



Diocese of Leicester and Leicester Cathedral

“My hope is that (this strategy) will make some changes in the diocese and churches at a face to face level” (Focus group member)



1. Introduction:

The Church of England is committed to ensuring that the Church is a safer place, a space where abuse of any kind is not tolerated. As part of this commitment, engagement with victims and survivors is a key priority and their voice and experiences are listened to and taken seriously.

The Diocese of Leicester and the Cathedral recognise that the experience of abuse from within the church can have a profound impact on a person's life, faith and spiritual wellbeing. We believe that by engaging with and seeking the views of victims and survivors we can learn and ensure that the right response and support is put in place.

This Strategy has the full support and agreement of the Bishop's Leadership Team and the Diocesan Safeguarding Oversight Group.

2. Background:

A key priority in the Diocesan Safeguarding Strategy, overseen by the Diocesan Safeguarding Oversight Group, is the production of a Survivor Care Strategy. As is outlined, it has been important that we engaged with a group of survivors. The Diocese of Leicester was able to seek the views of survivors for the Past Cases Review 2 in 2022 and this provided the foundation for this work.

The Church of England's Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse guidance¹ and Responding Well: A guide to support for victims and survivors of church-based abuse² guidance have been referred to during the process.

3. Process:

In December 2023 the Diocesan Safeguarding Team (DST) began to promote our plan to create a focus group to help develop a survivor strategy for Leicester Diocese and the Cathedral, shaping future care and support for survivors. It was important to ensure there were opportunities for survivors' voices to contribute to practice development.

Through publicising this, including a flyer to all church settings, we were delighted to establish a small group of survivors interested in supporting and contributing to this work over a number of months.

The focus group was facilitated by Shabnum Popat, Clinical Lead for a local counselling service working with childhood abuse, and Rachael Spiers, Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser. The group had terms of reference & an agreement of expectations. Work on the strategy was undertaken by commenting on written drafts and completing surveys to contribute ideas and advise on plans.

¹ Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse ([Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse | The Church of England](#)) April 2022

² Responding Well: A guide to support for victims and survivors of church-based abuse.

This strategy sets out how we will care for and support those who have disclosed abuse related to church settings, including Leicester Diocese & Cathedral, and those who have experienced abuse outside of the church. It also outlines how we will seek feedback from victims & survivors.

We are indebted to the focus group for their work and time, for being prepared to share learning from painful lived experience.

For the purposes of this strategy, we will be referring to victims as survivors but recognise that there is no one term that captures everyone's experience.

4. Our commitment: Values & core principles

Our focus group has told us that the following are important principles for our work:

- Making sure that they are being believed and taken seriously.
- Person centred.
- Listening.
- Accepting & valuing.
- Caring & compassionate.
- Sensitive.
- Respectful.
- Respect for diversity.
- Trauma informed way, recognising this can look different for each survivor.
- Never too late.
- Recognise that every survivor's journey/experience will be different.

Therefore, the Diocese and Cathedral fully commit to the following:

- Recognising that everyone's experience of abuse will be different. It can be difficult to talk about painful experiences and it may take many years to feel able to do so. To do so requires trust and courage. We also recognise that the experience following a disclosure can be as traumatising as the abuse itself.
- Recognising that some people may not wish to approach the Diocese or Diocesan Safeguarding Team directly, details of independent sources of advice and support will be widely publicised.
- If someone contacts a person in the Diocese or Cathedral, e.g. the Diocesan Safeguarding Team or a Parish Safeguarding Co-ordinator, to talk about their experiences of emotional, physical, sexual, financial and/or spiritual abuse, no matter how long ago, they will be treated with compassion, taken seriously and listened to.
- We undertake to work in a caring, sensitive and trauma-informed way that recognises the different needs of each survivor and that they are not to blame for what happened.

- We will endeavour to work in a non-discriminatory way that is empowering, inclusive and respectful of gender, sexual orientation, disability and ethnicity.
- We will maintain confidentiality regarding the information shared with us unless we are concerned about potential risks to the individual or to others. We would always try to explain first if we need to share concerns more widely, as long as it is safe to do so.
- We are committed to learning from the experiences of survivors and making changes based on that learning to ensure better support
- We will work within the requirements of House of Bishops Practice Guidance “Responding Well to Victims & Survivors of Abuse” 2022: [Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse | The Church of England.](#)

5. What this means

A. Reporting:

We realise it can be frightening to report experiences of abuse, whether these happened recently or a long time ago. When you are ready to talk to someone, you will be taken seriously, and we will try to make it feel as safe as possible.

If you call or email the Diocesan Safeguarding Team and leave a message, we will get back to you as soon as possible, and within 24 hours. If it is out of office hours or at the weekend, there is information on our website of who else you can talk to.

We will provide accurate information and help you to think through what you want to do next, including supporting you in reporting concerns to the police and through any subsequent proceedings.

We will explain the Church of England processes, including the complaints process.

We will keep any information shared confidential, except if we are concerned about risk to you or to others or if there is a police investigation. We would always try and talk to you first if we need to share concerns more widely.

Within your local church or parish you may wish to speak to your Parish Safeguarding Coordinator or a member of the clergy.

B. External Support:

We recognise that if you have a lived experience of abuse involving your relationship with the Church, you might initially want to talk to someone not connected to our diocese. In that case you can contact the independent helpline **Safe Spaces** that specialises in supporting church related victims and survivors of abuse. They offer a helpline, a live web chat and website. Tel: 0300 303 1056, Monday – Friday 9.00am – 9.00pm, Saturday 9-1pm and Sunday 1-5pm. Email: SafeSpaces@FirstLight.org.uk

or visit the website: [Home - Safe Spaces England and Wales](#) for further information.

C. Contact from the Diocesan Safeguarding Team

In exceptional circumstances, we may need to contact someone because information has come to light suggesting on-going risk or there are criminal offences to be reported to the police. No survivor will be contacted by the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer (DSO), police or local authority without a plan in place to offer immediate care and support.

D. Support we can offer

For those who have reported church related abuse that took place in Leicester Diocese or Cathedral, we are able to arrange for the services described in the Church of England's Responding Well: A guide for victims and survivors of church-based abuse. This can include offering therapeutic support, a support person, spiritual & pastoral support and where appropriate an apology. We fund counselling on a case-by-case basis.

You do not have to accept support; we understand that each survivor's needs are different and will work with you to consider the choices and to find the service that would be helpful and right for you.

We know that churches can also be places where people speak about abuse they have experienced outside of the church. We can offer advice to you and your church and signpost you to other organisations that might be able to help.

6. Caring and supporting victims and survivors of abuse in church settings

It is important that church settings take steps to become safer places for those who have experienced trauma and abuse. Our focus group have told us that the following ten key points are important for church settings to consider:

1. Ensuring welcomers at church, are not standing too close to the door, so people have space to come in.
2. Giving people time & space to become settled in church.
3. Having the opportunity to choose where to sit.
4. Awareness of service leaders that not everyone will be comfortable mixing up after they have spent time to find where to sit.
5. Awareness of touch and use of touch in prayer and services. Not asking people to hold hands. Not touching or hugging unless this is initiated by them.
6. Poster for victims and survivors ... If you have been affected by abuse, no matter how long ago, support is available to you from....

7. Making sure people know who the “safe people” are to talk to in church, including the pastoral assistants and prayer ministers.
8. Thinking about how a sermon or a talk might affect someone with lived experience of abuse or trauma.
9. Giving a warning ahead of time about what you will be talking about, to give people choices.
10. Thinking about how decorations in your church environment can affect people, e.g. bunting & balloons.

How we will do this

We will support church settings to respond to victims and survivors of abuse in a sensitive way by:

1. Sharing this advice widely with church settings.
2. Creating questions for PCCs to promote discussion, encourage reflection about how they care for victims and survivors who may be in their congregations but without knowing who they are.
3. Sharing with clergy and lay ministers, pastoral teams.
4. Discussing with the Bishop’s Leadership Team.
5. Sharing with those who train clergy and lay ministers.

7. Seeking feedback

Sometimes our contact with survivors is brief, but sometimes it can be over a long period of time. It might involve supporting someone to come forward to report concerns, to tell their story, through to accessing counselling and other support services.

Feedback is an important way to help improve how the Diocesan Safeguarding Team and the parishes respond. The Diocesan Safeguarding Oversight Group is very keen to gain the views of survivors.

It is important that feedback can be provided quickly and easily and is not a burden. Also, people will always have a choice about whether or not to give feedback.

How we plan to do that:

1. We have sought the advice of the focus group about a feedback form to use at the end of work with survivors. This includes seeking consent to use anonymous comments from feedback in reports or information on our website.

Trial this for 12 months.

2. We sometimes work with people for a long time and would like to check in mid-way or at different points, and ask for example, How are we doing? Is there anything we can improve on?

Trial for 12 months.

3. Anonymous information from the feedback to be shared with the Diocesan Safeguarding Oversight Group.

8. Future Survivor Engagement:

We are indebted to the small focus group who contributed to this strategy. Whilst the group has concluded with the completion of this strategy, we are keen to build on this experience and explore further ways for victims and survivors to engage more widely in safeguarding work and developments in the diocese.

We will publicise these opportunities in church settings and on the diocesan website.

Date: September 2025

Date of Review: September 2027