

RESPONDING WELL TO VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS OF ABUSE:

Diocesan Responses – Baseline Survey 2022

Summary of findings

Our Church aims to be a safe space, where everyone feels heard, understood and supported – a space where abuse of any kind is not tolerated. Promoting a safe and healthy Church also means that, when abuse takes place, victims and survivors feel empowered to disclose and seek support, knowing that their voice and experience will be listened to, taken seriously and received with compassion, respect and honesty.

Ensuring that victims and survivors who disclose abuse within the Church of England receive immediate and appropriate support is a central pillar of the Church's approach to safeguarding. The response and support that victims and survivors can expect from the Church is outlined in the House of Bishops' Safeguarding Guidance "[Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse](#)". The Guidance came into effect in April 2022 and introduced a set of minimum requirements regarding the provision of support to victims and survivors of church-based abuse in the Church of England. It covers different types of support, including: therapeutic support, emotional and practical support from Support Persons, spiritual and pastoral support, and apologies. In addition, the Guidance outlines requirements and good practice advice regarding the development and promotion of healthy cultures across the Church.

Between October - December 2022, all 42 dioceses in the Church of England completed a survey about their current provision under the "Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse" Guidance. The aim of this exercise was to gather baseline data on what the picture of support to victims and survivors currently looks like across the Church. This summary outlines the key findings of that baseline survey. The intention is for the survey to be repeated in 2024, to enable comparison and an assessment of progress. The final report of the repeat survey will be published on the Church of England website.

Our Values

Key findings

Survivors Strategies:

There is no requirement under the “Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse” Guidance for dioceses to have a Survivors Strategy. However, this is considered good practice, and a good Survivors Strategy will generally outline the support offer of a diocese to victims and survivors, as well as plans around survivor engagement in the development and delivery of safeguarding activities. In the baseline survey, 26 dioceses reported that they had a Survivors Strategy in place, whilst 16 reported that they did not. For those dioceses that had a strategy in place, this was generally focused on the support offer to victims and survivors, rather than the wider engagement of victims and survivors in safeguarding activities, and not all strategies were co-produced with victims and survivors.

Building healthy cultures:

Under the [Guidance](#), “Church Bodies must promote a healthy, compassionate and safe culture which facilitates disclosures”. This is aligned with ongoing efforts within the Church to achieve an open and healthy culture, which enables church settings to become safe spaces. Respondents to the survey reported that cultural practices in most dioceses included positive communication, inclusive relationships, openness to receiving feedback, reflections on distribution of power and behaviour, and constructive challenge. Fewer respondents reported that victims and survivors were involved in discussions about culture, behaviours and relationships - although, overall, more respondents reported that this was the case than not.

It must be noted that these findings are based on self-reported data, which reflects the subjective perspectives of the 42 respondents to this survey, so there are limits on the extent to which broader conclusions around the culture within the Church can be drawn. Further, the inherent difficulties involved in measuring culture within any organisation must be considered here, particularly when comparing these findings against those of other reviews, such as the [Past Cases Review 2](#) or the

[investigation](#) of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse into the Anglican Church.

Therapeutic support:

All dioceses must provide [therapeutic support](#) to victims and survivors of church-based abuse, and 41 dioceses reported that they provided this type of support. In many instances, multiple ways in which victims and survivors can access this type of support were reported. The most common arrangements included: support being commissioned from external providers, and survivors identifying a practitioner and requesting for the diocese to cover the cost. Dioceses reported that, on average, victims and survivors were able to access therapeutic support within a month of requesting it. 27 dioceses reported that therapeutic support was provided by practitioners who were registered with a relevant professional body in all cases, and 8 reported that it was provided by a registered practitioner in most cases. This suggests that there are instances in which non-registered practitioners provide this type of support.

Spiritual and pastoral support:

All dioceses reported that they provide spiritual and pastoral support, and this is a requirement under the [Guidance](#). However, from the brief descriptions provided, it was unclear if this was delivered in a structured manner and informed by principles and practices specific to working with victims and survivors (e.g. trauma-informed principles and practice).

Support Persons:

There were low levels of responses (26 dioceses responded) to the questions about Support Persons and caution must be exercised in interpreting what this indicates. The data showed that fewer than half of the dioceses who answered the questions were providing Support Persons, despite this being a requirement in the [Guidance](#). Some of the difficulties reported by dioceses include concerns about both the demand for services (i.e. perceptions that victims and survivors do not request the support of Support Persons because they prefer to access support that is independent from the Church) and its

supply (i.e. difficulties in recruiting volunteers to this role). There were correspondingly low levels of provision, training and feedback about the support received.

Independent Sexual / Domestic Violence Adviser (ISVA / IDVA) services:

The availability of ISVA / IDVA services is not a requirement within the “Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse” Guidance, but some dioceses employ or commission ISVAs / IDVAs or Safeguarding Advocates in addition to, or instead of, Support Persons. Around half of the dioceses reported that they had access to both ISVA and IDVA services, mostly in the community. A small number of dioceses reported funding their own ISVA / IDVA service.

Limitations

The above findings highlight the variations in the support offered across dioceses to victims and survivors of church-based abuse. These findings must be understood within the limitations of the data. These include:

- the fact that the data is self-reported, mostly by Diocesan Safeguarding Advisors on behalf of their dioceses; and
- the fact that the data snapshot was captured 6 months after the “Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse” Guidance came into effect, therefore, this is an early stage assessment of how dioceses are meeting the requirements set out in the Guidance.

Despite limitations, this exercise has provided new data on key aspects of activity required or recommended in the Guidance, showing early indications of where developmental activity might usefully be focused in the future. As such, this exercise is helpful in supporting the Church of England’s ongoing commitment to improving responses and support for victims and survivors of abuse.

For further information, please contact policy.safeguarding@churchofengland.org.