The Diocese of Southwark

DS(26)18

Safeguarding Yearly Summary: 2025

Introduction from the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer (DSO)



The Diocesan Safeguarding Team (DST) warmly acknowledges the vital role played by so many in keeping safeguarding central to our Christian life across the diocese and within every parish. We extend our sincere gratitude to our Clergy, Church Officers, Parish Safeguarding Officers (PSOs), and all volunteers for their steadfast commitment to fostering safer church communities, where safeguarding truly is a shared responsibility. We also offer our sincere and profound thanks to our Diocesan Secretary, Nicola Thomas, and to Bishop Christopher for their unwavering dedication and exceptional support, which remain invaluable to the work of the Diocesan Safeguarding Team.

Michael Browne
Diocesan Safeguarding Officer

Introduction from the Independent Chair of the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP)



I would like to begin by expressing my sincere thanks to all clergy, parish officers, volunteers, and colleagues across the Diocese who have continued to prioritise safeguarding throughout the year. Your commitment to creating safer worshipping communities, often alongside demanding responsibilities, is deeply appreciated. Safeguarding is a shared endeavour, and the progress reflected in this report is a direct result of your dedication, vigilance, and care.

The Diocese has made considerable strides in strengthening safeguarding governance, oversight and preventative practice. We have worked collaboratively to further develop the DSAP into a clearer, more structured forum for meaningful scrutiny of the National Safeguarding Standards and wider Diocesan safeguarding activity. We have also invested in improving practice and resilience across the safeguarding system, undertaken comprehensive reviews and made significant progress in Safer Recruitment and compliance monitoring, with more accurate DBS and training data, high levels of engagement with parish dashboards, and increased visibility of compliance information for Archdeacons, Area Deans and Lay Chairs.

Alongside this progress, we recognise that important areas still require sustained attention. National scrutiny of safeguarding within the Church of England remains high, and recent engagement with the Charity Commission has initiated a retrospective review of serious incident reporting at PCC and DBF level. This work aims to address historic under-reporting and ensure greater consistency in decision making going forward.

I am grateful to everyone who has contributed to this year's achievements and who continues to help build a culture of safety, transparency and care across the Diocese. Together, we remain committed to ensuring that our churches are places where all can flourish and feel safe.'

Janet Ayoola
Independent Chair of the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel

The Diocesan Safeguarding Team (DST)

1. The Diocesan Safeguarding Team was benefitted in 2025 with the appointment of Michael Browne as Diocesan Safeguarding Officer, bringing over 20 years of experience in health, social care and the voluntary sector. His appointment has been formally confirmed through the required Church safeguarding certification. He is supported by a skilled team that includes a Deputy DSO, three Assistant DSOs, a Safeguarding Administrator, and a Safeguarding Trainer and Facilitator, with additional short-term support from a Safeguarding Performance Manager and an Information Data Manager to help improve data, reporting and audit preparation.

2. Safeguarding operational efficiency has been strengthened through a short-term investment in resources and the valuable contributions of appointed consultants and volunteers, alongside the collaborative efforts of colleagues across the IT Team, Data Team, Communications and other supporting departments.

Summary updates.

3. 2025 was a demanding year for the Diocesan Safeguarding Team, but it also brought important progress, including new leadership, parish dashboards, parish audits, improved communications, and stronger training policies and procedures. The arrival of the new Diocesan Safeguarding Officer led to a wider review of how the team works, supported by an external consultant, to improve processes, strengthen case management, and make better use of staff time and effectiveness. This has already led to clearer referral routes, better supervision, stronger oversight, improved reporting, and a renewed focus. Despite pressures from staffing shortages and rising referral activity, the team has continued to provide advice, training and direct support across the Diocese, and in 2026 will remain focused on strengthening culture, leadership, learning, supervision and support.

4. In 2025, the Diocesan Safeguarding Team received 487 referrals, which was an increase from the previous year. The biggest increase was in advice referrals, showing growing demand for guidance and support. The increase in referrals to the team is thought to be a positive step forward for parishes and individuals to feel enabled to speak out. Referrals fall into several categories including advice, Adult safeguarding, Child protection, as well as areas such as concerns around adult behaviour, DBS matters, discriminatory abuse, domestic abuse, failure to meet safeguarding requirements, financial or material abuse, mental health, neglect, and organisational abuse.

INEQE Audit

5. INEQE audit preparation began in June 2025 and has focused on gathering and reviewing evidence to show how the Diocese meets the National Safeguarding Standards. This work, overseen by the INEQE Audit Steering Group, has helped identify strengths as well as areas needing improvement. The INEQE 360 Audit Survey closed on 8 April 2026, and the in-person audit visit ran from 8 to 11 June 2026.

Church Safety Plans

6. The Diocese is committed to ensuring all Church Safety Plans are completed and reviewed at least annually, or sooner if risks change, to support individuals and maintain safe worship environments. Throughout 2025, with support from external consultants and audit reviews, diocesan processes and policies have been strengthened considerably.

The Charity Commission and regulation

7. The Charity Commission continues to maintain a sustained and high level of interest in the Church of England's safeguarding arrangements, particularly through its regulatory engagement with the Archbishops' Council. In November 2025, the Commission issued a Regulatory Action Plan requiring the Archbishops' Council to accelerate the implementation of independent safeguarding structures. This strengthened oversight reflects the Commission's broader expectation that the Church of England must demonstrate coherent, timely, and victim- and survivor- focused safeguarding practice, with clear accountability and governance arrangements that align with national standards.

Serious Incident Reporting

8. The Diocesan Safeguarding Team (DST) has identified an important opportunity to strengthen the consistency and transparency of our Serious Incident Reporting (SIR) practices. Historically, the absence of clearly-defined thresholds for reporting to the Charity Commission has led to variations in decision making and, in some cases, underreporting. Addressing this has been a key area of development. Over recent months, work has been undertaken, including a review, to establish clear, shared benchmarks for what constitutes a reportable incident at both parish and DBF level.

9. Parishes will be aware that the Diocese is in the process of renewing delegated authority from parishes for the DSO to report serious incidents to the Charity Commission on their behalf.

Training Data and Compliance Monitoring

10. Work is underway to improve the accuracy and visibility of safeguarding training data held by the Diocese. Updates include record storage, uploads, and implementing routine reporting of non-compliance to all Archdeacons. This enables earlier intervention, timely follow-up with individuals whose training is out of date, and clearer oversight at archdeaconry level. The process has facilitated a comprehensive data cleanse and, alongside annual parish reporting, will offer a more reliable picture of training compliance across the Diocese. All DBF staff are now required to undertake a basic level of safeguarding training, Raising Awareness of Domestic Abuse training, as well as an appropriate level of training commensurate with their roles and responsibilities.

Governance

11. The DSAP Chair and newly appointed DSO have identified improvements in the Panel's scrutiny functions and have initiated a re-design of the DSAP's structure and processes to strengthen oversight of the National Safeguarding Standards and risk. This includes a review of the terms of reference, membership, meeting schedule and reporting framework.

Training

12. The team welcomed Caroline Hollis to a newly-implemented role as safeguarding trainer and facilitator in November 2025 replacing previous use of consultants to deliver training. Caroline supports the team in delivery and administrative functions of this work, alongside evaluation processes and building relationships with parishes to better understand training needs, including delivery of bespoke sessions where gaps are identified.

13. In 2025, 1654 people completed basic safeguarding training, over 1,500 people completed Foundation Safeguarding training, over 500 people completed Leadership training, and more than 1000 people completed training to raise awareness of domestic abuse. 268 people completed the online Safer Recruitment course, and within the Diocese, more than 2,200 Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks were processed for staff and volunteers.

Introduction and Adoption of Parish Safeguarding Dashboards

14. The implementation and embedding of Parish Safeguarding Dashboards continues across the Diocese of Southwark. The Dashboards give parishes clear visibility of their safeguarding training compliance and their safer recruitment assurance, including DBS check compliance. Local uptake has been very positive, with approximately 80% of parishes now meaningfully engaged in the programme. Archdeacons now have direct access to dashboard information for their areas, enabling improved oversight, monitoring and support at archdeaconry level.

Data Subject Access Requests (DSAR)

15. The Diocese (Board of Finance and Area offices) received 16 DSARs in 2025, approximately double the number received in 2024, and continues the upward trend we have seen in previous years. A DSAR is a request for a lawful disclosure of personal data by a data subject to a data controller. DSAR requests are resource intensive, and in some circumstances may relate to many years' worth of personal data, all of which must be sifted, and third-party data redacted where necessary before disclosure to the data subject.

16. We would like to thank our parishes for their continued support, their commitment to keep Safeguarding at the forefront of everything that we do to enable our parishes and communities to be a safe place for all.

June 2026