



DIOCESE OF PLYMOUTH

**SAFEGUARDING
COMMUNICATION STRATEGY**

Dated January 2024

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1. **Foreword**

To be added

2. Introduction

Communication is a key part of improving the development of services and the provision of support for victims and survivors, ensuring that effective communications take place both internally and externally to promote awareness, provide guidance and facilitating the reporting of concerns.

Historically, the Church has not been good at raising awareness of safeguarding and abuse issues, often ignoring or minimising these to maintain its own reputation. The Church has also been poor in its communication with victims and survivors. It has often failed to respond promptly and appropriately to concerns and complaints and has not been focused on the needs of victims and survivors, in some cases shielding the accused and helping them to evade justice.

In order to address the issue of abuse in our parishes and communities and prevent it from happening, there is need to increase the awareness of safeguarding and the identification of cases by enabling people to recognise the potential signs of abuse. It is necessary to ensure that people in our parishes and communities are aware of the process they should follow if they believe that someone is being harmed by abuse.

Visible avenues of support and help for victims/survivors must also be provided so that they are aware of the options that are available to them. As it is not always easy for victims/survivors to reach out for help due to the impact that abuse can have on their dignity and self-respect, the diocese must seek to reach out to them in as many ways as possible. The provision of a range of different ways to communicate with victims/survivors across the diocese will hopefully make it as easy as possible for them to access help and support. All communication will take place in a compassionate, non-judgmental and supportive manner at all times, to demonstrate that the Church in the Diocese of Plymouth is here to listen to and support victims/survivors.

This Communication Strategy has been created to outline how safeguarding policies, practice and guidance will be disseminated throughout the Diocese of Plymouth. This strategy will help to foster a commitment to maintaining safe and welcoming churches through best practice, accountability, integrity and honesty. It also demonstrates the Diocese of Plymouth's commitment to the safeguarding mission of the Church.

3. Objectives

The key objectives of the Safeguarding Communication Strategy are as follows:

- a. **Promote Awareness:** increase understanding and knowledge of safeguarding policies, procedures, and responsibilities among all within the diocese.
- b. **Facilitate Reporting:** encourage the reporting of safeguarding concerns or incidents promptly, ensuring a confidential and supportive reporting mechanism is in place.
- c. **Ensure Consistent Messaging:** develop clear and consistent communication materials that convey the importance of safeguarding, expectations and available support services.
- d. **Training and Educational Resources:** in accordance with the Diocesan Safeguarding Training Plan, provide training and educational resources to staff, volunteers and relevant stakeholders to enhance their understanding of safeguarding issues.

4. Target Audience

The Safeguarding Communication Strategy is designed to engage and inform various groups, including:

- a. Trustees and clergy.
- b. Senior managers, employees and volunteers at all levels across the diocese.
- c. Parishioners, the wider Church community and the community beyond the Church.
- d. Contractors, partners and external stakeholders.
- e. Relevant regulatory bodies and the statutory authorities.

5. Communication Channels and Tactics

a. Internal Communication:

Team/Staff Meetings: allocate time for safeguarding updates and reminders during team/staff meetings. Safeguarding should be a standing item on all meeting agendas.

Intranet and email updates: utilise internal communication platforms to share information, policy updates and case studies.

Training sessions: conduct interactive training sessions to educate clergy, employees and volunteers on recognising, reporting and preventing safeguarding issues.

Noticeboards: display safeguarding posters, helpline numbers and reporting procedures in prominent areas.

Examples of how this will be achieved:

- all parishes must display the current safeguarding poster which provides the contact details for their Parish Safeguarding Representatives and for the Diocesan Safeguarding Office. Parish newsletters and websites should also include these contact details on a weekly basis.
- a calendar of safeguarding awareness dates/events will be created each year. These will be added to the Diocesan Ordo so that they can be acknowledged in an appropriate manner during Mass in each church.
- resources and information about each date/event will also be prepared by the Safeguarding Caseworker for Victim/Survivor Support. This will then be distributed to priests, deacons, parish secretaries and Parish Safeguarding Representatives for inclusion in parish newsletters and on parish websites.

b. External Communication:

Website and public platforms: publish clear and accessible safeguarding policies, procedures and reporting mechanisms on the diocesan website.

Social media: utilise social media platforms to share educational content, raise awareness and provide updates on safeguarding initiatives.

Newsletters and publications: include safeguarding-related articles, success stories and safeguarding reminders in regular newsletters or publications.

Partnerships and collaborations: engage with external organisations, communities and networks to promote safeguarding awareness and best practice.

Examples of how this will be achieved:

i) Diocesan Website

The diocesan website has a safeguarding section. This will be regularly updated to include:

- contact details and information about the function of the Diocesan Safeguarding Office.
- information about reporting abuse, including details of local and national support organisations and agencies.
- information for victims and survivors, including details of support available locally and nationally.
- information about safer recruitment processes for taking up a volunteer role in parishes, including advice about the DBS check process.
- information about training requirements for parish volunteers and a calendar of safeguarding training dates for across the diocese.
- information about the Trustee Safeguarding Sub-Committee, including details about membership, governance documents and copies of “open” section of the Minutes of meetings.
- safeguarding-related news and events in the ‘Latest News’ section, including reports about training events, information about support services available for victims and survivors and details about abuse-related dates.

ii) Social Media

- Posts will be created on Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) and other social media platforms as appropriate, with links to all news articles that are added to the diocesan website.
- The diocesan Facebook page currently has more than 1300 people following it, and the diocesan X (formerly Twitter) feed has more than 1650 followers, which will increase the scope of people we can communicate with beyond those who visit the diocesan website.

6. Communication with Victims/Survivors

Contact details (phone number and email address) for the Diocesan Safeguarding Office will be displayed in parishes, included in newsletters, and on the diocesan website to allow victims/survivors to contact us in order to

make a disclosure or to seek help or support. In addition, a contact form has been added to the 'Reporting abuse' and 'Help and support for victims and survivors' safeguarding pages on the diocesan website to provide another means by which contact can be made with the Diocesan Safeguarding Office. The Diocesan Safeguarding Office will liaise closely with statutory agencies to ensure that any allegations of abuse are responded to both promptly and appropriately.

The Safeguarding Caseworker for Victim/Survivor Support has administrative rights to the diocesan Facebook account. The Facebook Messenger facility can also be utilised as another means of communication by victims/survivors to contact us to seek help.

Communication with victims/survivors will go beyond this initial contact. The Diocesan Safeguarding team will provide ongoing support both in person and over the phone for any victim/survivor who would find this helpful. This will continue for as long as the victim/survivor would like this support, without any time-limit.

Victims/survivors will also be offered the opportunity to meet face to face with a caseworker in a location that is convenient and safe for them. This will involve travel throughout the diocese and beyond.

Communication with victims/survivors will also look at how they might be involved in the safeguarding mission of the diocese and will seek their input and feedback. This will include: what has been helpful for them, what may have been unhelpful, and whether there was something that was not provided that would have been useful.

The aim will be to communicate with victims/survivors on a meaningful basis as part of an ongoing discussion to ensure that the work the Diocesan Safeguarding team is providing them with the help and support that they need. This will require a commitment to being open and transparent, with a willingness to listen and learn, acknowledging that mistakes have been and will be made. The Diocesan Safeguarding team will continually review its work so that it can develop and improve provision to victims/survivors.

Through the Diocesan Safeguarding team, the diocese will work closely with and support victim/survivor charities.

7. Reporting Mechanisms

The awareness and use of the Safe Spaces confidential helpline that allows individuals to report safeguarding concerns or seek advice confidentially will be promoted across all appropriate diocesan and parish platforms.

The reporting portal on the diocesan website provides a user-friendly online platform to enable anonymous reporting and to seek updates on the progress of reported incidents.

The aim is to have transparent reporting pathways which clearly outline the reporting process, including the designated individuals or teams responsible for handling safeguarding concerns.

8. Evaluation and Monitoring

Regular evaluation and monitoring are crucial to assess the effectiveness of this Strategy and the following approaches will be used:

- a. **Surveys and Feedback:** surveys will be undertaken to gather feedback from parishioners, service users and other groups regarding their awareness, understanding and satisfaction with the Strategy's communication efforts.
- b. **Reporting Analysis:** the number of safeguarding concerns reported, response times and outcomes will be monitored to identify trends and areas for improvement.
- c. **Training Assessment:** the impact of training sessions will be evaluated by assessing participants' knowledge gain and seeking feedback on training content and delivery.
- d. **Review and Adaptation:** the periodic review of the Strategy's effectiveness, incorporating lessons learned and evolving best practice to enhance communication efforts continually.

9. Review

This Safeguarding Communication Strategy will be reviewed annually.

10. Useful Documents and Links

Diocese of Plymouth Strategy for Responding to Victims and Survivors of Abuse

<https://www.plymouth-diocese.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Strategy-Victims-and-Survivors-Final-Approved-Version.pdf>

Safe Spaces website: <https://www.safespacesenglandandwales.org.uk/>