

To gain an in-depth understanding of the culture around Safeguarding in the Diocese of Leicester, an independent facilitator ran 6 in-person focus groups with clergy, lay ministers and parish safeguarding co-ordinators, one online session, and conducted a survey, which was completed by 84 individuals, representing a mixture of clergy, lay ministers, and safeguarding co-ordinators. In total, about 150 people from across the diocese took part, answering questions about the approachability of the Bishops and senior leaders in the diocese on safeguarding, the ease of challenging them, whether they felt heard and confident action would be taken when a concern was raised, and how safeguarding across the diocese could be improved.

The feedback showed that while most participants had not personally raised safeguarding concerns with senior leaders, the majority of those who had found them approachable and felt listened to, and confident that action would be taken. Participants expressed strong appreciation for the Diocesan Safeguarding Team, particularly praising their professionalism, responsiveness, and pastoral sensitivity; and there was a widespread perception that senior leaders in the diocese prioritised safeguarding.

A major theme in the feedback was the importance of relationships in supporting a good culture around safeguarding. Where clergy or lay people had an existing, trusting relationship with a member of our leadership team, they felt more able to raise concerns. On the other hand, perceptions of leaders' busyness or hierarchy could prevent people coming forward. Other enablers identified included good two-way communication (including face-to-face contact), prior experience and training, advice from the safeguarding team, and feeling believed and supported.

The majority of survey respondents said they were not concerned about the potential consequences of challenging senior leaders on safeguarding. But the worries for those who did were: damaging future working relationships or opportunities and job security concerns; or being perceived as a troublemaker or overly dramatic. One barrier to raising concerns was confusion about when safeguarding thresholds are reached, especially in relation to bullying, power dynamics, spiritual and emotional abuse.

Several areas for improvement were suggested through the focus groups and survey; including suggestions for safeguarding training; better two-way communication when concerns are raised; having proportionate expectations based on parish size and capacity; and ideas for support for Parish Safeguarding Co-ordinators. A significant area for improvement which emerged concerned how bullying was handled: participants asked for greater clarity on the distinctions between safeguarding, HR, and pastoral issues, and more guidance on addressing bullying and spiritual abuse; and greater support for victims of bullying.

The recommendations which emerged from the report have been translated into an action plan and will be taken forward by the Bishops' Leadership Team and the Diocesan Safeguarding Team.