INTERIM REPORT: for distribution and discussion

How can the Newcastle Diocese Safeguarding Team better support Incumbents, Parish Safeguarding Officers and Churchwardens in the effective implementation of Church of England safeguarding policy in practice?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The purpose of the report is to share initial findings from a mixed methods research study aimed at understanding the experiences of Incumbents, Parish Safeguarding Officers and Churchwardens in implementing safeguarding policy in practice, within the Diocese of Newcastle.

Figure 1 Word cloud representing respondents' views of key safeguarding issues in their Parish

A mixed methods self-completion electronic survey was distributed across the Diocese of Newcastle, containing a range of open and closed questions so that both quantitative (statistical) and qualitative (narratives) data could be generated. The survey was completed by Incumbents (n=18), Parish Safeguarding Officers (n=39) and Churchwardens (n=43).

Conclusions: Data from the analyses highlights that while Incumbents, Parish Safeguarding Officers and Churchwardens are generally confident in their understanding of safeguarding (67.9%), there are differences based on position within the Church roles and within geography. The qualitative data highlighted an increased burden of bureaucracy and responsibility perceived to be placed on Parish Safeguarding Officers (who are volunteers) which is potentially unsustainable. The system is perceived as one of compliance that is burdensome and not appropriate for all Parishes; and that people, especially Incumbents, do not have enough time to complete their responsibilities. Rural communities require the same level of administration including training, but for fewer members, placing additional burdens on them that are not felt to the same degree in larger Parishes. This was potentially reflected in how they perceived safeguarding and presented a less positive perception in their knowledge and confidence. Whilst training is perceived positively, there is disparity in how this is received and experienced by Churchwardens. Further to this, there is statistically significant data to indicate that Parish Safeguarding Officers engage with the Diocesan Safeguarding Team for advice and support, but Churchwardens do not – reasons behind this will need further research. Data also indicates that trust

has not yet been established to the degree that survivors feel able to report their experiences of abuse and be believed, because a perceived protection of those in power still remains.

Areas for further discussion: The following are areas for consideration based on analysis of the data. The authors of the report are not involved in the financial/administrative management of the Diocese and therefore cannot make any commitments on behalf of the Church or the DST.

- Can a cultural shift be supported in terms of embedding safeguarding more into sermons and day-to-day life of the Church?
- How can trust be built – where survivors feel they will be believed, and that people will be held accountable for their actions?
- How can a conceptual understanding of safeguarding be further developed in terms of a preventative focus, e.g. a recognition of those who may pose a risk?
- The role of the Parish Safeguarding Officer – can the administration be reduced/shared and are there alternatives for smaller/rural Parishes rather than adding to Churchwarden responsibilities?
- Is there scope for paid roles to be created, e.g. in between Diocesan Safeguarding Team and Parish Safeguarding Officers, to take on more of the administrative and oversight responsibility?
- How can more face-to-face contact in Parishes be facilitated, e.g. through training, mentors etc., especially with Churchwardens?

Introduction: In October 2022, the Church of England published its *Past Cases Review 2* (NSSG, 2022) in which it acknowledged needing assistance from others to help 'shine a light' on some of the continuing challenges it faces in safeguarding children and adults at risk, in the Church, in its community and its congregation. They stressed the need for safeguarding to be an integral part of the Church and not an *add on*, with much more work still to be done. A National Safeguarding Team was established by the Church in 2014, to provide expert advice across Church bodies for implementing safeguarding policy; however, a risk of 'local variation' (p.68) in implementing safeguarding was found (NSSG, 2022). In light of this, Dr Lesley Deacon, a qualified social worker with expertise in safeguarding, was approached by Carol Butler, Diocese of Newcastle Safeguarding Adviser, to construct a research study across all 169 Parishes in the Diocese, to understand the experience of Incumbents, Parish Safeguarding Officers (PSOs) and Churchwardens (CWs) in implementing safeguarding policy within their Parishes. The intention of this report is to share initial findings for distribution and discussion to inform further research to improve safeguarding practice within the Diocese.

Research aim: The purpose of the research was to construct a comprehensive mixed methods survey, to understand variations and challenges in how Incumbents, PSOs and CWs implement safeguarding policy within their Parishes.

Research question: How can the Newcastle Diocese Safeguarding Team better support Incumbents, PSOs and CWs in the effective implementation of Church of England safeguarding policy in practice?

Participants: All Incumbents (n=145) PSOs (n=466) and CWs (n=466) in the Diocese were invited to participate in the survey. A total of 102 valid responses were received, then two were removed as the respondents did not confirm their role, therefore there were a total of 100 valid cases. Of these, 18 were Incumbents, 39 were PSOs and 43 were CWs. Some respondents only completed the closed questions and did not complete any of the open questions, therefore the qualitative data was completed by 14 Incumbents, 33 PSOs and 30 CWs.

Methodology and methods: A mixed methods self-completion electronic survey was chosen as the most appropriate method. Self-completion surveys are beneficial when participants are geographically dispersed as they enable more potential participants to be reached in a relatively short space of time and they are free from variability and the direct influence of interviewers (Clark et al., 2021). Due to potential differences in familiarity with technology, a postal survey was also made available where surveys could be returned directly to the researchers at the university, to maintain anonymity. The

survey questions were based on a mix of exploring current research (which is relatively limited and not specific to the Diocese of Newcastle) and an initial scoping review completed by Dr Lesley Deacon by engaging in informal conversations with, and shadowing of, Incumbents and PSOs to gain insight into their experiences of implementing safeguarding policy in practice. As the research area is exploratory, most questions were based on perceptions and experiences, and the qualitative parts of the survey (as well as enabling access to the voice of participants) also enabled responses to be driven by the participants rather than the researchers. The survey contained a range of questions covering the role and demographics of the respondent and, for Incumbents, a section on the demographics of the Parish (including questions on size, demographic constitution of congregations, theological position, and any Parish history of scandals).

Ethics: Ethical approval was sought and received from the University of Sunderland Research Ethics Committee (application: 017687) on 11 April 2023, as the academic host of the research. This was then ratified by the Newcastle Diocesan Safeguarding Team, before survey links were distributed.

Limitations: The survey was made available from 9 May – 16 June 2023 and was shared via email through the internal email system via the Parish Safeguarding Dashboard. It was made clear and explicit that the Diocesan Safeguarding Team (DST) had no access to the survey and would have no direct access to the results, receiving only aggregated data and fully anonymous quotes. A request was made for the survey to be completed by Incumbents, PSOs and CWs to ensure all views were sought. However, only 18 Incumbents completed the survey. This may have related to an oversight in communicating that the survey was intended to access ALL voices, not just the one person in the Parish perceived as having overall responsibility for safeguarding; or may have related to limited time available for Incumbents to complete the survey.

Approach to analysis: The majority of the quantitative data were Likert-scale measurements (i.e. a linear measurement of strength of agreement/disagreement towards the question posed). At the close of the survey, the data was exported from Qualtrics XM to IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) v.29, where they were cleaned to remove invalid cases and ensure consistent coding. The data were then explored – visually and through descriptive statistics at first, then, where appropriate, through statistical significance tests (chi-square, ANOVA [including Welch's variant and Kruskall-Wallace]) to explore potential associations between variables. Due to the size of the sample – and in particular to the limited size of significant sub-populations, e.g. positions within the Church, urban/rural Parishes – there is, for the most part, insufficient data to meet the thresholds for robust statistical testing. Where these tests have been carried out, the results have been reported only where

they may be considered valid. In a small number of instances, results of comparisons have been referred to when the relevant tests have not been valid, but only when visual analysis of the data strongly indicates a likely relationship that should be acknowledged for interpreting the data and the findings, or that may be significant in relation to the qualitative data from the survey, or for potential future elements of the research. In all these cases, however, it is important that it be remembered that even where tests are valid, the sample size (or the size of sub-populations) is such that the statistical power of the tests is insufficient to be relied upon. The results of any such statistical tests should be seen as indicators of possible – and perhaps likely – associations and not as robust evidence for such.

The qualitative data was exported to Excel and thematically analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006; and Clarke and Braun, 2013) six-stage framework: familiarisation, coding, search for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up themes. A total of five themes were identified through this process.

Quantitative findings (descriptive statistics): There was reasonable variety in the length of time participants had been in their current role, and in all cases the median time participants had held their role was between 3 and 5 years. Of the total sample, 69% of respondents were female and 29% male (2% not stated); disaggregated by role, the ratio remains similar for CWs (65.1%, n=28, female; 34.9%, n=15, male), but PSOs are much more likely to be female (87.2%, n=34) than male (10.3%, n=4) (2.6%, n=1, not stated), while the reverse is true of Incumbents, of whom 55.6% (n=10) are male and 38.9% (n=7) female (5.6%, n=1, not stated). The sample population is overwhelmingly homogeneous in terms of ethnicity, with 94% of participants being White British (including White English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish). The remaining 6% of participants are Black African, White Irish or other White ethnic background (4%), with 2% not stating an ethnic background. Based on the responses given by Incumbents as to the geographical character of their Parish, 52.9% were in urban or suburban areas, and 47.1% in urban peripheral or rural areas. Analysis of the data suggested notable differences in the experiences and outlook regarding safeguarding between Incumbents, PSOs and CWs. Accordingly, the following analysis is based on an exploration of the data based on a comparison of these different groups.

Perceptions and understanding of safeguarding: Firstly, it should be acknowledged that, in broad terms, the responses given to the survey indicated a strong engagement with issues of safeguarding. All respondents answered affirmatively to the question asking whether they felt they understood their role in safeguarding within the Church, and the majority of respondents in all roles answered 'definitely

yes' (67.9% overall). There is, however, a clear pattern showing differing levels of confidence within this broad picture: Incumbents are most likely to feel they 'definitely' understand their role (78.6%), closely followed by PSOs (69.7%), with CWs the least likely to feel they 'definitely' understand their role in safeguarding (63.3%).

There is an indication in the data that geography plays a role in the confidence of Incumbents when dealing with safeguarding. All Incumbents with Parishes in urban or suburban areas answered 'definitely yes' to understanding their role in safeguarding, whereas 42.9% (n=3) of Incumbents with Parishes in rural or peripheral areas answered 'probably yes'. When the responses to the question asking about worries about the safeguarding role were similarly disaggregated by Parish geography, all the Incumbents from rural or peripheral Parishes responded with 'maybe', whereas 57.1% (n=4) of Incumbents in Parishes in urban or suburban areas answered 'no'. This information is only available for Incumbents and the numbers of responses are too small for any robust analysis, so these findings should be treated with caution, but it nevertheless indicates that confidence with the safeguarding duties is lower in Parishes in rural and urban-peripheral areas than in urban or suburban centres.

Previous professional experience of safeguarding: Respondents were asked whether they had any previous professional experience of safeguarding (for instance as a social worker, police officer or teacher); 35.3% of respondents indicated that they had previous professional experience of safeguarding.
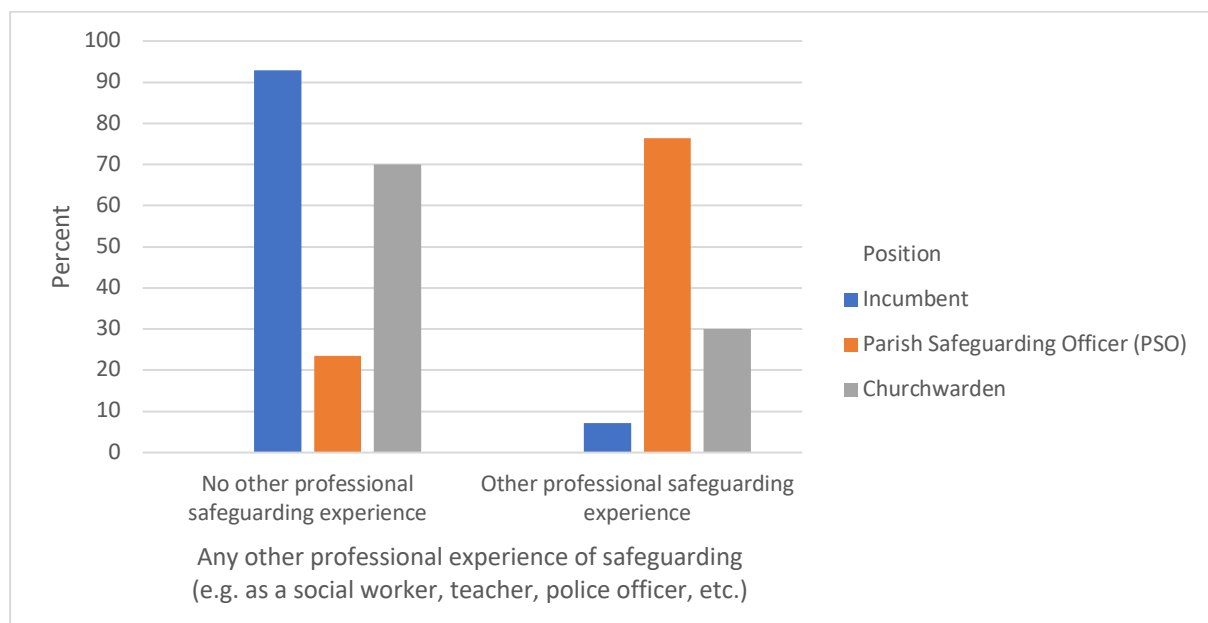

Figure 2 Bar chart showing other professional safeguarding experience by position

Disaggregated by position (see **Figure 2** above), it is clear (unsurprisingly) that the overwhelming majority of professional safeguarding experience is held by PSOs (76.5% of whom have other professional safeguarding experience, which accounts for 72.2% of all the other professional safeguarding experience among respondents). It is worth noting that although PSOs identified having professional experience, they were not asked where this was from, therefore their expertise may vary. Incumbents, however, are least likely to have any other professional experience (only 7.8% of whom have any other professional safeguarding experience). Interestingly, however, having other professional safeguarding experience has no connection to confidence in understanding the safeguarding role, or with having any worries about safeguarding; which is the same across all positions.

Understanding of safeguarding procedures and services: A series of Lickert-scale questions were asked covering respondents' perceptions of their capacity (in time and support) to perform their safeguarding role and their confidence with safeguarding procedures. These questions (ranked on a scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' for questions pertaining to respondents' perceptions of capacity and services, and from 'very poor' to 'very good' for questions concerning respondents' understandings of aspects of safeguarding practice and procedure), and the number of responses to each, by role, are provided in **Table 1** below.

Table 1 Perceptions of capacity and understanding of safeguarding practices and procedures

Question	Reponses			
	Incumbent	PSO	CW	TOTAL
I have enough time to do my safeguarding role effectively	14 (77.8%)	33 (84.6%)	29 (67.4%)	76
I have enough support to do my safeguarding role effectively	14 (77.8%)	33 (84.6%)	30 (69.8%)	77
There is a clear system for managing safeguarding in my Parish	14 (77.8%)	33 (84.6%)	30 (69.8%)	77
I am confident in using the Parish Safeguarding Dashboard	14 (77.8%)	33 (84.6%)	27 (62.8&)	74
I know to whom I should pass information about safeguarding concerns	13 (72.2%)	33 (84.6%)	30 (69.8%)	76
I know where to go/whom to ask for help about safeguarding concerns	14 (77.8%)	33 (84.6%)	30 (69.8%)	77
Would you say you feel sufficiently financially supported in implementing safeguarding practice?	13 (72.2%)	32 (82.1%)	26 (60.5%)	71

How would you rate your understanding of the following? – Worship Agreements	14 (77.8%)	34 (87.2%)	29 (67.4%)	77
How would you rate your understanding of the following? – Risk Assessments	14 (77.8%)	34 (87.2%)	30 (69.8%)	76
How would you rate your understanding of the following? – Children's Services	13 (72.2%)	33 (84.6%)	29 (67.4%)	73
How would you rate your understanding of the following? – Adult Services	13 (72.2%)	34 (87.2%)	30 (69.8%)	75
How would you rate your understanding of the following? – Diocesan Safeguarding Officer	14 (77.8%)	34 (87.2%)	30 (69.8%)	78

Responses to all the questions about capacity and understanding of safeguarding practices and procedures were generally positive, regardless of role. Some differences are apparent, however, as indicated in the following sections.

The strongest results were in response to questions about respondents' awareness of safeguarding communication and support. Regardless of position, the overwhelming majority strongly agreed (and in response to both questions, 97.4% (n=70) either agreed or strongly agreed) that they knew who to contact in order to raise any safeguarding concerns or to seek help regarding any safeguarding concerns. There was also strong consistency in responses regarding whether a respondent's Parish has a clear system for managing safeguarding (see **Figure 3**). In this case, 89.6% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that there was a clear system in place. Responses were largely consistent across positions. Only three respondents (2 CWss and 1 Incumbent) disagreed with the statement, suggesting that clear safeguarding systems are not currently in place in their Parish.
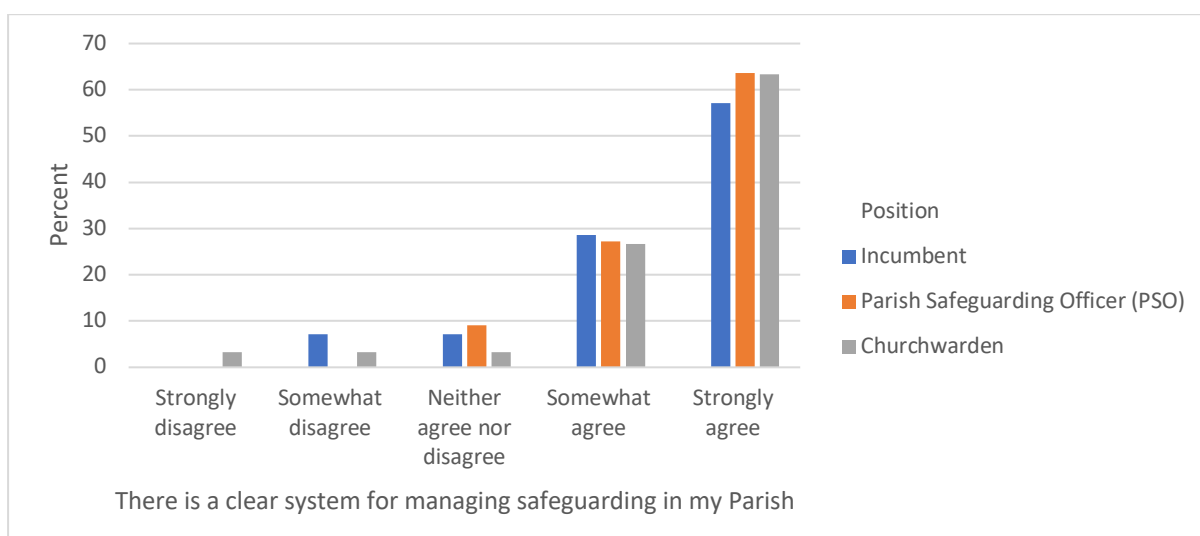

Figure 3 Bar chart showing clear safeguarding system in Parish by position

There were also strong results to the question regarding confidence in using the Parish Safeguarding Dashboard, with 82.4% (n=61) of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing that they have confidence in using the Dashboard. There are, however, some minor but notable differences between the confidence of people in different positions here. Incumbents and PSOs indicate the highest levels of confidence here, with 85.7% (n=12) and 93.9% (n=31) respectively either agreeing or strongly agreeing that they are confident in using the Dashboard. By comparison, the degree of confidence amongst CWs varies considerably: although 66.6% (n=18) either agree or strongly agree, the remaining 33.3% were spread evenly across the other categories, meaning that 22.2% either disagree or strongly disagree that they are confident in using the Safeguarding Dashboard.

Support and time: When considering how much support they receive, there is broad agreement from respondents, across positions, that there is sufficient support in order to carry out their safeguarding roles. Of these, 78.6% (n=11) of Incumbents, 88.8% (n=26) of PSOs, and 73.3% (n=22) of CWs either agreed or strongly agreed that they have enough support to carry out their safeguarding roles effectively. There was, however, increasing disagreement, across all roles, with 21.4% (n=3), 15.1% (n=5) and 16.7% (n=5) of CWs either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing (16.9% of respondents overall), suggesting that support is potentially an issue in a number of Parishes.

While support appears to present only a minor – although notable – problem with safeguarding capacity, the picture is more complicated when it comes to having the time needed to carry out safeguarding roles. Reponses vary considerably across all positions. The highest responses coming from PSOs, 51.8% (n=15) of whom agreed in some degree to having enough time to carry out their safeguarding role (with 31% either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing). They are narrowly followed by CWs, 51.7% (n=15) of whom either agree or strongly agree that they have sufficient time. In contrast, only 35.7% (n=5) of Incumbents either agree or strongly agree that they have enough time to carry out their safeguarding role, with 28.6% (n=4) disagreeing, and 35.7% neither agreeing nor disagreeing. The issue of time crosses positions. While overall 53.9% of respondents agree to some extent that they have sufficient time to effectively carry out their safeguarding role, 25% of respondents overall disagree to some extent, and in total 46.1% do not agree that they have enough time. Incumbents are the most likely to report not having enough time, but even among PSOs time appears to be an issue. A similar position appears to be the case regarding financial support for implementing safeguarding practice (see **Figure 4**).
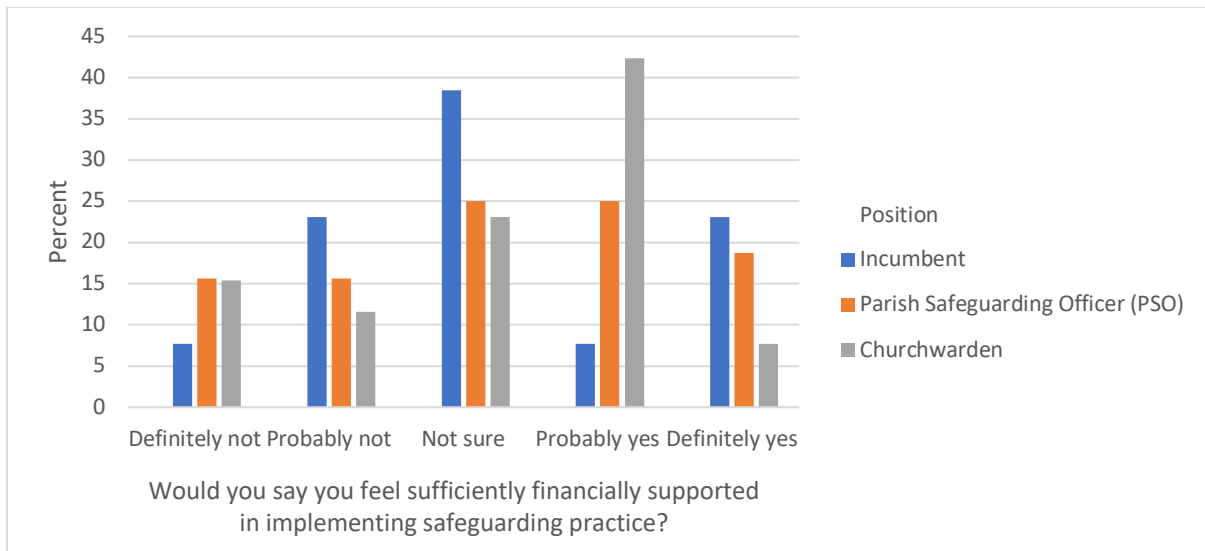
Figure 4 Bar chart showing sufficient financial support by position

The picture here is unclear. While Incumbents are the most likely to respond 'definitely yes', more of both PSOs (43.8%, n=14) and CWs (50.0%, n=13) answered either probably or definitely yes, than did Incumbents (30.8%, n=4). This may reflect the situation of Incumbents in receipt of a stipend, who may see safeguarding as an integral part of their role and something for which they themselves are financially supported, which is different for PSOs and CWs who, as volunteers, may perhaps instead view the issue in terms of broader Church resources. But this cannot be answered by this data. More significantly, however, are the proportions of respondents in all roles who consider financial support to safeguarding to either probably or definitely not be sufficient. Overall, 29.6% (n=30) of respondents feel financial support is insufficient, and this includes 30.8% (n=8) of Incumbents and 31.2% (n=10) of PSOs. Of the respondents, 26.8% were not sure about the sufficiency of the financial support. There is, then, considerable variety in respondents' views on the whether financial support to safeguarding is sufficient. While it is not possible based on these data to see where areas of concern might be, this is something that should probably be explored.

Procedures: The remaining questions are those concerned specifically with different elements of safeguarding procedures: Worship Agreements, Risk Assessments, Children's Services, Adult Services, and the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer. In all cases, there is considerable variation in the responses across the respondents overall and between respondents in different positions. While the differences here do not always amount to statistical significance, and so cannot be relied upon to indicate any particular relationship between position and understandings of different aspects of safeguarding procedure and practice, the variation, and lack of consistency in that variation across different aspects, suggests that understanding of safeguarding procedures and practices is far from uniform, and that

there will be considerable variation across Parishes and between people working in different roles, which should be acknowledged as a potential barrier to effective safeguarding working. Of all the topics covered, there was most uniformity in answers regarding understanding of Worship Agreements, with which 52% (n=40) of respondents stated their understanding was either good or very good. There was minimal variation between Incumbents, PSOs and CWs.

A similar picture was observed in the understanding of the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer (see **Figure 5**). There was mostly conformity between respondents from different positions, but a higher propensity of PSOs to report their understanding as very good (52.9%, n=18), while Incumbents are more likely to report their understanding as good (57.1%, n=8). Overall, however, the majority of respondents reported their understanding as either good or very good (78.2%, n=61).
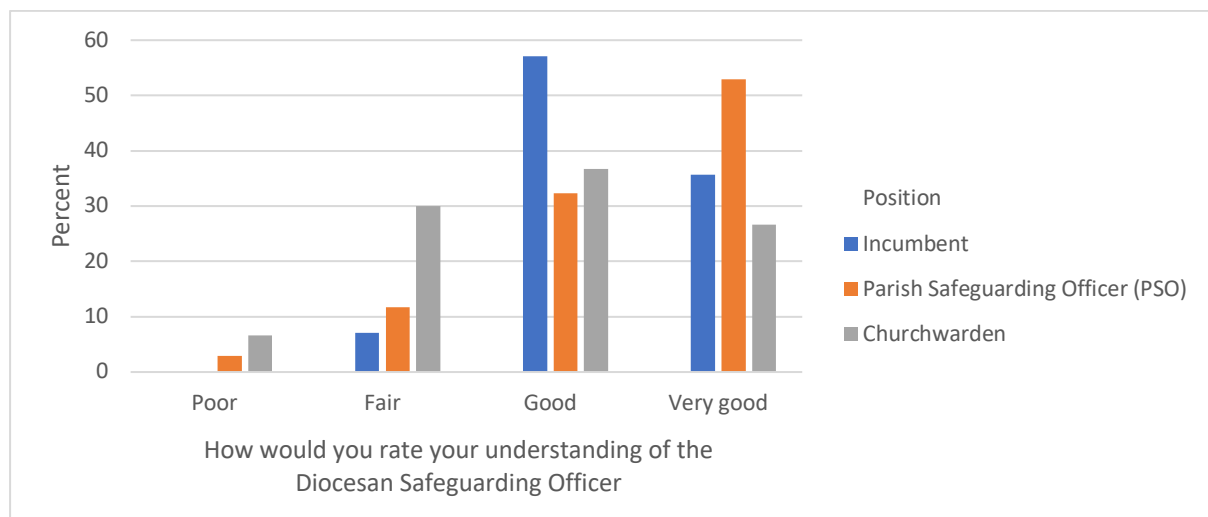

Figure 5 Bar chart showing understanding of Diocesan Safeguarding Officer by position

Of all the aspects of safeguarding procedures respondents were asked about, Risk Assessments were the one with which respondents overall reported the highest understanding. A total of 79.5% (n=62) reported their understanding to be either good or very good, with only 2.6% (n=2) rating their understanding less than fair. The starkest contrast concerning understanding of safeguarding procedures relates to the understanding of Children's Services. Here, while PSOs report high levels of understanding (24.2%, n=8, report very good, and 48.5%, n=16, report good understanding) and CWs report middling understanding (48.3%, n=14, report good, and 27.6%, n=8, report fair understanding), Incumbents report poor levels of understanding. While 46.2% of Incumbents rate their understanding as fair, 38.5% (n=5) consider their understanding to be poor. The difference between Incumbents' reported understanding of Children's Services and those of PSOs and CWs here are statistically significant, which suggests that this is a genuine issue with a lack of understanding (or perhaps of

confidence) amongst Incumbents, which warrants attention. A similar, although less pronounced, relationship can be seen in relation to understanding of Adult Services. Here, again, there is a noticeable difference between the reported understanding of PSOs and CWs, who broadly report reasonable levels of understanding (55.9%, n=19 of PSOs and 60.0%, n=18 of CWs report either good or very good understanding, compared with 15.4%, n=2 of Incumbents); 30.8% (n=4) of Incumbents rate their understanding of Adult Services as poor (none describe it as very poor). Again, the data here show the differences between the Incumbents' reported understanding and that of PSOs and CWs to be statistically significant, and worth noting.

Quantitative findings (statistical significance): There were three areas of statistical significance discovered.

Safeguarding capacity and understanding: These separate indicators show that, across a range of issues, confidence and capacity in safeguarding processes and procedures is high – although there are notable differences in this regard based on position within the Church. These individual components are important and should be considered in future planning for safeguarding provision and training. Taken on their own, however, within the scope of this research, these separate factors present little capability to assess the overall perceptions of capacity and understanding across the Diocese. To provide some overall measure, by which people working in different roles might be more meaningfully compared, these separate indicators were amalgamated into a single measure indicating a respondent's capacity and understanding of safeguarding processes and procedures as an average (mean) score. We use the term Safeguarding Capacity and Understanding (SCU) rate. This measure is derived from the answers to the questions (see **Table 2** below), which were recoded as values ranging between −1 (wholly negative responses) and 1 (wholly positive responses), where 0 represents a score where negative and positive responses appear in equal measure.

Table 2 Perceptions of capacity and understanding of safeguarding practices and procedures

Question	Reponses			
	Incumbent	**PSO**	**CW**	**TOTAL**
I have enough time to do my safeguarding role effectively	14 (77.8%)	33 (84.6%)	29 (67.4%)	76
I have enough support to do my safeguarding role effectively	14 (77.8%)	33 (84.6%)	30 (69.8%)	77
There is a clear system for managing safeguarding in my Parish	14 (77.8%)	33 (84.6%)	30 (69.8%)	77

I am confident in using the Parish Safeguarding Dashboard	14 (77.8%)	33 (84.6%)	27 (62.8&)	74
I know to whom I should pass information about safeguarding concerns	13 (72.2%)	33 (84.6%)	30 (69.8%)	76
I know where to go/whom to ask for help about safeguarding concerns	14 (77.8%)	33 (84.6%)	30 (69.8%)	77
Would you say you feel sufficiently financially supported in implementing safeguarding practice?	13 (72.2%)	32 (82.1%)	26 (60.5%)	71
How would you rate your understanding of the following? – Worship Agreements	14 (77.8%)	34 (87.2%)	29 (67.4%)	77
How would you rate your understanding of the following? – Risk Assessments	14 (77.8%)	34 (87.2%)	30 (69.8%)	76
How would you rate your understanding of the following? – Children's Services	13 (72.2%)	33 (84.6%)	29 (67.4%)	73
How would you rate your understanding of the following? – Adult Services	13 (72.2%)	34 (87.2%)	30 (69.8%)	75
How would you rate your understanding of the following? – Diocesan Safeguarding Officer	14 (77.8%)	34 (87.2%)	30 (69.8%)	78

A positive score, therefore, indicates that a respondent, on average, has a positive capacity and understanding of safeguarding, and a negative score indicates a respondent has, on average, negative capacity and understanding of safeguarding. Any positive score should be considered good, but higher positive scores are of course preferable. Although it is only an *ad hoc* assessment, it is felt that an SCU rate between 0 and 0.3 would indicate a positive but low degree of capacity and understanding of safeguarding processes and procedures, a rate between 0.3 and 0.5 would indicate a moderately good degree, a rate between 0.5 and 0.75 would indicate a moderate-to-high degree, and a rate of 0.75 and above would indicate a very high degree of capacity and understanding. The range of scores on this measure give an overall indication of capacity and understanding of safeguarding across the Diocese. The spread of results (see Figure 6) indicates that there is, overall, a moderately high capacity and understanding of safeguarding practices and procedures across respondents in the sample. The overall (mean) average SCU rate is 0.474 (SD 0.257, CI 0.416–0.532), which is very high within the 'moderately good' range, and suggests that, on average, respondents are fairly confident in terms of their capacity and understanding regarding safeguarding.
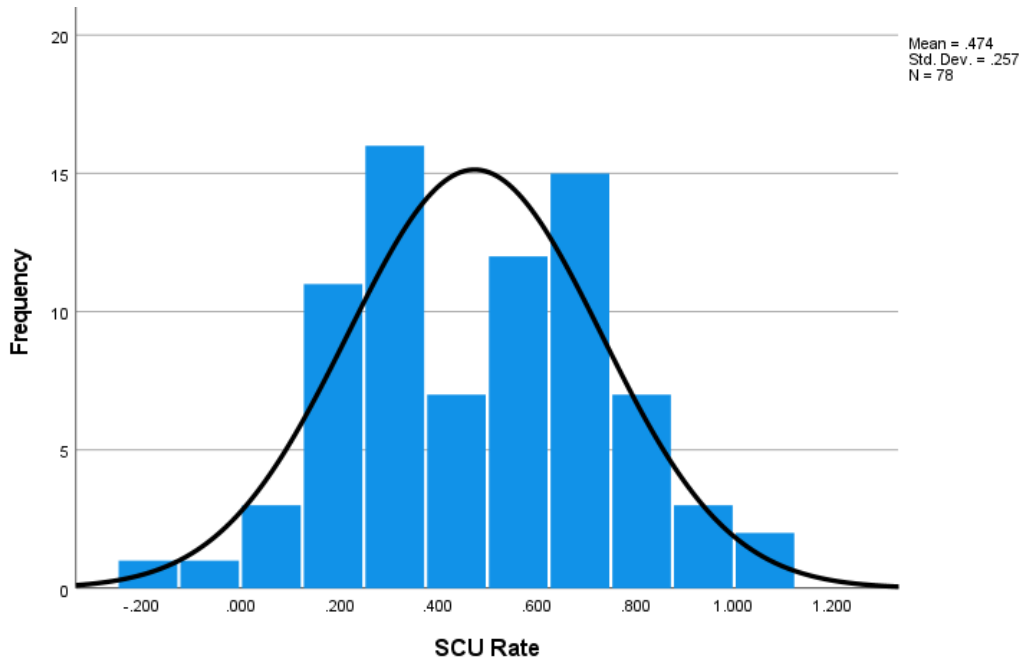
Figure 6 Histogram showing distribution of SCU rate

The SCU rates for respondents from different positions were compared to see whether there was any indication of significant differences for capacity and understanding of safeguarding. The results (see **Table 3**) show that there is slight difference in the mean scores and distribution of rates between different positions, with PSOs having a mean score of 0.535, marginally higher than the overall average, with Incumbents (0.441) and CWs (0.421) marginally lower than the overall average.

Table 3 Comparison of SCU rate by position

Position					95% Confidence Interval for Mean			
			Std.	Std.	Lower	Upper		
	n	Mean	Deviation	Error	Bound	Bound	Minimum	Maximum
Incumbent	14	0.441	0.241	0.064	0.302	0.580	0.100	1.000
PSO	34	0.535	0.230	0.039	0.455	0.615	0.083	1.000
CW	30	0.421	0.285	0.052	0.314	0.527	-0.208	0.875
Total	78	0.474	0.257	0.029	0.416	0.532	-0.208	1.000

All groups, however, contain a broad range of values, and despite some slight differences being observable, these are not statistically significant, which means that there is no compelling evidence to suggest that there is any significant difference between the perceptions of capacity and understanding of safeguarding procedures and practices between Incumbents, PSOs and CWs.

Safeguarding training: Respondents were asked which of the following safeguarding training courses they have attended: Basic awareness; Foundation; Raising awareness of domestic abuse; and, Safeguarding leadership training. Of those responding, 64% (n=45, 44.1% of total sample) answered that they had attended all the training courses, and 70 (68% of total sample) had experience of at least one safeguarding training course. Those respondents who indicated that they had at least some experience of safeguarding training were asked to assess the training they had received by stating to what extent they would agree or disagree that the training was informative, that it was useful/relevant to them, and that it was clear and easy to understand. On all these measures the results overall were highly positive, with 92.7% (n=64) of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing that the training was informative, 82.9% (n=58) agreeing or strongly agreeing that the training was useful or relevant to them, and 91.4% either agreeing or strongly agreeing that the training was clear and easy to understand. Disaggregated by position, the picture is relatively unchanged. The only statistically significant difference in responses by position was for the question 'to what extent would you agree or disagree that that the training provided was useful or relevant' (see **Figure 7**), where there was a statistically significant relationship observed for CWs showing a higher propensity for neither agreeing nor disagreeing. This effect, however, is relatively small, and given the limited sample size should not be relied upon too heavily.
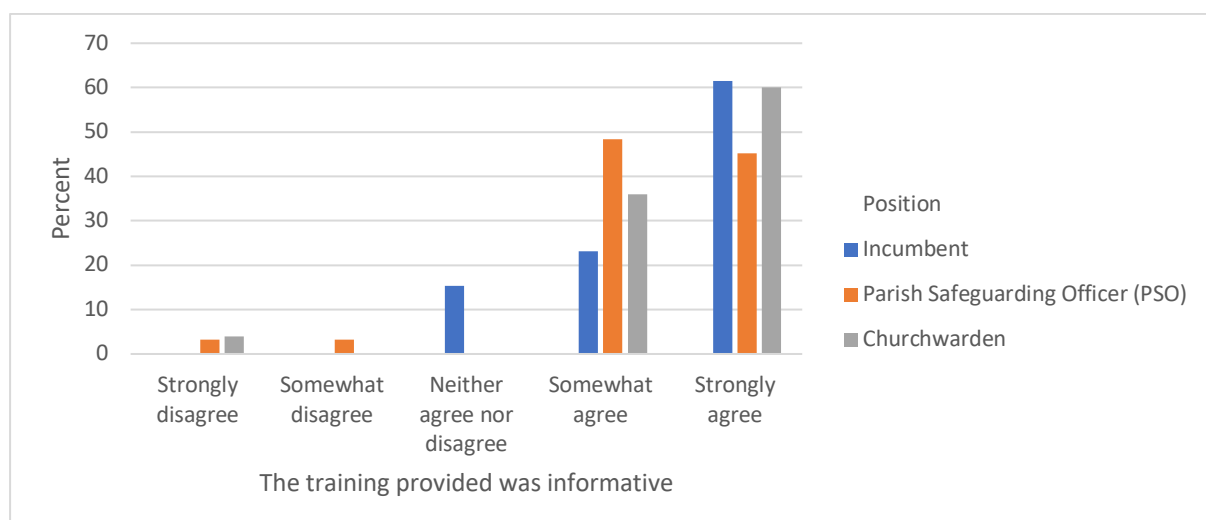

Figure 7 Bar chart showing whether safeguarding training was informative by position

In order to compare levels of engagement with safeguarding training across different positions and to test for any connected between overall engagement with training and SCU scores, participation in training was transformed into a score between 1 (attendance only at basic awareness course) and 10 (attendance at all courses), with combinations of courses gaining a score in between. Mean scores on this overall training score were then compared between positions. On average, PSOs had the highest average training score (9.25), followed by Incumbents (8.54) and then CWs (6.88). There is a statistically-significant difference between the scores of the PSOs and the CWs. It might be assumed that PSOs would have the highest level of training, but the statistically-significant difference between them and the CWs suggests that, overall, training is not getting to the CWs in an especially consistent manner, and that there may be obstacles to participation.

Training score was correlated against SCU to assess whether there was any noticeable connection between training undertaken and confidence and understanding around safeguarding. There was no statistically-significant relationship found, which would suggest that attendance at safeguarding training does not affect respondents' capacity or understanding around safeguarding. It should be remembered, however, that this is limited data.

Interactions with the Diocesan Safeguarding Team: Overall, interactions with the DST are what would be expected – most people have had contact, mostly once or twice, some a few more. However there is a significant difference between PSOs and CWs here, with PSOs much more likely to have had high frequencies of contact, and *only* CWs report having had none at all. Then, when looking at reasons to interact with the DST, CWs are significantly less likely than PSOs and Incumbents to have contacted the DST for advice, or if what they did was appropriate, and Incumbents statistically more likely to have asked for advice, or if what they did was appropriate. This is a clearly statistically significant relationship (and the largest effect size found in all the data), and could potentially be a significant point to pick up on in future research – why are CWs not seeking advice? Do they not need it? Do they *think* they do not need it? Are there obstacles?

Qualitative findings: Five key themes were identified within the qualitative data, which are set out in the subsequent sections.

Safeguarding is… ADMINISTRATION: When respondents were asked to explain their role in safeguarding, they largely described procedures, systems and 'paperwork' that they were required to follow such as DBS checks, training checks and keeping the Parish Dashboard up-to-date. These were

explicitly referred to as 'reporting upwards' (C-25), 'compliance' (PSO-6) and ensuring 'that the PCC [Parish Church Council] fulfils all the required and advised monitoring and record keeping' (PSO-14).

For many this focus was not, however, what they had expected when volunteering for the role. This is illustrated by PSO-16 who stated, 'I did not expect all the HR work'. This perceived level of bureaucracy was highlighted as being unnecessary and potentially determinantal to the actual *doing* of safeguarding. As PSO-31 highlighted, the administration of safeguarding was indicative of 'the over bureaucratic nature of the CofE processes'. Respondents emphasised how this was *box ticking* rather than helping in understanding and development of safeguarding culture within the Church, the Diocese and the Parish. This first perception of what safeguarding is could potentially act as a barrier to developing a knowledge-base, based on understanding of safeguarding as a concept. This is further explored in the role training takes within this administrative functioning. CW-8 illustrates this.

> *I understand that as a Churchwarden, I have to do safeguarding training. I am happy volunteering as a Churchwarden but though I understand the need to protect the vulnerable, I feel that safeguarding training is too much complicated and demanding. The Church could find other ways of educating about safeguarding.*

This view was shared across respondents who related specific concerns about the training being too onerous because it was generalised and not specific to the PCC's needs, it took place outside the Parish and was therefore challenging for people to attend, it felt overly complicated and time consuming. Concern was expressed that those who were volunteering were expected to go to the training rather than having it come to them. However, where respondents had engaged with more bespoke training they felt this was better and more appropriate for their needs, e.g. 'I found the new leadership training a vast improvement on what went before' (I13).

Safeguarding is… SOMETHING SOMEONE HAS TO DO: When answering the question regarding whether they had a choice in taking up a safeguarding role, only 19 reported that they did have a choice, whereas most respondents suggested they did not, but for different reasons. Incumbents saw it as an organic and fundamental part of their role, and therefore it was not about it being personal choice, as illustrated below.

> *It is [p]art of my role*
> I-4

As incumbent it is an integral part of my duties

I-2

It comes with the job

I-3

CWs, however, had a specific concern about how they had been given PSO responsibilities.

I volunteered to be a Churchwarden. The role I thought I was taking on was taking care of the Church and making sure everything was in order so services could run smoothly.

CW-8

I understand that as a Churchwarden, I have to do safeguarding training. I am happy volunteering as a Churchwarden but though I understand the need to protect the vulnerable, I feel that safeguarding training is too much complicated and demanding. The Church could find other ways of educating people about safeguarding.

CW-10

There appeared to be conflict where those taking on CW roles then feeling they had safeguarding added to this. Overall they accepted the need for training and understanding but raised concerns regarding the high level of administrative functions added to their role, which was not something they had volunteered for. PSOs perceived safeguarding as a role someone had to do and there was no-one else volunteering, so they felt they had to do it. This issue of finding people to volunteer for the role of PSO was also highlighted by Incumbents and CWs. The issue of there being no-one else to do it is illustrated below.

no one else was forthcoming when the previous PSO retired

PSO-6

I knew there was no-one else able or willing to take it on

PSO-8

…few left in small congregation to ask.

PSO-13

The issue was connected, by some respondents, with retirement, i.e. that it was a role that someone retired from paid work should be volunteering for. It was not clear what specifically this related to, e.g. that they had more time, or that those with more time were being expected to take on the role… Concerns were also expressed by respondents about getting stuck in the role. This is highlighted by PSO-4 who stated 'Originally yes, I had a choice, however as time has gone on there have been no other interested volunteers. We are a small rural church.'

Safeguarding is… ABOUT RISK BUT THAT ISN'T HAPPENING YET: The majority of respondents highlighted that the Church as a whole appeared to still be focused on the issue of vulnerability and had not yet fully embraced the idea that someone within the Church could *pose* a risk to others. Concerns were raised by respondents that the rebuilding of trust was an ongoing issue in the Church. This was emphasised to be a responsibility for those higher in the Church, not those at PCC level, that the Church somehow must acknowledge that a culture of always seeing 'the best in people' (CW-23) can be problematic from a safeguarding perspective. Respondents highlighted the need for the two concerns in safeguarding to be embraced, i.e. that people can pose a risk to others and that a focus on prevention is needed on this, rather than just a focus on the potential vulnerability of some. Attention on safeguarding to prevent/minimise risk is needed rather than just the protection of vulnerability. PSO-9 highlighted this as being too much focus on reputational damage rather than the acknowledgement that some people may pose a risk to others. Respondents highlighted where they felt changes were needed; in more emphasis on suitable vetting of Incumbents to ensure risks are minimised and not being 'overawed by senior figures' (CW-23). Concern was raised that there were 'too many cases where the forgiveness of sin has become the condoning of sin; and the over protection of reputation' (PSO-09).

Respondents also related the rebuilding of trust to the issue that they felt victims were still not being fully believed, including citing examples that had taken place in 2023. 'The stream of media reporting of failings at senior leadership level are a deterrent to reporting up the chain. Too much law, insufficient love' (PSO-31). Respondents expressed concern that reporting abuse does not make a difference as those higher up in the Church hierarchy are perceived as being protected, referred to by CW-37 as 'power abuse'. A danger was perceived in the hierarchical nature of the Church, which made it difficult to challenge. They emphasised a complex situation still permeated, as people may not have been reporting abuse because they did not think anything would be done or that the person they

accused would be protected. This was highlighted by I-14 as 'cults of personality', where the power rested with certain personalities who, in effect, became untouchable – or at least were perceived to be untouchable by respondents. CW-8 raised concerns about people slipping 'through the net'. CW-9 illustrated that what was needed to address this was 'transparency, honesty, integrity', that this needed to come from higher up in the Church and filter down to Parishes, and that it was essential for all members of the Church to be held accountable regardless of 'rank' (PSO-17). Respondents largely agreed that those in positions of trust needed more monitoring rather than less, but that this has not become the norm and there is still resistance.

This *resistance* was perceived in what a variety of respondents referred to as pervading cultures. For example, the difficulty in perceiving people as potential risks to others was highlighted as being about 'a culture of niceness' (I-4). PSOs and CWs felt they were often placed in difficult positions where they are a part of the 'family' and yet they are required to 'police' others. This was further complicated by their volunteer status, with I-4 I highlighting how this led to difficulties in attempting to perceive risks or to challenge others. Respondents highlighted concerns that there were cultures of complacency concerning safeguarding practice. They expressed how this led to may PSOs facing resistance when trying to implement policies, e.g. 'we have to manage some adults that could be a threat to others. I have also had to really insist on managing risks for some of our children's groups' (PSO-5).

Safeguarding is… 'DIFFERENT' IN SMALL, RURAL COMMUNITIES: A strong perspective emerged from Incumbents, PSOs and CWs in smaller, rural communities: that safeguarding was not the same issue for them as it would be in larger areas. They emphasised that the one-size-fits-all administrative process of safeguarding was unnecessary. This was explained as rural communities being small and therefore respondents perceived the level of scrutiny needed was not proportionate. Because of smaller numbers, the level of work (perceived as the same as for a church with a larger population) was seen as placing a significant burden on them. Smaller congregations also meant a smaller pool of volunteers to draw from.

Those who identified as being in rural Parishes felt they had no choice or control over what was happening, they felt they did not understand the processes of what they were agreeing to, and they strongly saw safeguarding as compliance rather than a conceptual understanding of risk and vulnerability.

In one particular issue there were diametrically opposite views – the idea that people in rural communities all know each other (CW10, CW-25) and therefore the level of bureaucracy and scrutiny was not proportionate, as illustrated below.

> *There has never been a safeguarding issue within our Parish and although it sounds cliched, our Parish is extremely small and rural and it would be extremely hard to hide a serious issue and for it to go unnoticed in such a place. People are nosy and talk a lot in places like this.*
> PSO-6

However, others (who also identified as being in rural communities) emphasised that this in itself was a cause for concern.

> *It would be easy in a small community like ours to think that there is no abuse here. But it could happen here just as easily as anywhere else, so we need regular action to keep us alert.*
> CW-26

Safeguarding is… the PSO: PSO-8 suggested that the PSO role is not seen positively and is, in effect, the 'Cinderella department of Parish life and no one goes there'. Respondents highlighted a struggle to access volunteers for this role, the level of administration and bureaucracy being off-putting (as set out in previous themes), and how the role was really about compliance rather than safeguarding *per se.* This was highlighted by PSO-32 who stated, 'there is too much to do as a safeguarding officer, and this puts them off' and I-8 'in small congregations… there is no waiting list to join the PCC or other roles, we are grateful that anyone is willing to do anything!'. Respondents emphasised the increased demands and expectations of giving up so much time as being problematic; it's a 'much bigger role that it used to be' (I-10). There was agreement from Incumbents, PSOs and CWs that too much emphasis was made on the PSO's ability to 'persuade' others to engage in safeguarding compliance (CW38, I7), rather than safeguarding being an embedded part of Parish life.

Examples of good practice: Participants were asked to highlight examples of what they perceived as 'good practice' i.e. where they considered that they went above and beyond what they understood to be the expectations of safeguarding practice. These were shared with the DST prior to the publication of this report to consider whether these were examples of 'good practice' or just what was expected minimally in terms of safeguarding practice. The following were acknowledged as examples of good practice.

- Everyone working with children given a copy of the *Code of Safer Working Practice*.
- Having a Parish Dashboard summary at each PCC meeting so it can be discussed as a group – shared responsibility rather than focusing on just one individual.
- Not working alone, or if working alone ensuring someone else knows where they are and they have their mobile. This tended to relate to being alone in the church building rather than out, alone, at people's homes.

What would help?: Participants were asked to advise what they would find helpful in applying safeguarding policy into practice within their Parish. These are framed into two key themes: cultural and pragmatic.

Cultural:
- A culture shift within churches to encourage people to be less dismissive of safeguarding. Respondents emphasised the need for safeguarding to be normalised and not feared or dismissed. It should be integrated into Church life to shift away from it being onerous. It was suggested that Incumbents should work to embed safeguarding more and more into sermons, rather than just having a focus on one day. PSO-8 illustrated this: 'better sermons on living the gospel life and the theological foundation and imperative of safeguarding being the responsibility of each of use'.
- More understanding is needed regarding people who may pose a risk, not just on the vulnerability of others.
- Shift to a preventative focus on safeguarding is needed – we are 'fighting fires rather than being proactive' (I-14)

Pragmatic:
- An acknowledgement that no one in the volunteer roles are safeguarding professionals, so more support is needed.
- Make training less onerous and move them onsite within Parishes to minimise travel.
- Shift away from volunteers – share responsibility more. 'I pray that I never get it wrong' (CW-9) – too much responsibility placed on them, and respondents worry they will miss something because processes keep changing.
- Having templates for admin forms would help.
- Support is inconsistent or too late. Respondents would like more face-to-face contact at Parish level, including mentors for PSOs.

Discussion: This research study took place over 15 months, from the scoping review (conducted with current Incumbents and PSOs) through to the completion of this report. The length of time is reflective of the detailed consideration of the needs of the research and on doing justice to highlighting the voice of those responsible for implementing safeguarding policies within their practice. The qualitative data highlights the voices of those responsible for implementing safeguarding into practice. Data from the analyses highlights that while Incumbents, PSOs and CWs are generally confident in their understanding of safeguarding (67.9%), there are differences based on position within the Church roles and within geography. The qualitative data highlighted an increased burden of bureaucracy and responsibility perceived to be placed on PSOs (who are volunteers) which is potentially unsustainable. The system is perceived as one of compliance that is burdensome and not appropriate for all Parishes; and that people, especially Incumbents, do not have enough time to complete their responsibilities. Rural communities require the same level of administration including training, but for fewer members, placing additional burdens on them that are not felt to the same degree in larger Parishes. This was potentially reflected in how they perceived safeguarding and presented a less positive perception in their knowledge and confidence. Whilst training is perceived positively, there is disparity in how this is received and experienced by CWs. Further to this, there is statistically significant data to indicate that Parish Safeguarding Officers engage with the Diocesan Safeguarding Team for advice and support but CWs do not – reasons behind this will need further research. Data also indicates that trust has not yet been established to the degree that survivors feel able to report their experiences of abuse and be believed, because a perceived protection of those in power still remains.

Limitations: As Collier (2020 and 2022) emphasises, application of policy can be regionally based. This research is only based on findings from those who responded to the study based in the Diocese of Newcastle. However, it is possible that further research could be conducted to compare findings with other Diocese across the whole of the Church of England.

Areas for further discussion: The following are areas for consideration based on analysis of the data; the authors of the report are not involved in the financial/administrative management of the Diocese and therefore cannot make any commitments on behalf of the Church or the DST.

- Can a cultural shift be supported in terms of embedding safeguarding more into sermons and day-to-day life of the Church?

- How can trust be built – where survivors feel they will be believed, and that people will be held accountable for their actions?

- How can a conceptual understanding of safeguarding be further developed in terms of a preventative focus, e.g. a recognition of those who may pose a risk?

- The role of the PSO – can the administration be reduced/shared and are there alternatives for smaller/rural Parishes rather than adding to CW responsibilities?

- Is there scope for paid roles to be created, e.g. in between DST and PSOs, to take on more of the administrative and oversight responsibility?

- How can more face-to-face contact in Parishes be facilitated, e.g. through training, mentors etc.?

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