

**2. Audit Grading**

**2.1.** Practice was assessed against the eight safeguarding standards 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.

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

**3. Summary of Overall Findings**

**3.1** The baseline safeguarding audit conducted with the Diocese of Brentwood found good practice across all eight of the national safeguarding standards. Safeguarding practice in respect of case management, the monitoring and support of respondents, and training were particular strengths for the Diocese. The Diocese was compliant with statutory and regulatory requirements.

**3.2** The Diocese has a culture of safeguarding, which is underpinned by a clear leadership message that safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility, and strong internal working relationships that serve to embed safeguarding across a range of curial and Diocesan departments. The leadership, clergy, volunteers, and key employees understand, and are seen to act on, their individual and collective roles and responsibilities in relation to safeguarding. There is a good governance structure in place, with the Diocese benefitting from both a Safeguarding Subcommittee and Safeguarding Advisory Panel, although associated processes would benefit from further development to ensure that the bulk of strategic safeguarding governance takes place within the Subcommittee, with the Advisory Panel focussing on casework. Existing effective risk management processes, such as oversight of the Safeguarding Risk Register and Charity Commission reporting processes, could be built on by developing the safeguarding data that is reported to individual governance bodies. Although some excellent safeguarding resources are available within the Diocese, a review of Safeguarding Team capacity should take place to support resilience in a range of reactive and proactive areas.

**3.3** Safeguarding communications take place via a range of mediums, include strong leadership messages, and are underpinned by a formal Safeguarding Communication Plan. The Diocese has forged strong links with statutory and specialist agencies, as well as other Church bodies, both Catholic and ecumenical; these relationships were seen to support a range of safeguarding practice relating to the national safeguarding standards, as well as promoting a safer environment within the Diocese and more widely. The recent Safeguarding Communications Plan would benefit from further dissemination and embedding, paired with an exploration of how key Diocesan stakeholders can be engaged with to evaluate and further develop safeguarding communications.

**3.4** The Diocese has a formal Victim & Survivor Care Charter that clearly sets out the support, response, and minimum standards that can be expected from the Diocese. Casework demonstrated that, in practice, victim-survivors are provided with a bespoke, needs-based response, with the Safeguarding Coordinator providing enhanced, victim-led support, and the leadership funding a range of bespoke support services. Victim-survivors are able to meet directly with the Bishop, who receives good support from the Safeguarding Team to prepare for and reflect deeply on these meetings. The Diocese is considering how it can formalise processes to obtain feedback from, and increase engagement with, victim-survivors. Development in this area would be supported by exploring how the Diocesan website could be exploited to capture victim-survivor feedback, and consideration being given to conducting proactive public initiatives, such as Survivor Masses, which would provide opportunities for victim-survivors to contribute to the development of practice and policy.

**3.5** Casework was of high quality, with each of the individual case audits completed receiving an overall grade of Outstanding; statutory liaison was seen to be very effective, information to flow well from parishes to the Safeguarding Team, and appropriate maintenance of confidentiality. Appropriate distinctions are made between safeguarding cases and lower-level concerns, with proportionate responses provided to the full range of casework, and good case recording practice for substantive cases. Leadership oversight of, and support to, safeguarding casework is regular and robust. Good practice in this area could be built on by a review and development of wider recording processes so that governance minutes provide enhanced detail of casework supervision discussions, meeting agendas specifically include opportunities to identify ‘lessons learned’, and the full range of lower-level concerns are subject to the same high standards of case file preparation as substantive casework.

**3.6** The Diocese provides a consistent and collaborative response to both lay and clergy respondents, with a good balance between tailored support and robust risk management. Safeguarding Plans are robustly managed, with regular reviews, good quality risk assessments, and the involvement of statutory professionals and the views of all key parties included in processes. Diocesan, statutory, and canonical investigations are well coordinated, with excellent use of canonical processes to support risk management and safeguarding processes and the leadership providing direct support to the Safeguarding Team. Respondents are routinely provided with national guidance as part of Diocesan investigations, but consideration should be given to bringing together the full range of support and guidance in a single document or presentation that can be proactively circulated to Diocesan clergy.

**3.7** The Diocese has good safer recruitment practice, which is underpinned by formal policy and is seen to be applied at all levels, from the leadership to volunteers. Processes for clergy coming into, and ministering outside, the Diocese are robust, with good liaison between the leadership and Safeguarding Team, and compliance being reinforced by strong leadership messages. Bespoke safeguarding complaints and whistleblowing policies are in place and readily available via the Diocesan website; promotion of the whistleblowing policy is good, but the complaints policy would benefit from further promotion and development to include the CSSA complaints escalation process. There is a bespoke DBS system in place, with DBS blemishes being well managed and clergy DBS compliance at 100% for those in active ministry, but there was a lack of clarity and certainty on DBS practice can be developed by regular interrogation and oversight of disaggregated population data as a formal KPI; this will be supported by a review of DBS resourcing, a development of DBS system functionality, and a final drive to cleanse any outstanding parish volunteer lists and associated DBS re-checks.

**3.8** Clergy training is a strength for the Diocese, with proactive ongoing liaison with the CSSA Safeguarding Training Lead to develop and deliver a varied annual training programme to clergy. Leadership support for safeguarding training is strong, with the Bishop and Safeguarding Coordinator attending all clergy sessions and delivering bespoke inputs, and a strong message being sent about the importance of safeguarding training. Clergy compliance is 100%, and annual attendance is a prerequisite for the granting of a celebret. All PSRs receive a bespoke induction, which has been developed to include a practical DBS skills session; in-person PSR training events are due to recommence shortly. Good work in this area will be built on by increasing opportunities for PSRs to access in-person training and networking events, a refreshing of the Training Policy to clarify Diocesan expectations regarding online training, and to increase leadership oversight of training via a regularly monitored KPI; this will be particularly important for PSRs, as surveys suggested that a small number had not accessed any safeguarding training in three years, and others felt that they would benefit from additional input on the practicalities of DBS processes.

**3.9**. The Diocese has completed a good body of historic quality assurance work, which has included both internal and external audit processes and led to learning and development opportunities; ongoing quality assurance processes have been brought to casework by the longstanding Safeguarding Coordinator, supported by the multi-expertise Safeguarding Advisory Panel. Additional opportunities for quality assurance and continuous improvement are available via the Annual Safeguarding Report and Safeguarding Strategic and Work Plans, but these documents require further development to ensure that the leadership has effective and regular oversight of key areas of safeguarding practice. The Diocese should also explore the creation of a formal internal audit process to provide an additional layer of oversight to safeguarding casework, as well as assessing the implementation and quality of safeguarding practice at the parish level.

**3.10** The good practice summarised above is reflected in the overall audit grading of *Results Being Achieved*.

**4. Recommendations**

**4.1** Areas for development primarily concern comprise building on existing work; the following are broad areas for development:

* Review of safeguarding resources.
* Further development of safeguarding governance processes.
* Further evaluation and development of safeguarding communications.
* Further development of processes to proactively engage with victim-survivors.
* Further development of case recording processes.
* Further development of DBS oversight.
* Further development, evaluation, and oversight of training.
* Further development and embedding of quality assurance, continuous improvement, and learning processes.

**4.2** To support improvement in these areas, a number of recommendations are made; timeframes are intended to be indicative, and it is acknowledged that the Diocese may wish to prioritise actions differently. The following recommendations should be considered along with the bullet-pointed strengths and areas for development listed against each standard in Section 4 of this report, as well as the associated detailed comments.

**4.2.1** Short term (within 3 months)

* Review of Safeguarding Team capacity and resources.
* Further development of case recording processes to include the full range of Lower-Level Concerns.
* Review of Safeguarding Subcommittee and Safeguarding Advisory Panel working processes to ensure a proper delineation of function.
* Further development of the existing Safeguarding Strategic and Work Plans into a single Implementation Plan, ensuring that actions are owned by individuals with the right skills, knowledge, and resources.
* Inclusion of CSSA audit recommendations in the Diocesan Safeguarding Implementation Plan.
* Development of processes to record case oversight/discussion from the Safeguarding Advisory Panel, as well as strategic Safeguarding Subcommittee oversight.
* Further development of the Diocesan Training Policy to include the current national online provision and clarify expectations in this area; to be paired with further promotion of the LMS provision.

**4.2.2** Medium term (within 6 months)

* Further development of the safeguarding complaints policy to include the CSSA escalation process; further promotion of both complaints and whistleblowing policies via appropriate internal distribution.
* Further development of the Diocesan Training Policy to include the current national online provision and clarify expectations in this area; to be paired with further promotion of the LMS provision.
* Development of processes to report key safeguarding data to the Board of Trustees, Safeguarding Subcommittee, and Safeguarding Advisory Panel to facilitate enhanced leadership oversight of key safeguarding risks.
* Develop processes to routinely obtain feedback from those who report being harmed within the church.
* Develop formal processes for extracting learning from safeguarding allegations, concerns, and complaints; learning to be shared to drive continuous improvement throughout the Diocese.
* Consideration to drawing relevant aspects of policy and guidance into a bespoke guide for clergy respondents.
* Dissemination and embedding of the safeguarding communication plan.
* Further development of the safeguarding KPIs to enable regular monitoring of key safeguarding data; to include disaggregated DBS and training compliance figures.
* Development of additional leadership safeguarding messages, to be paired with a refreshment of the Diocesan website.
* Final Safeguarding Team-led drive to cleanse any remaining parish lists and ensure all volunteer checks are completed.

**4.2.3** Long term (within 12 months)

* Continued development of additional opportunities for in-person networking, training, and recognition events for PSRs.
* Exploration of proactive public initiatives to engage victim-survivors and gain their input into safeguarding processes.
* Exploration of how key stakeholders can be engaged with to evaluate safeguarding communications and inform ongoing Safeguarding Communications Plan development
* Consideration of formal internal or external processes to quality assure safeguarding casework, such as a reciprocal peer-review.
* Consideration of internal audit processes to embed and quality assure safeguarding practice at the parish level.
* Develop feedback processes for the PSR, or wider volunteer, training provision, and ensure any returns are evaluated and diverted to developing relevant training packages.

**5. Arrangements for Follow-up**

**5.1** In accordance with the CSSA follow-up pathway for Dioceses achieving a grading of *Results Being Achieved*, a full re-audit should take place in the Diocese of Brentwood during the second half of 2026, with annual “top-up” self-assessments to be completed in the intervening period.

1. Brentwood Roman Catholic Diocesan Trust; charity number 234092. The charity has one trustee, (The) Brentwood Roman Catholic Diocese Trustee (company number 00450897); Directors of this company comprise aa mixture of lay and clergy, who comprise the full Board of Trustees. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. DBS – the Disclosure and Barring Service; a government organisation which facilitates the completion of criminal records checks, as well as consulting other material and databases which might suggest that someone is unsuitable to work with children or adults at risk. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)