Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency

Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre

Baseline Audit Report

October 2026

Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency

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Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency

1. Introduction

1.1 This report is a baseline audit of the safeguarding arrangements for the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre. This audit has been undertaken as part of the CSSA programme of baseline audits for Religious Life Groups (RLGs) in England and Wales.

1.2 The Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre is a community of individuals that strives to foster connections across the areas of Colchester and Chelmsford. Members follow the rule of Saint Augustine emphasising the tradition of hospitality. As women following this Rule, they provide care for community members and welcome others to share their activities and prayer together.[1]

1.3 The Canonesses are an autonomous community that comprises ten Sisters in total. Seven Sisters reside at the Colchester site, where care provision is based, with a further Sister living independently in Colchester. The remaining two Sisters, including the Prioress and both of whom are Trustees, live in Chelmsford. The Colchester site is the main location for the provision of care and support to Sisters who require it, and is overseen by a Care Manager. While the Sisters resident there are no longer engaged in active ministry, one Sister continues to contribute to the wider community by volunteering at a local charity shop. A further Sister lives independently outside the community. The two Sisters based in Chelmsford are the only members currently engaged in active ministry. They deliver a range of activities accessible to the local community, which they see as important vehicles for building community, promoting inclusion and providing a trusted and neutral presence within the estate where they live. The Canonesses believe that living alongside people provides the foundation for understanding the local culture and identifying the needs of the neighbourhood. Their decision to live in Chelmsford enables them to participate in the life of the community and enables them to understand and respond to local needs. This approach is reflected in their provision of a toddler group, a homework club and a group for older people (known as the

[1] Creating Community – Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre

Wisdom Club). The Sisters are supported in delivering these activities by volunteers from the community.

1.4 This audit seeks to assess the effectiveness of current safeguarding arrangements, by considering practice over the last twelve months. The CSSA has categorised RLGs on a scale from Level 1 (a small community with minimal outreach and no known safeguarding concerns), Level 2 (a medium sized community with some outreach with vulnerable populations and/or providing some diocesan ministries, such as by parish priests), to Level 3 (a large community and/or one with significant outreach with vulnerable populations and/or a disproportionately high number of open safeguarding cases). The Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre was assigned to a Level 2 audit due to their ongoing ministry activities involving children, young people, families and vulnerable adults within the community of Chelmsford.

1.5 The CSSA recognises the rich diversity of the Religious and acknowledges that the Religious Life Groups within any category may vary significantly in terms of size, ministry, and safeguarding practice. Consequently, CSSA analysts may use professional judgement to ensure that Religious Life Groups are graded against the national standards in such a way that reflects their uniqueness.

2. Methodology

2.1 The CSSA initially contacted both the Prioress and Designated Safeguarding Lead on 26 May 2026 to advise them of its intention to conduct a safeguarding audit during the week of 17 August 2026. A meeting was subsequently held on 11 June between the analyst and the Prioress to discuss the audit process more fully, including the practical arrangements.

2.2 The Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre was requested to complete a Level 2 self-assessment tool providing information on its adherence to the eight National Safeguarding Standards and progress in the overall implementation of the standards. The self-assessment was returned on 13 July 2026, eight days earlier than the requested submission date, together with a comprehensive range of

supporting evidence, details of which are provided in the Appendix section of this report.

2.3 Audit interviews were undertaken in-person, unless otherwise stated, on 17 August 2026 in Colchester with:

- The Operations Manager (also Designated Safeguarding Lead)
- Trustees (two of whom attended online)
- The Care Manager
- The Prioress and another Trustee (the only two Sisters involved in active ministry)

2.4 A tour of the premises was facilitated to provide an overview of the practical safeguarding arrangements in place. The analyst also engaged in informal conversations with most of the Sisters present.

2.5 Liaison has taken place between the analyst and the Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS)[2], regarding the engagement between them and how this meets their expectations for safeguarding.

3. Audit grading

3.1 Practice was assessed against the eight national safeguarding standards adopted by the Catholic Church in England and Wales[3] and graded in accordance with the CSSA Maturity Matrix for Level 2 RLGs.

3.2 Potential audit ratings against each standard, and the final overall ratings, are: Below Basic, Basic, Early Progress, Firm Progress, Results Being Achieved, Comprehensive Assurance and Exemplary.

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[2] The Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS) is an independent team of safeguarding professionals offering safeguarding services to the Religious of the Catholic Church in England and Wales.

[3] Full details of the eight standards and underpinning sub standards are available here: The Eight National Safeguarding Standards (www.catholicsafeguarding.org.uk)

Overall grading	Comprehensive Assurance
Standard 1 - Safeguarding is embedded in the Church body's leadership, governance, ministry and culture	Exemplary
Standard 2 - Communicating the Church's safeguarding message	Comprehensive Assurance
Standard 3 - Engaging with and caring for those who report having been harmed	Comprehensive Assurance
Standard 4 - Effective management of allegations and concerns	Comprehensive Assurance
Standard 5 - Management and support of subjects of allegations and concerns (respondents)	Comprehensive Assurance
Standard 6 - Robust human resource management	Comprehensive Assurance
Standard 7 - Training and support for safeguarding	Results Being Achieved
Standard 8 - Quality assurance and continuous improvement	Firm Progress

4. Audit findings against each standard

4.1 Standard 1 Safeguarding is embedded in the Church body's leadership, governance, ministry and culture

Strengths

4.1.1 The Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre has adopted the RLSS template Safeguarding Policy as its overarching policy, which sets out the general safeguarding principles, governance, roles and expectations. This is complemented by separate policies covering Safeguarding and Protecting the Welfare of Children and Safeguarding Adults at Risk of Abuse or Neglect, which recognises the different legal and practice frameworks applicable to the Canonesses' various ministries. Together, these policies provide clear and tailored guidance for Sisters, employees and volunteers, according to their roles and the activities in which they are involved. Safeguarding policies are accessible in a range of formats, for example, physical copies are available on site, while electronic versions of the RLSS Safeguarding Policy can be accessed through the Canonesses' website and HR portal. Safeguarding policies are scheduled for annual review, or earlier where changes are required. The analyst noted some slippage in the review cycle, with certain policies not having been reviewed within the specified timeframe. The Canonesses explained that this occurred during the onboarding of a new HR and health and safety provider and a wider programme of work to update the HR and HSE handbooks, induction processes and associated policies to reflect legal and regulatory requirements. At the time of the audit, the Designated Safeguarding Lead, (DSL), advised of his intention to review all safeguarding related policies following the audit and to align with their future review dates.

4.1.2 A Safeguarding Statement is publicly available on the safeguarding page of the Canonesses' website[4]. It affirms their commitment to safeguarding and well-being, reflecting their Gospel values and aspiration to "strive to live as Christ lived,

[4] Safeguarding – Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre

aware that he showed respect for each person he met." The statement confirms adherence to the safeguarding policies of the Catholic Church in England and Wales and the guidance of RLSS and CSSA, and a commitment to "do all that they can to promote each person's safety and well-being."

4.1.3 The Prioress described the importance of modelling a positive safeguarding culture, explaining that this starts with openness, accountability and vigilance, and that it is everyone's responsibility to ensure that safeguarding is undertaken effectively. Together, the Prioress and other Trustees recognise that safeguarding is not solely the responsibility of the DSL and seek to reinforce this through their own behaviour, visibility and engagement, as well as through clear structures and expectations. This is reflected in practical measures intended to keep safeguarding visible and embedded in everyday community life. For example, Trustees ensure that safeguarding information and key contact details are prominently displayed, while volunteers are provided with handbooks and an in-person induction that explicitly addresses safeguarding responsibilities and how to raise concerns.

4.1.4 Leaders demonstrate a clear understanding of the importance of creating a safe environment for Sisters living both within and outside the Colchester community, as well as those attending their groups and activities. Trustees recognise the ageing profile and reduced capacity of several Sisters as a safeguarding risk and have taken steps to mitigate this. A Care Manager has been appointed, and agency carers have been replaced with a permanent staff team, which Trustees have oversight of. This has reportedly improved well-being, reduced hospital admissions and supported better end-of-life care, enabling Sisters to remain within the community. Safeguarding is also embedded in the Canonesses' activities through measures such as volunteer training and supervision, ensuring that individuals are not left alone, and making safeguarding information visible. Leaders consider these arrangements contribute to a safe and supportive environment. They view the continued growth of groups such as the Wisdom Club, from two to seventy participants over 20 years, together with the popularity of the Melbourne Project Clubs, as evidence of the trust and positive relationships established.

4.1.5 The Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre is a registered charity,[5] set up to support the social and pastoral work of the Sisters within the local community and beyond. Its charitable purposes include supporting education, personal and faith development, and providing support for members of the community. Governance is provided by a Board of seven Trustees, comprising two religious Sisters and five lay members. Lay Trustees bring professional expertise and experience from a range of sectors including education, health, property, law, and business. Safeguarding is a standing agenda item at each quarterly Trustee meeting. The DSL provides regular reports covering DBS[6] checks, safeguarding training, policy developments, and any safeguarding concerns or issues arising. The Care Manager also submits a report in advance of each meeting, outlining emerging care and support needs amongst Sisters, responses to feedback received, and any practical arrangements required to ensure their safe access to care staff. The Trustee with responsibility for safeguarding works closely with the DSL and maintains oversight of safeguarding practice within community activities. This has contributed to strengthened arrangements within the Homework Club, including the introduction of structured annual safeguarding meetings for volunteers in place of previous informal, one to one briefings.

4.1.6 In addition to formal oversight provided by Trustees, the Canonesses have maintained a Steering Group since 2004 to support the governance and development of their ministry activities in Chelmsford. The group comprises the two Sisters engaged in active ministry together with four lay members, all of whom are involved in the community groups in some capacity. The Steering Group meets bi-monthly and provides a forum for discussions and review across a range of areas, including safeguarding, finance, policy review, future planning, and holiday provision. The DSL maintains oversight of safeguarding compliance, risk

[5] The Charity of the Regular Canonesses of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Our Lord, charity number 1167869.

[6] The Disclosure and Barring Services (DBS) processes and issues criminal record checks on individuals applying for employment or a voluntary role.

management and works closely with the Steering Group to ensure that safeguarding remains embedded within all activities.

4.1.7 Trustees maintain an overarching organisational risk assessment that identifies and evaluates safeguarding, financial, and reputational risks associated with the Canonesses' activities and ministries, including risks relating to the care and support of Sisters within the community. The assessment details existing controls and actions required to minimise identified risks. This demonstrates that leaders take a strategic and proactive approach to risk management, have oversight of the risks facing the charity, and are committed to safeguarding the welfare of those engaged in its ministries and activities.

4.1.8 Five out of seven Trustees have completed role-specific safeguarding training through RLSS. The remaining two have been briefed by those who attended on the key messages arising from the training. Trustees present during the audit were able to describe the procedures they would follow when considering whether a serious incident should be reported to the Charity Commission. The Board has previous experience of making such a report, although not relating to a safeguarding issue.

4.1.9 The Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre appointed an Operations Manager two and a half years ago. Following his appointment, he also took on the role of DSL, and is responsible for overseeing safeguarding arrangements, including the application and review of safeguarding related policies, and the reporting of safeguarding incidents and concerns to Trustees. His professional background is in finance and highly regulated corporate environments. While he acknowledged that it is not in safeguarding, he has undertaken RLSS safeguarding training and participated in the RLSS DSL forum and inter-congregational safeguarding support groups. He maintains his safeguarding knowledge through engagement with RLSS, conferences, professional advice, and learning from safeguarding audits of other Religious Life Groups. The Prioress has also undertaken DSL training. Given that she is one of only two Sisters involved in active ministry and taking account of the size and nature of the Religious Life Group, these arrangements are proportionate.

4.1.10 Trustees demonstrate awareness of the key risks associated with their activities, including safeguarding, care needs and the use of volunteers. Evidence

was provided of formal risk assessments completed for individual activities, which identify hazards, people at risk, control measures and risk ratings. These provide a structured means of identifying and mitigating risks within ministry activities, alongside the oversight and reporting arrangements described above.

4.1.11 The community in Colchester has a stable care staff team, led by the Care Manager, providing support tailored to each Sister's needs. This ranges from personal care, mobility and medication support to health care appointments, physiotherapy, dementia care, and participation in social, community and spiritual life. The Care Manager liaises closely with the Prioress regarding the Sisters' day-to-day needs and with the DSL on safeguarding incidents and training, and also engages with external health and care professionals as required. Care arrangements balance appropriate protection with the Sisters' privacy, dignity, autonomy and religious identity. Sisters are supported to retain control over their own health care where this is possible. Safeguards are introduced collaboratively and proportionately, for example, the use of a smartwatch for a Sister living with dementia, which supports her safety while enabling her independence and dignity.

4.1.12 A copy of the Integrity in Ministry[7] Standards has been provided to all Sisters and is readily accessible in various locations across the community, as observed by the analyst. A further copy is held in the 'Safeguarding Folder' located in the Care Manager's office. Evidence that the Standards are communicated and discussed was also seen in extracts from Community meeting minutes reviewed by the analyst, demonstrating that the DSL had discussed them with Sisters, including their principles and practical application in areas such as receiving visitors, record-keeping and wider safeguarding responsibilities in relation to employees. Leaders recognise that the Standards align closely with Chapter 4 of their Constitution, particularly in relation to the expectations for how Sisters treat one another, staff and all those with whom they come into contact. These are further reinforced through a Code of Conduct, which provides clear expectations regarding

[7] Integrity in Ministry is a code of conduct for Religious engaged in ministry in the Catholic Church in England and Wales. It has been written for the guidance of those in ministry and for the information of those people with and among whom Religious exercise their ministry.

appropriate behaviour, boundaries and conduct. Collectively, the Standards, the group's Constitution and Code of Conduct provide a clear framework for conduct across the community, irrespective of individual roles.

4.1.13 The Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre is a member of RLSS, CSSA and the Conference of Religious[8] (CoR) and draws on their services for a range of purposes. This includes audit support, training, DBS processing, and advice and guidance when safeguarding concerns arise. RLSS describes them as an Order that engages well with its services. The DSL considers that links with RLSS have enhanced his safeguarding practice, contributed to the development of an overarching safeguarding policy framework and strengthened the approach to categorising and monitoring concerns and determining when concerns should be escalated to statutory services.

Areas for development

4.1.14 The DSL has developed a Gantt[9] chart outlining safeguarding tasks, including policy reviews, training, risk assessments, and associated timescales. While this provides a useful framework for monitoring specific safeguarding activities, it does not constitute a full Safeguarding Implementation/Action Plan that addresses all the national safeguarding standards. The DSL intends to develop a formal plan, informed by the recommendations from the audit. The plan will clearly identify required actions, responsibilities, priorities, timescales and measures of progress against each of the standards. Oversight will be provided by the Trustees, who will receive regular updates on progress against agreed timescales, outstanding actions and any areas requiring further attention.

Graded: Exemplary

[8] The Conference of Religious in England and Wales represents the leaders of religious life by encouraging collaboration on the major issues facing religious today and by addressing issues from a Catholic perspective on their behalf.

[9] A Gantt chart is a visual timeline that illustrates a project schedule, showing the tasks to be completed, their duration, and when they are scheduled to take place.

4.2 Standard 2 Communicating the Church's safeguarding message

Strengths

4.2.1 A Safeguarding Communications Plan has recently been created and sets out the safeguarding message to communicate, the intended audience, method of communication and frequency. Its purpose is to "ensure that all stakeholders understand their responsibilities, know how to recognise concerns, and are aware of reporting procedures to protect children, young people, or vulnerable adults". This plan provides a structured framework for communicating safeguarding information across the Canonesses' activities and identifies a range of audiences, communication methods and key messages. It is intended to be reviewed annually and is currently recorded as Version 1. To align with the planned review dates of other safeguarding related documentation and policies, the DSL may wish to consider including a specific review date within the plan.

4.2.2 A safeguarding section is placed prominently at the top of the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre website homepage. The safeguarding statement as described in 4.1.2 follows a link to relevant policies including the Safeguarding Policy. The page also provides an overview of RLSS and CSSA, together with their respective contact details and links to their websites. In addition, information about Safe Spaces[10] is included, along with details of how to access and contact the service. Contact details for both the DSL and the Prioress are also provided, enabling visitors to the website to easily contact either individual.

4.2.3 During the analyst's visit to the community in Colchester, consistent safeguarding messages were observed throughout the house, including in the reception area and main living room. A noticeboard in the Care Office prominently displays the DSL's contact details, RLSS leaflets promoting safe yet caring

[10] Safe Spaces is a free and independent support service, providing a confidential, personal, and safe space for anyone who has been abused by someone in the Church or as a result of their relationship with the Church of England, the Catholic Church in England and Wales or the Church in Wales.

boundaries, a safeguarding body map and concern form, together with a reminder that the 'Safeguarding Folder' is held in the office and contains all relevant guidance, policies and supporting documentation. These resources provide staff with clear information about safeguarding arrangements and how to access relevant materials. Associated policies are also available through the HR portal, which is accessible to all employees. Safeguarding information is similarly provided to volunteers supporting activities in Chelmsford through a dedicated Volunteer Handbook and the use of physical displays. The DSL maintains records confirming that employees and volunteers have received the relevant information, with individuals required to sign to acknowledge that they have been received and understood.

4.2.4 Leaders demonstrate that they own the messages they produce through their direct involvement in communications, induction and training activities. For example, the Religious Trustee and safeguarding Trustee jointly induct volunteers and student helpers for Fun Week and Homework Club.

4.2.5 The Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre recognises that links established with RLSS, CoR, the wider church, safeguarding and professional networks contribute positively to safeguarding practice. The Prioress explained that engagement with these networks has increased awareness of emerging risks and informed local safeguarding arrangements. The Care Manager similarly identified professional networks and external learning opportunities as important influences on the development of care and safeguarding provision. An increased awareness of risks, including spiritual abuse, together with regular communication with the Prioress, Operations Manager/DSL and Trustees, has helped translate learning into practice. Examples include reviewing stair and lift safety following a fall, prioritising the revision of the medication policy, and developing formal care plans and risk assessments. Collectively, these relationships support ongoing development and strengthen the Canonesses' ability to identify, manage and respond to risk.

Areas for development

4.2.6 While safeguarding information is prominently displayed and provides clear routes for making contact, the safeguarding section of the website would benefit from further development to include information on local and national support services available to children, young people and vulnerable adults. This could include details and links to relevant local statutory services, such as children's services, adult social care, and other safeguarding agencies, alongside appropriate national helplines and specialist support organisations. This would provide individuals with clear and accessible routes to independent and specialist support where required.

4.2.7 While safeguarding materials have been developed to communicate key messages including that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, the 5Rs[11], and who to contact if concerns arise, there are opportunities to further strengthen these by tailoring them to the different audiences that Sisters encounter through their ministry. Consideration should be given to developing accessible materials and information for children and young people, including establishing mechanisms for obtaining feedback on how safeguarding messages are communicated and understood. Once established, these arrangements should be reflected within the existing Safeguarding Communications Plan to ensure a clear and coordinated approach to safeguarding communication, engagement and review.

Graded: Comprehensive Assurance

[11] Recognise, Respond, Report, Record, Refer.

4.3 Standard 3 Engaging with and caring for those who report having been harmed

Strengths

4.3.1 The Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre has not had any direct experience of engaging with and caring for individuals who report having been harmed, therefore, an assessment against this standard is based on a review of existing policies and procedures, together with the group's readiness and capacity to respond to such situations should they arise.

4.3.2 The overarching Safeguarding Policy applies to all workers, whether religious members, voluntary or employed, regardless of their role or the activities they undertake. The 'Roles and Responsibilities' section of the policy sets out the responsibilities of the Board of Trustees, the Prioress, the DSL and others, with clear differentiation between the strategic and operational oversight of safeguarding practice. This is further reflected in the 'Procedure' section, which clearly sets out the responsibilities of RLSS and the DSL. These include ensuring that the victim/survivor or individual is informed of next steps, the options available to them, indicative timescales and any contact with relevant external bodies. The procedure also addresses record keeping, onward referrals and internal reporting mechanisms. The 'Safeguarding and Protecting the Welfare of Children Policy' and 'Safeguarding Adults at Risk of Abuse or Neglect Policy' provide more detailed guidance on responding to individuals. These expectations are reinforced by the Code of Conduct, also included in both policies, which emphasises treating everyone with respect, respecting individuals' privacy and ensuring that they feel comfortable and cared for.

4.3.3 All interviewees described the importance of responding to concerns by listening openly and without judgement, making an appropriate record, and explaining clearly what will happen next. They also demonstrated an understanding of the mandatory reporting expectations, including the circumstances in which information must be shared and the implications this has for confidentiality. Where appropriate, advice would be sought from RLSS, and the

case would have oversight from the DSL. The Prioress and other Sister involved in outward-facing ministry emphasised that a key principle underpinning their groups is listening to children, young people, their parents and other adults who access their groups. This expectation is also reinforced with volunteers. This reflects the findings of the CSSA's thematic review of survivors' experience of the Catholic Church[12], which highlighted the importance of compassionate, transparent and survivor-focussed responses that extend beyond receiving a disclosure. The Canonesses' commitment to listening provides a strong foundation for responding appropriately should an individual come forward to report harm.

4.3.4 Evidence seen by the analyst, together with information provided by RLSS, reflects an understanding that a disclosure or safeguarding concern could arise in a variety of contexts and involve anyone connected with the community, including a child or adult accessing its groups, a Sister, an employee or a volunteer. The DSL demonstrated an understanding of the importance of considering an individual's support needs alongside any safeguarding response and was able to provide an example where an individual had been appropriately signposted to relevant services. This demonstrates an awareness that those making disclosures may require support tailored to their circumstances. This is further supported by the availability of Safe Spaces[13] leaflets displayed throughout the community, providing information about independent support for those who may wish to seek it.

4.3.5 The Canonesses recognise that Sisters themselves may wish to raise concerns or make disclosures, particularly given the care and support needs of some members of the community. The Care Manager acknowledged that there is potential for Sisters to raise concerns and expressed confidence that they would feel able to do so. She attributed this to the trusting and respectful relationships that have been developed with the Sisters, together with her presence and accessibility within the community. The Care Manager explained that Sisters can and do raise

[12] Survivors-Experience-of-the-Catholic-Church-CSSA-Report-Summary-July-2026.pdf

[13] Safe Spaces is a free and independent support service, providing a confidential, personal, and safe space for anyone who has been abused by someone in the Church or as a result of their relationship with the Church of England, the Catholic Church in England and Wales or the Church in Wales.

matters directly with the Prioress and/or DSL, where appropriate. In addition, Trustees visit the community regularly and while not a formal reporting pathway, this provides opportunities for Sisters to raise concerns with them. These arrangements demonstrate an awareness of the importance of ensuring that Sisters have various avenues in which concerns can be raised.

4.3.6 Young people (aged between 16-18) volunteer for a range of groups, and an understanding was evident that they may receive a disclosure and, as children themselves, may require appropriate support following such an experience. The DSL acknowledged the importance of supporting and safeguarding all those involved, including both the person reporting harm and the person receiving the disclosure. The Care Manager similarly explained that, should a member of the care team receive a disclosure, she would ensure that they are listened to and appropriately supported. This would include access to any training identified as necessary, alongside regular supervision, in recognition of the potential emotional impact of receiving and responding to a disclosure.

4.3.7 Some individual Trustees have experience of receiving disclosures within their professional roles and are well placed to draw upon and share this learning with the DSL and two religious Trustees who are most likely to engage with and provide care for someone reporting harm. There is also a positive recognition among the Trustees of the importance of learning from external networks, including RLSS, CoR, and other religious life groups, and from communities with experiences of responding to reports of abuse.

Areas for development

4.3.8 As the two Sisters involved in outward-facing ministry have not themselves received a disclosure to date, there is an opportunity for them, alongside the DSL, to further strengthen their readiness by drawing on the experiences and perspectives of those who have reported harm. This should include learning about what has helped individuals to feel heard, safe and supported. Consideration should also be given to accessing trauma-informed practice training to enhance understanding of the impact of trauma, barriers to disclosure and approaches that promote a sensitive, compassionate and person-centred response. Drawing on lived

experience and learning would help the DSL and Trustees further develop their confidence and readiness to respond effectively to future disclosures.

4.3.9 The DSL recognised that there are currently no formal mechanisms for seeking feedback from those who have received a safeguarding service. He intends to progress this to ensure that feedback is sought appropriately and routinely reviewed. This will enable the Canonesses to better understand the experience of those who engage with safeguarding processes and identify areas for development.

Graded: Comprehensive Assurance

4.4 Standard 4 Effective management of allegations and concerns

Strengths

4.4.1 The procedures for responding to allegations and concerns are set out in the Safeguarding Policy. Within the 'Practice Guidance' section, the policy states that action must be taken where there is a concern that a child or adult is, or is likely to be, suffering significant harm. This includes circumstances where an individual may be at risk of harm from themselves or others, may pose a risk to another person, or where there are concerns about an individual's mental capacity. The policy further states that action must be taken in accordance with the Church's mandatory reporting requirements where there is reason to believe that a person holding any role within the Church has committed a crime, or may be going to commit a crime, has caused or may cause harm, poses a risk to others, or may be unsuitable to work in a public facing role. The 'Procedure' section sets out the steps to be followed when a safeguarding issue becomes known. This includes contacting RLSS and passing all records onto them immediately, as well as informing the person concerned of the action being taken, promoting transparency in safeguarding practice. As described in 4.3.2, within the 'Roles and Responsibilities' section, there is a clear

delineation of responsibility for the management of allegations and concerns. For example, the Prioress is responsible for ensuring that appropriate policies, procedures and best practice are in place to support the effective delivery of safeguarding. The DSL is responsible for case progression and the management and oversight of safeguarding records, ensuring they are maintained securely and in accordance with legal requirements.

4.4.2 The Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre has developed two separate forms for recording safeguarding concerns: a low-level concerns form and a safeguarding incident form which is to be used for concerns of a more serious nature. The low-level concerns form records details of the person raising the concern, the nature of the concern, whether permission has been given to share information, and a brief description of the concern. The safeguarding incident form is similarly structured and includes a reminder of the TALK[14] principles, and tips to follow when completing the 'summary of concerns' section, as well as inclusion of onward reporting, what the individual wants to happen, immediate support needs, RLSS contact, background/useful information, and a body map to record any injuries. The low-level concerns form could be strengthened further by including dedicated sections to record any action taken in response to the concern, together with details of any management oversight and review. This will help ensure that there is a clear and consistent record of how concerns have been considered and addressed, provide evidence of appropriate oversight and accountability, and support a clear audit trail should concerns need to be reviewed at a later date.

4.4.3 At the time of the audit, evidence was seen of the safeguarding incident form having been completed in response to concerns raised regarding an attendee at a group who was suspected of having previous convictions. The record documented the nature of the concerns, the action taken in response, including contact with RLSS and the advice provided. In addition to this, there has been recent experience of responding to a safeguarding concern regarding a community member. Records relating to this case are maintained by the DSL and were

[14] TALK: T- thank the person for telling you; A – ask how you can help; L – listen without judgement; K – keep supporting.

reviewed by the analyst during the audit. Electronic records are stored securely to maintain confidentiality and are only accessible to the DSL. The DSL advised that access to these records may also be granted to the Prioress where circumstances require this. This practice is consistent with the requirements of the Safeguarding Policy.

4.4.4 In addition to the safeguarding policies and recording templates, the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre has developed a safeguarding flowchart which sets out the actions to be taken when a safeguarding concern arises. The flowchart provides a clear and accessible guide for Sisters, volunteers and employees, outlining reporting pathways, key contacts and indicative timescales for action. Together with the low-level concerns and safeguarding incident forms, it helps to promote consistency in safeguarding practice and supports readiness by ensuring that individuals understand what action should be taken should a concern, allegation or disclosure arise. These resources provide a practical framework for responding promptly and appropriately, helping to ensure that safeguarding practices are followed and that concerns are consistently managed in line with policy.

4.4.5 Trustees' oversight of safeguarding is maintained through structured reporting by the DSL. The safeguarding Trustee meets with the DSL ahead of each Trustee meeting to review safeguarding matters and consider any issues requiring wider Board scrutiny. Low-level concerns are also reported to Trustees to support oversight and identification of emerging themes or patterns. While outside the scope of the audit, the analyst heard that, prior to the appointment of the Care Manager, an emerging pattern had been identified in relation to the care needs of Sisters during weekends, including the use of agency staff and hospital admissions. This contributed to the subsequent decision to appoint full-time, permanent care staff. Trustees intend to strengthen this oversight further through the more systematic evaluation of safeguarding practice and outcomes. This will form part of their developing quality assurance framework, which is expected to include regular review and analysis of safeguarding allegations and concerns, with a particular focus on identifying themes, patterns and opportunities for learning and improvement.

Areas for development

4.4.6 While safeguarding concerns are reported to, and overseen by Trustees, arrangements should be strengthened through a structured process for reviewing safeguarding allegations and concerns once they have reached a conclusion. The review process should identify learning, evaluate the effectiveness of responses and inform improvements to practice, policies, procedures and training. Consideration should also be given to seeking feedback from those who have received safeguarding support to better understand their experience.

Graded: Comprehensive Assurance

4.5 Standard 5 Management and support of subjects of allegations and concerns (respondents)

Strengths

4.5.1 While the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre has previously sought advice in relation to managing a potential respondent, this represents the extent of their experience in this area. An assessment against this standard is therefore based on a review of policies, procedures and capacity to respond effectively should such a situation arise. Within the 'Roles and Responsibilities' section of the Safeguarding Policy, it states that "everyone involved in the work of CRSS has a duty to disclose to the Safeguarding Lead/Prioress or Chair, any safeguarding concerns that have been raised about them". The policy also sets out the action to be taken where there are grounds to suspect that an individual holding any type of role within the Church may present a risk to themselves or others or may otherwise be unsuitable to undertake a public facing role, as described in 4.4.1.

4.5.2 The DSL has undertaken training in relation to Care and Safety Management Plans and working with individuals who pose a risk of harm. He demonstrated a clear understanding of the procedures to be followed in the event of an allegation being made against a Sister, employee or volunteer. This would include ensuring

that concerns are appropriately documented using either the low-level concern form or safeguarding incident form, as applicable. The next steps would be determined by the nature and seriousness of the allegation, including consideration of whether any immediate measures were required. For example, the introduction of appropriate restrictions or the temporary removal of the Sister from role or the community while investigations are undertaken. The DSL confirmed that he would seek advice from RLSS, inform the Trustees, and liaise with relevant statutory agencies, where required. It was recognised that support should be provided both to the person reporting or experiencing and to the Sister who is the subject of the allegation. Where a Sister needed to be temporarily removed from the community, pending further investigation, arrangements would be made to ensure that she was appropriately supported. This would include the provision of suitable alternative accommodation, together with access to legal (both civil and canonical), and pastoral support.

4.5.3 Trustees acknowledge that, with only two Sisters currently involved in active ministry, any future allegations would most likely concern one or both individuals. The analyst was advised that, in the event of an allegation being made against either or both Sisters, the Sister(s) concerned would step down permanently from their roles and responsibility for the associated groups would be transferred to appropriate members within the local community of Chelmsford, given that they are longstanding and well-established groups. The Prioress advised that, in the longer term, the Canonesses intend to preserve the legacy of the work undertaken through these groups by enabling activities to continue through alternative arrangements. This represents a planned approach to their future, rather than a contingency measure in response to a particular safeguarding allegation or concern, and is intended to ensure continuity of the work.

Areas for development

4.5.4 Given the Canonesses' limited direct experience of managing and supporting respondents, consideration should be given to identifying and preparing a small number of individuals who could undertake a support role. This should include access to appropriate training, guidance and support from RLSS, ensuring that

responsibility and expertise do not sit solely with the DSL. Arrangements should be established to provide appropriate oversight and review of future respondent cases.

Graded: Comprehensive Assurance

4.6 Standard 6 Robust human resource management

Strengths

4.6.1 The Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre has made the decision not to consider applications from individuals seeking a vocation to religious life; therefore, their safer recruitment processes apply only to employed roles and volunteers. The 'Practice Guidance' section of the Safeguarding Policy sets out a commitment to ensuring that all staff are subject to the appropriate DBS checks and that appointments are based on the person's experiences, skills and ability to meet the set criteria and job description for the specific role. Further information confirms that anyone working with children or adults, whether in a paid or unpaid capacity, will be provided with the opportunity to self-disclose relevant conviction information. More detailed information regarding each stage of the recruitment process, from the initial advertisement of a role through to pre-employment checks, is set out within a separate Safer Recruitment Policy.

4.6.2 The Canonesses have strong links with New Hall School[15] that accommodates Rwandans from the same Association, whose primary ministry is undertaken within the school. Although responsibility for these Sisters lies with the school, including ensuring that appropriate vetting checks are undertaken, the Canonesses recognise that the Sisters regularly visit the community and occasionally stay overnight alongside Sisters who are vulnerable adults. As the checks undertaken by the school relate specifically to the Sisters' work with children, the Canonesses have

[15] New Hall School is one of the oldest Catholic schools in the UK and was founded by the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre.

taken the additional step of ensuring that appropriate checks have also been undertaken in relation to their contact with vulnerable adults. The Sisters have also received safeguarding training and an introduction to the safeguarding standards from the safeguarding Trustee. These arrangements demonstrate a proactive and proportionate approach to safeguarding by recognising and responding to safeguarding considerations arising from the Sisters' contact with the community, notwithstanding that their primary roles, ministry and associated responsibilities sit with another organisation.

4.6.3 DBS records for Sisters, employees, Trustees, contractors, and volunteers are maintained by the DSL through a 'DBS Clearance Schedule'. This schedule includes individual DBS certificate numbers, dates of issue, renewal dates and associated activities. Trustees have adopted the position that although not all activities delivered by the Canonesses constitute regulated activity, they do involve children, and vulnerable adults and that individuals undertaking these activities should have an appropriate DBS check. At the time of the audit, a review of the DBS Clearance Schedule identified one volunteer whose DBS checks was recorded as being in progress and two volunteers for whom no DBS details were recorded. The DSL confirmed that the outstanding DBS check has now been completed and of the two remaining individuals, one was no longer in the role. The DSL recognised the need to review the records to ensure that they clearly reflect individuals' roles and involvement in activities. As part of the review, the DSL should consider whether the activities undertaken by each individual constitute regulated activity and ensure that the level of DBS check undertaken is appropriate to, and, permitted for the role.

4.6.4 Trustees have oversight of HR processes and take an active role in accordance with the Safer Recruitment Policy. It is standard practice for employed roles for at least one Trustee to sit on the interview panel alongside relevant personnel, typically the Care Manager. The DSL, in his capacity as Operations Manager, provides advice and administrative support, including reporting on DBS checks and any relevant self-disclosures. Trustees receive regular updates on DBS status and disclosures through safeguarding reporting arrangements. The Canonesses have experience of responding to self-disclosures and concerns arising during recruitment. For example, in one instance, a prospective employee made a self-

disclosure, however, their application was not progressed due to a lack of engagement with the recruitment process. On another occasion, an applicant was unable to provide the required identification, and further checks identified a conviction for violence, which led to the individual not being appointed. In accordance with the Recruitment of Ex-Offenders Policy, applications from individuals with previous convictions will be considered, with a criminal record not necessarily preventing appointment. Disclosures are considered on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the nature of the role and seriousness of the offence, with risk assessments and mitigating measures implemented where necessary. These examples demonstrate that potential safeguarding concerns arising during the recruitment process are appropriately explored, with further enquiries undertaken where information is incomplete or additional assurance is required.

4.6.5 The Canonesses have well-established induction processes, with all individuals, whether employed or voluntary, receiving an induction prior to commencing their role, including an introduction to safeguarding. Evidence was seen of records maintained by the DSL confirming that all relevant documentation, such as the Employee or Volunteer Handbook had been provided. Individuals are required to sign to confirm receipt and their understanding of the expectations placed upon them. In addition, the Care Manager has recognised the importance of ensuring that care staff are appropriately supported and plans to introduce six-weekly supervision sessions and team meetings, with safeguarding included as an agenda item. It is intended that these meetings will provide opportunities to share good practice, identify areas of practice that may require further training or development, support staff who may have been affected by incidents or safeguarding disclosures, and consider any wider training and support needs. This is a positive development which, once implemented, should provide a more structured mechanism for ongoing oversight of practice, staff well-being and safeguarding, while helping to ensure that support and development needs are identified and addressed at an early stage.

4.6.6 The Canonesses have a Complaints Procedure, which is accessible via the 'Key Policies and Procedures' section of their website. The procedure clearly states that employees wishing to raise a complaint should do so via the Grievance Procedures

outlined in the Employee Handbook. The Complaints Procedure recognises that many complaints can be resolved "on the spot" between the complainant and the individual concerned, whether this is a volunteer or another responsible person on site. Where this is not possible, the procedure sets out clear steps for managing complaints through a two-stage process. While there have not been any complaints received by the Canonesses to date, the procedure includes a documented commitment to "monitoring and learning from complaints". This states that complaints will be reviewed annually to identify any trends that may indicate a need for further action.

4.6.7 Whistleblowing is covered within both the overarching Safeguarding Policy and a separate standalone Whistleblowing Policy. The Safeguarding Policy recognises that individuals should be able to raise concerns without fear of victimisation, or disadvantage, and states that RLSS should be made aware of concerns relating to malpractice, illegal acts or omissions. The standalone Whistleblowing Policy is specifically aimed at employees, with its introduction recognising that employees may make disclosures about organisations for which they work.

Areas for development

4.6.8 It is positive that there is a set procedure for making complaints, however, with the policy due for its annual review, there is an opportunity to strengthen the procedure by providing specific details regarding the 'external sources' referenced at Stage 2, including identifying CSSA as the final point of escalation where internal stages have been exhausted and a resolution has not been reached. Including these details will ensure that complainants are fully informed of the options available to them and provide clarity on the available escalation routes.

4.6.9 Similarly, to 4.6.8, the Whistleblowing Policy sets out the procedures for how to raise concerns internally. While individuals are directed to raise concerns with the Operations Manager, Prioress or Trustee, the policy states that, where this route is not followed, concerns should be directed to "the appropriate organisation or body". The policy may benefit from identifying relevant organisations or bodies, to

provide greater transparency and assist individuals in understanding the routes available for raising concerns outside of the organisation.

Graded: Comprehensive Assurance

4.7 Standard 7 Training and support for safeguarding

Strengths

4.7.1 The Safeguarding Policy sets out the minimum standards for training according to role, including the Prioress, the DSL, Trustees, community members who work with the public and those that do not, as well as the frequency of when training should be refreshed. Training records are maintained by the DSL. Care staff are provided with a comprehensive programme of training as relevant to their role, including (but not limited to) dementia awareness, fire safety, equality, diversity and inclusion, manual handling, Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS)[16], to driving for business purposes.

4.7.2 The DSL has undertaken a range of safeguarding training and demonstrates a strong commitment to ongoing professional development. He recognises the value of reviewing the audit findings of other religious life groups, particularly those similar to the Canonesses, participating in RLSS's safeguarding leads forums, and drawing on resources available through BrightHR[17], and inter-congregational networks. These help to maintain and develop his safeguarding knowledge, keep practice current and support him in fulfilling the responsibilities of the role.

4.7.3 Trustees maintain oversight of training compliance through regular reporting from the DSL. This enables them to monitor both completion rates and how effectively safeguarding messages are understood and applied in practice. While

[16] Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) are legal protections under the Mental Capacity Act 205 designed to ensure that adults who lack the capacity to consent to their care or treatment are only deprived of their liberty when it is necessary, proportionate, and in their best interests.

[17] BrightHR is an online human resource and employment law support platform.

Trustees have not had to address any failures to meet training requirements, they have experienced some resistance, and were able to describe the steps taken to ensure that the individual concerned completed the required training. The Prioress provided a further example involving a volunteer who required one-to-one reinforcement of safeguarding expectations. Together, these examples demonstrate that oversight extends beyond compliance and that where concerns arise, they are addressed through appropriate follow up and support.

4.7.4 Safeguarding questionnaires have recently been introduced to gather feedback from the community, volunteers and employees on safeguarding arrangements and identify any learning or development needs. The questionnaires assess awareness, confidence in recognising and reporting concerns, and perceived levels of support. The introduction of these questionnaires demonstrates a proactive approach to evaluating the effectiveness of training and communications. Positively, the small sample of completed questionnaires reviewed by the analyst reflected high levels of satisfaction with training and confidence in recognising and responding to safeguarding concerns, with no additional needs identified.

Areas for development

4.7.5 Although the questionnaires have only recently been introduced and the findings to date are positive, the sample reviewed was reasonably small and cannot therefore be considered to be representative of the training needs of the wider community, volunteer and employee groups. The Canonesses should build on this good work by undertaking a formal and comprehensive training needs analysis to identify learning and development needs across different roles and areas of practice, and to provide greater assurance that training remains appropriate and responsive to need. The questionnaires could form part of this process, alongside other sources of information, previously described, such as supervision sessions, safeguarding incidents, changes in guidance and identified areas of development.

4.7.6 The Safeguarding Policy states that all members are expected to refresh their training annually, however, the DBS Clearance Schedule, which also records

training provided across the organisation, does not document when individual Sisters last completed safeguarding training. It is recommended that the training expectations set out in the Safeguarding Policy are reviewed to ensure that the frequency and level of training required are clear and proportionate. This should include consideration of whether annual refresher training for all Sisters remains appropriate, taking into account the nature of their current roles and their own potential vulnerabilities. As the policy applies more broadly to everyone associated with the Canonesses, this section could also set out the training expectations and frequency for different groups, including employees and volunteers.

Graded: Results Being Achieved

4.8 Standard 8 Quality assurance and continuous improvement

Strengths

4.8.1 The evidence reviewed as part of this audit demonstrates a clear commitment from the Canonesses to meeting and maintaining compliance with the national safeguarding standards. The Canonesses have established effective arrangements for accessing external safeguarding support and advice, and these arrangements have contributed positively to policy development and safeguarding practice. This provides assurance that safeguarding arrangements are understood and applied in practice too.

4.8.2 As documented within the 'Development Plan' section of the self-assessment, the Canonesses recognise the need to further develop their quality assurance processes, including how their provision is evaluated. There is reference to the care provided to Sisters within the Colchester community, and as described in 4.6.5, an intention to ensure that staff have opportunities to participate in supervision and whole team meetings, where safeguarding is included as a standing agenda item. This is particularly important in acknowledging the potential vulnerability of some Sisters and the organisation's duty of care towards them.

Areas for development

4.8.3 The Canonesses have stated their commitment to using learning arising from this audit to further develop and improve their safeguarding practice. A Safeguarding Implementation/Action Plan should be developed, incorporating the actions already identified and recommendations arising from the audit. The plan should clearly identify the actions to be taken, responsible owners, timescales for completion and arrangements for monitoring progress. This would provide Trustees with a clear framework for monitoring progress against the recommendations and seek assurance that agreed actions are being addressed within the expected timescales.

4.8.4 The Canonesses acknowledge that their direct experience of responding to safeguarding cases remains limited. Although comprehensive policies and procedures are in place, further opportunities should be taken to strengthen confidence through trauma-informed practice training and by drawing on the experiences of RLSS, safeguarding networks and other religious life groups that have managed safeguarding cases in practice.

4.8.5 The Canonesses should consider building on the quality assurance processes associated with the care provision by extending the arrangements more widely. While feedback relating to training and support is beginning to be sought, this could be broadened to include the views of children and their families, attendees at Wisdom Club, volunteers and Sisters receiving care and support. Developing a more consistent approach to gathering, reviewing and acting upon feedback would provide greater assurance regarding the quality and safety of the provision.

Graded: Firm Progress

5. Summary of overall findings

5.1 The Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre demonstrates a strong commitment to safeguarding, with safeguarding embedded within leadership, governance and day-to-day practice. Trustees provide regular oversight of safeguarding matters,

safeguarding responsibilities are clearly understood, and there is a positive safeguarding culture in which safeguarding is recognised as everyone's responsibility. Strong links have been established with RLSS and other organisations, and these relationships are used effectively to support safeguarding practice.

5.2 The Canonesses have implemented a broad range of safeguarding policies, procedures and communication arrangements which support safe practice across their ministry and within the community. Safeguarding information is readily accessible, safeguarding messages are visible throughout the organisation, and appropriate arrangements are in place for recruitment, vetting, training, record keeping and management of safeguarding concerns. Trustees and leaders demonstrate a willingness to learn, reflect and strengthen safeguarding arrangements where opportunities for improvement are identified.

5.3 Opportunities for further development relate primarily to strengthening quality assurance, safeguarding communications, and feedback mechanisms. These include the development of a formal Safeguarding Implementation/Action Plan, improved arrangements for gathering and evaluating feedback, and further development of safeguarding communications and training. Leaders had themselves identified follow-up and the evaluation of the effectiveness of existing processes as areas for improvement, which is consistent with the opportunities for further development identified through the audit.

5.4 Overall, the audit found that safeguarding arrangements are well established and effective across most areas of practice. The Canonesses demonstrate openness to scrutiny, a commitment to learning and improvement, and a clear desire to build upon existing strengths to further enhance their safeguarding arrangements and sustain compliance with the national safeguarding standards.

Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency

6. Recommendations

To support improvement, the following recommendations are made:

Within 3 months

- To develop a Safeguarding Implementation Plan, incorporating the findings and recommendations arising from this audit
- To review the Complaints and Whistleblowing Policies to include external escalation routes, including RLSS and CSSA where appropriate
- To review DBS checks to ensure they are appropriate and proportionate to each role and undertaken for individuals involved in regulated activity

Within 6 months

- To develop safeguarding communications and resources tailored to children, young people and adults at risk, and introduce mechanisms to obtain feedback on their effectiveness
- To introduce arrangements to seek and evaluate feedback from those who receive safeguarding support, ministry activities or care services, and use this to inform improvements
- To complete a training needs analysis to inform future training provision and review training expectations across different roles

Within 12 months

- To establish a quality assurance framework to review safeguarding practice, monitor compliance with the national safeguarding standards, and capture learning from safeguarding concerns and complaints
- To access trauma-informed learning and development opportunities to strengthen readiness to receive disclosures and support those who report harm

- To develop arrangements to identify, review and share learning arising from the management of allegations, respondents and safeguarding concerns to support continuous improvement

7. Arrangements for follow-up

7.1 In line with the audit follow-up pathway, having received an overall rating of Comprehensive Assurance, the minimum period for the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre's next safeguarding audit will be three years, subject to there being no indications of increased risk.

8. Appendix

Evidence provided

Adult Safeguarding Body Map
Canonesses' Safeguarding Statement
Care and Safety Management Assessment Template (RLSS produced)
Club and Volunteer Checklist
Code of Conduct
Complaints Procedure
Completed Safeguarding Questionnaires
Constitution of the Association of the Regular Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre and Daughters of the Resurrection
Copy of Referral to RLSS
DBS Clearance Schedule
Disciplinary and Grievance Procedure
DSL Report to Trustees
Ecclesiastical Policy Extract

Employee Handbook
Employee Safety Handbook
Excerpt from Community Minutes
Extracts from emails to RLSS
Extracts from Trustee Minutes
GDPR Communications Policy
HSE Inspection Action Points
Links to CRSS Website
Low-Level Concern Template
Photographs of posters displayed
Policies and Procedures Directory
Policy Flowchart
Recruitment Documentation inc. Safeguarding Declaration
Recruitment of Ex-Offenders Policy
Risk Assessments
Safeguarding Adults at Risk of Abuse or Neglect Policy
Safeguarding and Protecting the Welfare of Children Policy and Procedures
Safeguarding Communications Policy
Safeguarding Concern Waterfall Chart
Safeguarding Incident Report Forms
Safeguarding Policy
Safeguarding Training Certificates
Safeguarding Training Presentation PowerPoints
Safer Recruitment Policy
Statement of Main Terms of Employment and Offer Letter
Suite of Safeguarding Leaflets
Volunteer Club Safeguarding Leaflet
Volunteer Pack
Whistleblowing Policy