

ST ALBANS DIOCESAN SYNOD

13 June 2026

ANNUAL SAFEGUARDING REPORT 2025

This report provides an overview of the work of the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP) during the period April 1, 2025, to March 31, 2026. It outlines the Panel's role, activity, key themes, assurance provided to the Diocese, and areas for attention or development.

The DSAP

The DSAP continues to operate within the Terms of Reference, in accordance with House of Bishops' guidance, providing independent advice, challenge, and support to the Diocese on safeguarding matters. The Panel's core purpose remains to contribute to the promotion of a culture in which safeguarding is understood, prioritised, and embedded across all aspects of diocesan and cathedral life.

The DSAP does not hold executive responsibility but offers assurance and constructive challenge of safeguarding practice, policy implementation, and learning.

The panel is made up of:

Mr Seb Smith (Panel Independent Chair), Mr Jeremy Hirst (Diocesan Safeguarding Officer), Mr David White (Diocesan Secretary), The Rt Rev'd Dr Jane Mainwaring (Bishop of Hertford), The Ven Janet Mackenzie (Archdeacon of Hertford), The Ven Charles Hudson (Archdeacon of St Albans), The Rev'd Canon Will Gibbs (St Albans Cathedral. Canon for Mission and Pastoral Care), Mrs Elaine Rabbitt (St Albans Cathedral Safeguarding Officer), Mrs Linda Bulled Lay Member, Central Bedfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership and PSO, Ms Liz Hanlon (Independent Chair, Hertfordshire Safeguarding Adults Board), Ms Phillipa Scott (Strategic Safeguarding Partnership Manager, Central Bedfordshire Children's Safeguarding Board), DCS Adam Ghaboos (Head of Crime and Safeguarding for Herts Police), Ms Emma Mortimer (independent social worker), Reverend Clinton Dan – Jumbo (Senior Probation Officer Hertfordshire PDU – Mid Herts Centre), Mrs Helen Schmitz (PSO), Mr Tom Snell (DBF member).

The panel is comprised of members with expertise in safeguarding practice from statutory agencies and pastoral ministry. Membership has remained stable during the year and is healthy, and the meetings are well attended. The panel recognises that it would be strengthened through increased membership from colleagues in Health,

especially mental health; Education and by the addition of a local authority designated Officer (LADO). Work is underway to progress these appointments.

We are also focussing on a way where we can include survivor engagement.

The panel meet quarterly, in person, with additional taskings undertaken as required. Attendance has been strong, and the panel continues to function effectively.

The Terms of Reference and Constitution can be found at

[Terms-of-Reference-and-Constitution-for-Diocesan-Safeguarding-Advisory-Panel.pdf](#)

The Diocesan Safeguarding Team (DST)

The DST staffing remains the same as last year:

DSO. Full time

A/DSA. Full time

A/DSA. 0.6

Training Co-ordinator and Trainer. 0.6

Administrator. 0.6

DBS administrator. 0.5

Key areas of focus during the year have included:

- Preparation for the 2027 independent audit By INEQE who were appointed by the Archbishops council in August 2023 to carry out external audits of both Diocese and cathedrals
- The collation of evidence-based information through a DSAP sub-group, with feedback at full DSAP meetings
- Agreement of the 2026 to 2028 safeguarding strategy, aligned to the national safeguarding standards and audit requirements
- Discussion and review of the DSAP risk register
- Support and challenge for the diocesan six monthly self-audits in line with the national standards quality assurance recommendations
- Oversight of policy updates and national church guidance
- Support and challenge regarding safeguarding culture, leadership and training
- Examination of the Diocesan Safeguarding Team (DST) requirements, to understand capacity, resourcing, and emerging risks
- The panel has maintained a constructive and appropriately challenging relationship with the DST and senior diocesan leadership.
- Focus group meetings between the chair and representative Parish safeguarding Officers and Incumbents.

- Dialogue with the National safeguarding team to explore options for improved performance reporting.

National Safeguarding Standards

The DST and diocesan leadership promote and are working towards improvement of the five standards

1. Culture, Leadership and Capacity
2. Prevention
3. Recognising, Assessing and Managing Risk
4. Victims and Survivors
5. Learning, Supervision and Support

Self-audits are being conducted in a timeframe suggested within the national guidance, with use being made of the advised templates and tools. Standards 1, 2 and 3 have been completed with reports submitted to DSAP and BSM. Standards 4 and 5 will be completed in the following 12 months.

In addition to self-audits, the Diocesan safeguarding team benefit from external audits from the regional lead for safeguarding (RSL) and these will be presented as standing items at future panel meetings.

Key Themes and Observations

The following themes have emerged during the year:

Safeguarding Culture. There is continued progress in embedding safeguarding as a shared responsibility, alongside recognition that cultural change requires sustained leadership and consistency across parishes and worshipping communities.

Complexity of Cases. There is an increasing complexity in some safeguarding matters, requiring careful risk assessment, multi-agency engagement, and clear communication. New guidance places extra burden and responsibility on the DST.

Capacity and Resilience. There are ongoing pressures on safeguarding resources, particularly in relation to casework volume, managing persons of risk, training and parish support.

Learning and Improvement. There is evidence of learning from reviews and incidents, although the panel notes the importance of monitoring long-term implementation and impact.

Independent Audit by INEQE 2027

The diocesan audit action plan sits alongside the diocesan safeguarding strategy and is aligned to the National Safeguarding Standards. The intention is to turn national standards into local priorities, making sure safeguarding is consistent, accountable, and always improving.

There are five diocesan action plans that accompany the strategy, one for each national standard. These plans set out clear actions and responsibilities to deliver the safeguarding strategy. By reviewing progress against these plans, the diocese can show how safeguarding standards are in place or are developing. The evidence gathered from carrying out and monitoring these plans will provide assurance for the independent audit. In addition, work is underway to demonstrate the impact improved plans have on the lives of all parishioners and survivors of abuse.,

The INEQE independent audit begins in July 2027. The Diocesan Safeguarding Officer (DSO), as the single point of contact, will complete a 360-degree audit tool over four to six weeks, with support and evidence from diocesan leaders. The evidence used must come from the previous 12 months, from July/August 2026. An in-person visit for one week is scheduled for November 2026.

The Audit Preparation Group, a subgroup of the DSAP, met twice in 2025 and has three meetings planned in 2026. The group is working through an audit action plan in preparation for the audit.

The Charity Commission

The Charity Commission has sought to clarify the requirements for reporting to it safeguarding and other serious incidents and the specific role of trustees in this process. In addition, what constitutes a serious incident as well as determining whether safeguarding should be concerned only with those adults who are vulnerable or with all those who come into contact with a charity has been subject to debate. This has required diocesan level discussion as to whether any retrospective actions may be required.

Safeguarding at the Cathedral

The DST continue to have an excellent working relationship with the Cathedral, and this is underpinned with a Service Level Agreement. The current Cathedral Safeguarding Officer (CSO) is retiring in 2026, and we are grateful for her service and input at panel meetings. Together with the Dean and Canon for Mission and Pastoral Care, there has been a continued improvement and strengthening of safeguarding. The DST and Cathedral are working together towards the 2027 independent audit within the DSAP sub-group.

2025 introduced the Cathedral Safeguarding Advisory Panel (CSAP). The CSAP meeting follows on directly after the DSAP meeting with the same panel members offering scrutiny to Cathedral Safeguarding to a separate agenda, rather than any discussion being set around a standing item on the DSAP agenda. This is embedding and is a useful and forward-thinking change. The cathedral has recruited a safeguarding professional to sit on Chapter as an executive member.

Independent inquiry into Child sexual Abuse (IICSA) 1 and 8 Recommendations

In April 2025, St Albans Diocese were accredited having fulfilled the national criteria for the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser to become the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer and so have authority to make decisions independently of the diocesan bishop on key safeguarding tasks. Shortly prior to this, an appointment was made to the new role of Regional Safeguarding Lead for East Anglia who now offers professional supervision to the DSO. These two changes fulfil the requirements of ICCSA recommendations 1 and 8.

Regional collaboration

In August 2025 the current DSAP Chair was appointed for three dioceses, St Albans, Chelmsford and Ely. This paid appointment may in future extend to Norwich

This, along with the introduction of the East Anglian Regional Safeguarding Lead (RSL) means the Eastern Region is well placed to share best practice and drive forward improvement. The DSAP Chair recruitment has been an innovative move which has drawn interest from other regions as the current best model and practice.

The introduction of regional RSLs, regarding DSO supervision, has created an environment of sharing and learning between peers.

Parish Support

The DST remains dedicated to supporting parishes in meeting the five national safeguarding standards set out in the national guidance.

Both the Parish Safeguarding Dashboard and the Safeguarding Hub continue to receive strong engagement from Parish Safeguarding Officers and clergy. Parishes that have adopted these systems are to be commended, and encouragement and support are ongoing for those not yet making use of them.

The monthly Zoom drop-in sessions remain highly valued by PSOs, providing regular opportunities to connect with members of the DST and with one another. These sessions help foster a sense of shared purpose and mutual support, reducing the isolation that can be felt in safeguarding roles.

The annual safeguarding forums take place again in March and April 2026.

Assurance to Bishops' Council

Based on the work undertaken during 2025 to 2026, the DSAP can offer measured assurance that safeguarding arrangements within the Diocese are being taken seriously and that there is clear commitment to continuous improvement.

By bringing together external and internal audit findings, as well as making the best possible use of data, the ability to objectively understand the quality of safeguarding and its impact across the Diocese and Cathedral will continue to improve.

The panel recognises the diligence of the DST and the willingness of senior leaders to engage openly with challenge and advice.

The panel highlights the following areas for continued focus in the coming year:

Building on an existing foundation that safeguarding is a function and responsibility across the whole of the Diocese of St Albans.

Ensuring adequate resourcing and staff wellbeing within safeguarding roles.

Further strengthening safeguarding links and support of parishes, particularly Parish Safeguarding Officers.

Maintaining survivor-centred approaches and opportunities for learning from lived experience.

Appreciation

The panel wishes to thank the bishops and senior staff, the Diocesan Safeguarding Team, and all those involved in safeguarding ministry in parishes, with recognition to the voluntary work across the diocese for the commitment during the past year.

The DSAP remains committed to supporting the diocese in its safeguarding responsibilities and looks forward to continuing its work in partnership with Bishops' Council during 2026 to 2027.

Seb Smith

Independent Chair, Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel

April 2026