



Given the time restrictions at Synod, it will be assumed that this report has been read and any question should be submitted in advance.

2025 in summary and the way forward

Much of last year and the early part of this year has been overshadowed by Charity Commission investigation into the circumstances that led to the resignation of the former Bishop of Liverpool, the Right Reverend Dr John Perumbalath, following media coverage of safeguarding allegations made against him.

Allegations had been raised by two women against Bishop John in 2023. These allegations were denied but following its regulatory investigation, the Charity Commission concluded that Trustees of the Liverpool Diocesan Board of Finance (LDBF) did not adequately discharge their safeguarding responsibilities in relation to their oversight of safeguarding and that there were failings in our processes and procedures. The Official Warning is to the body corporate of the LDBF – there were no sanctions or disqualifications of individual trustees.

Trustees responded publicly to the Charity Commission’s findings with a statement that included:

We accept the Commission’s findings and apologise for the shortcomings identified. We have already made changes to strengthen reporting and governance processes, and we commit to ongoing learning, accountability and continuous improvement. The Diocese of Liverpool is dedicated to ensuring that the church is a safe and inclusive environment where concerns can be raised in a culture of accountability, transparency and compassion.

While this was going on the Diocesan Safeguarding Team continued their work to support parishes.

Fit for Mission 2:

Fit for Mission:

The DST continued to work closely with the FfM team, in particular the safeguarding coordinator, to ensure that the FfM framework is consistent and compliant with existing national safeguarding requirements. Currently three groups of churches have gone through the legal pastoral reorganisation to become larger single parishes: Church St Helens in St Helens deanery (11 parishes), Christ our Hope in West Derby deanery (9

parishes), the Parish of Warrington in Warrington deanery (12 parishes). Two more larger parishes will be formed in the next 12 months, with a further two in 2028.

The forming of larger single parishes, which is a significant element of the diocesan strategy for sustainability, benefits safeguarding rigour in the following ways:

A team of PSOs (one per church) is formed that work together across the larger parish. They support each other generally and with best practice, driving up consistency and standards. Their team leader is a member of the larger parish PCC that sets policy and monitors safeguarding effectiveness. The larger parish Safeguarding team, which is formally a sub-committee of the PCC, is an antidote to isolation of PSOs that can be a feature of single parish life. If a PSO is sick or leaves, then there is the possibility for the team to cover those responsibilities temporarily.

The PSO team receive significant support from paid administrative staff in the Support Services team that is developed within the larger single parish. The Support Services staff can undertake safer recruitment for the PSOs and manage that with the GDPR compliant Churchsuite church management system. Case documentation is securely stored with controlled limited access.

There is consistency of implementation of policy and process, with dashboards being implemented across all the churches in the larger parish.

A strong relationship can be built between the lead PSO and the DST. The DST can access the larger parish safeguarding statistical data in real time instead of relying largely on periodic audits.

PSOs in larger parishes report that support they receive and their roles are significantly improved in a larger parish.

Safeguarding Dashboards

The Diocese launched safeguarding dashboards as a pilot in February 2025 with 2 deaneries. They were rolled across the whole of the Diocese in the Summer of 2025 and good progress has been made (as detailed in the data below which shows the number of parishes that have initiated the system and the level of progress made). The feedback

has been overwhelmingly positive, in particular the assistance it has afforded parishes in enabling them to ensure compliance with safeguarding policy, monitor progress and identify and focus on areas for improvement. The system has also enabled the safeguarding team to have accurate oversight of the progress made and allowed them to identify any problems, and the parishes that may need extra support.

The Diocesan Safeguarding Team (DST) acknowledge and continue to support the vital work of Parish Safeguarding officers via the further development of the Parish Safeguarding Officer Forums, which are held quarterly. The forums have included focused presentations and discussion on a wide variety of topics, including mental health, honour-based violence and modern slavery, as well as talks by guest speakers such as the LADO. The forums have also been an opportunity to develop professional relationships with the safeguarding team and foster best practice and consistency in this pivotal role within the Diocese.

The team is supported by the Regional Safeguarding Lead – Stephen Crofts. He has been able to connect the team with other colleagues across the region to network and peer support. He also provides professional supervision for the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor, so both Andy and Mick have benefitted from this during the year.

In addition to the day-to-day support that the team has offered to the diocese they have had a number of national programmes to implement.

In 2025, the new Code of Practice for responding to Safeguarding Concerns & Allegations came into effect, with it becoming a requirement from September 2025. This was a steep learning curve for all diocesan safeguarding teams, with the new code differing to the previous 2017 practice guidance. The new code is much clearer about what is required, with accompanying guidance detailing how the requirements might be achieved. The code is also much less 'one size fits all', with several different 'pathways' depending on the situation (e.g. clergy, volunteer, deceased individual). This is bringing greater clarity for victims/survivors, respondents to allegations, and to diocesan safeguarding teams/senior diocesan clergy.

By the time Synod meets the team and other members of both the cathedral and the diocese will have been audited by INEQE as part of their national programme to audit all the cathedrals and diocese in the Church of England. This audit required a huge amount of preparation in advance. It also required an honest assessment of where safeguarding has been in the past, what has already been done and what is planned for the future.

In many ways 2025 marked the beginning of significant change in safeguarding in the Diocese of Liverpool. A number of key people have moved on and they are to be thanked for their service:

Andy Holmes - Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor (DSA)

Stuart Haynes – Assistant Diocesan Secretary

Neil Frackleton - Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel Chair (DSAP)

With these people moving on and with a recognition that safeguarding needs further resource to enable strategic leadership, the opportunity has been taken to restructure the team. We have appointed an experienced and strategic safeguarding specialist to be our Head of Safeguarding, effectively our Diocesan Safeguarding Officer (DSO) to lead safeguarding across the Diocese. This is a senior leadership role with independent authority of the Diocesan Bishop and Cathedral Dean, responsible for the professional oversight of safeguarding children, young people, and vulnerable adults. We anticipate the appointee will be in their role by in late Spring. A new Deputy Diocesan Safeguarding Officer, Stuart Barton-Ainsworth has also recently joined the team. Formerly a social worker, Stuart has 20 years experience across social care, education, youth justice, policing, and community engagement

Thanks are also due to Mick Murphy who has stepped into Andy's shoes as the Acting Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor until the new appointees are embedded in post before his own retirement.

We have recruited a new Cathedral Safeguarding Officer, Lauryn Dobie who is now working on an action plan for the Cathedral Safeguarding Management Group. Lauryn's background is in child protection. The Liverpool Diocesan Board of Finance has entered into a **Memorandum of Understanding and Safeguarding Partnership Framework with Liverpool Cathedral** to formalise joint working practices in safeguarding and to align with the Church of England's National Safeguarding Standards and Quality Assurance Framework.

Sharon Parr as Diocesan Secretary and Cathedral Chief Officer has meanwhile supported the strategic oversight of safeguarding for both the diocese and the cathedral until the new Head of Safeguarding (DSO) is in post. Bishop Ruth has appointed an interim DSAP chair, Debbie Innes-Turnill to ensure that governance lines are effective and that there is challenge and constructive support around safeguarding in our worshipping communities. Debbie is an experienced DSAP chair and has also served on the Jay/Wilkinson response group and is a current member of the Church of England Safer Structures programme, in addition to her other independent safeguarding consultancy roles.

Together we have begun to build a more strategic safeguarding approach with victims and survivors at the heart of practice and improvement. Using the Church of England Safeguarding standards this will make use of the data now available to us via the new National Case Management system – My Concern. This is the source of the statistics in

the next section which will be reported against annually so that Synod has the overview of the operation of safeguarding in the diocese. The forward action plan progress will be overseen by DSAP. This plan in addition to the new Quality Assurance process being carried out by the Regional Safeguarding Lead will provide DSAP, trustees and Synod with a more comprehensive overview of what is going well and what could be improved going forward.

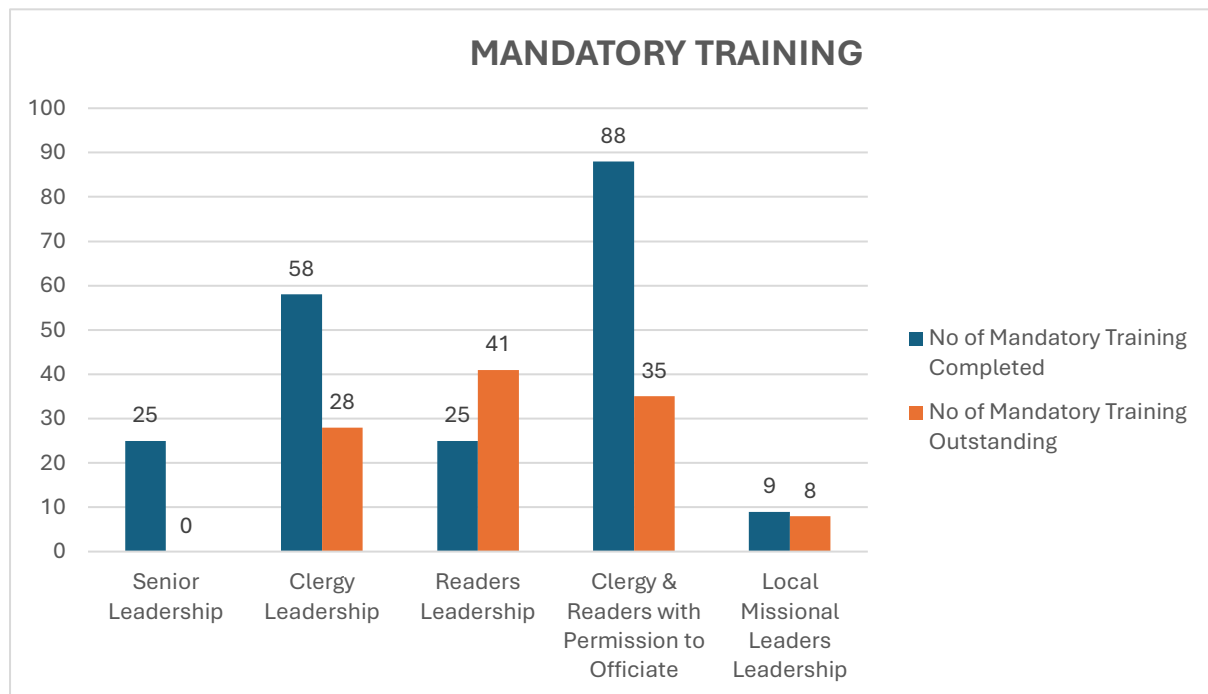
National Synod accepted the proposal in February to improve safeguarding by the creation of an Independent Safeguarding Authority. A rapid change plan is now being developed with a view to moving towards a new system in the next 3 years. The changes that Liverpool has already made and the improvement plans will stand it in good stead for the future.

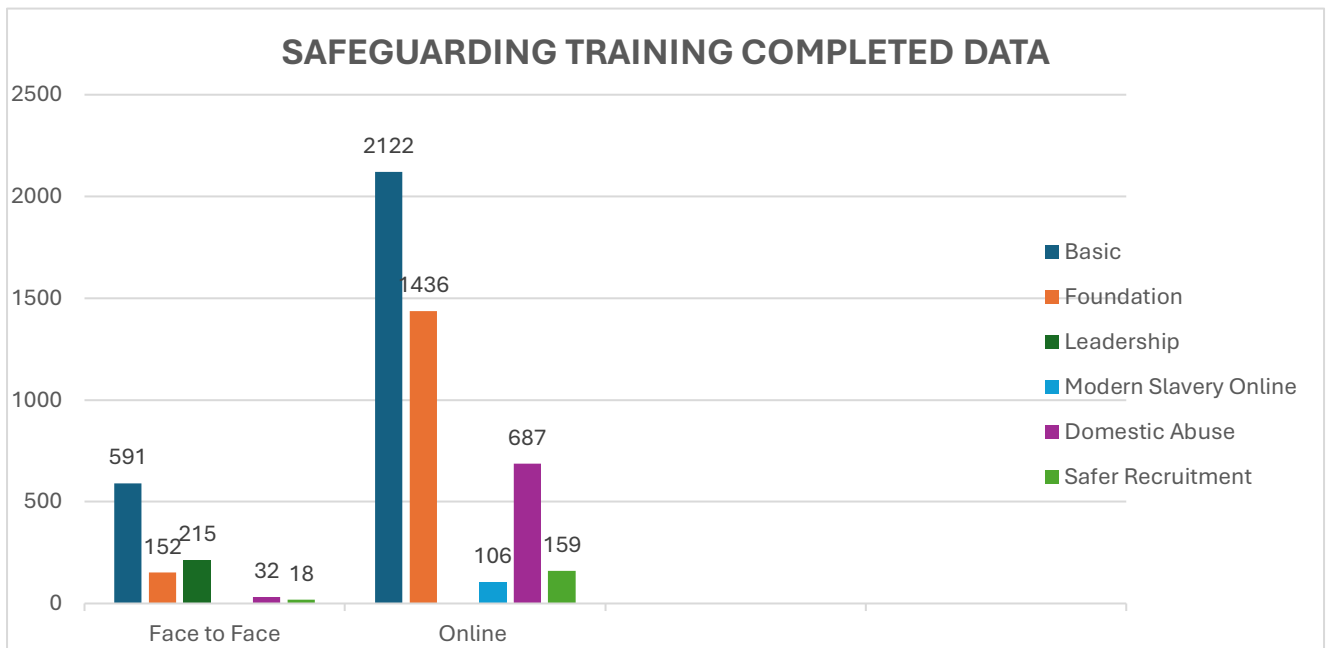
2025 statistics

Safer Recruitment

No. Of DBS checks carried out - 1276

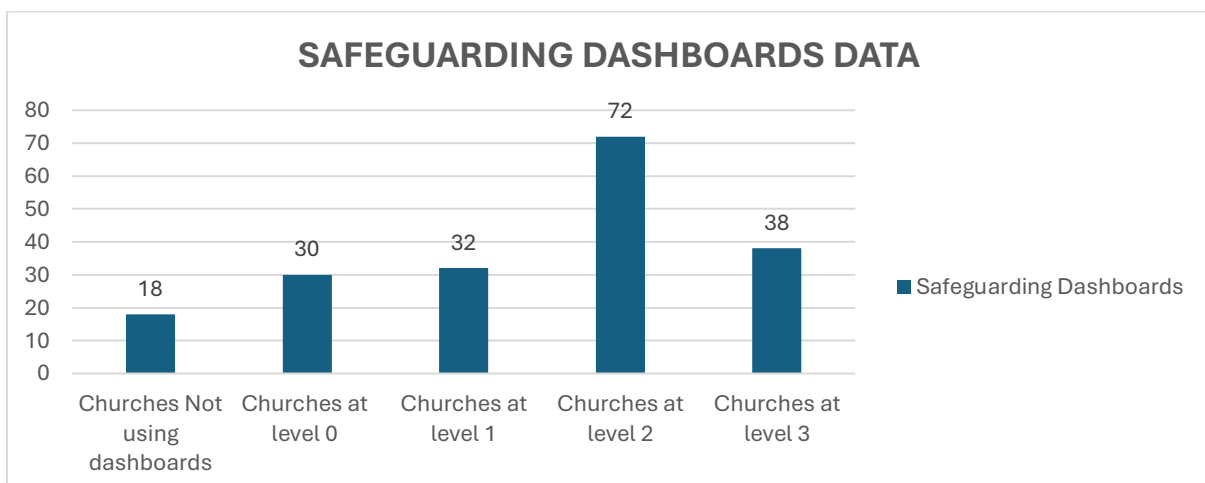
Training





The future provision and delivery of training is the focus of the new Safeguarding Learning and Development Strategy, which will extend until 2028. The aim of this strategy is to not only improve the delivery of training, but to raise awareness and appreciation of its importance in creating a safer church. New initiatives to support this aim will include the introduction of a ‘Buddy System’ and shared resources hub to enhance the skills, knowledge and experience of the cadre of volunteer trainers. New Bespoke training packages will also be developed, these will include ageing and dementia awareness, and online safety. New neurodivergent friendly sessions will also be introduced, (held in smaller groups, specific venues and using additional communication tools) to ensure that training is available and accessible to everyone within the Diocese.

Parishes



The DST reports serious safeguarding incidents to the Charity Commission through its online system for serious incident reporting (SIR). The purpose of SIRs is to ensure transparency and demonstrate that trustees are managing safeguarding risks appropriately. In 2025 a total of 4 SIRs were reported on behalf of PCCs, the LDBF and the Cathedral Chapter.

Notes on statistics

The statistics you see here represent a huge amount of work from the Diocesan Safeguarding Team and they are to be thanked for what they do every day to support worshipping communities in Liverpool to keep people safe.

With the implementation of the National Safeguarding Management System (My Concern) we are now able to provide detailed and top-level information about safeguarding cases that can be used to better determine the level and type of need. This in turn, alongside information from parish dashboards, arch deacon visits and the recently completed INEQE audit provide a rich source of information to inform strategic planning. What you have been presented with here is the top-level data to give a sense of the range and quantity of the work. DSAP receive more detail from all these sources, alongside the new quality information from the Regional Lead's processes so as to scrutinise and challenge practice. This process is new, you should expect to see feedback to Synod of a much wider range in the future.

This report represents the combined views of Debbie Innes-Turnill, Interim DSAP chair and Mick Murphy, Interim Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser.

Debbie will speak to this report and the ongoing work with the Safeguarding Standards which can be found here: <https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/national-safeguarding-standards>

March 2026