

Safeguarding improved at Catholic Diocese after charity regulator investigates

Trustees of the Birmingham Diocesan Trust are responsible for mismanagement and/or misconduct in the administration of charity over failings in the oversight and governance of safeguarding, [the charity regulator has found](#).

The Trust, which oversees the Roman Catholic Diocese of Birmingham, and provides services accessed weekly by around 60,000 people, has been investigated by the Charity Commission over concerns about its record on safeguarding, which came to light when the charity was selected as a case study by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA).

The Commission launched its investigation in December 2018, after the trustees were unable to reassure the regulator that they were managing risks to the charity's beneficiaries promptly or robustly enough.

Today's report points to serious shortcomings in the charity's safeguarding governance in the past, of which the trustees "appeared to be either insufficiently aware" or which they "did not adequately address with the pace or in the way expected".

It finds that the charity's approach to safeguarding "fell short of the culture and environment expected of a charity of this nature" and finds that safeguarding was not sufficiently prioritised by the trustees and that safeguarding risks were not adequately managed. The trustees' initial response to safeguarding concerns highlighted prior to the Commission's investigation lacked urgency, the regulator finds.

Problems identified by the investigation include chaotic record keeping, including of files relating to members of the charity's congregations who had served a sentence for sexual offences and should have been monitored under so-called Safeguarding Agreements. A report by a safeguarding expert appointed to review and improve the charity's work in this area, produced in November 2018, pointed to "people we know should be subject to restrictions but may have been forgotten".

Other shortcomings highlighted by the Commission's report include a historic lack of safeguarding skills and experience among trustees and within the charity.

As a result of the Commission's investigation and the work undertaken by an interim Head of Safeguarding Transformation, appointed by the charity in November 2018, the charity has now taken significant action to improve safeguarding, including by reviewing and updating all Safeguarding Agreements, and recruiting new staff members with the necessary skills and experience.

But the regulator has made clear that further improvements are required, and has issued the trustees with an Order under Section 84 of the Charities Act 2011. Among other things, the order requires the trustees, to identify, implement and maintain a new safeguarding case management system, develop and implement a strategy for monitoring safeguarding in parishes, and develop an action plan for improving the culture on safeguarding throughout the charity's operations, including to ensure it "feels safe for people to criticise or discuss safeguarding matters within the charity".

The Commission will be monitoring and assessing the charities' compliance with its order.

Stephen Grenfell, Head of Investigations and Enforcement at the Charity Commission, said:

I am pleased that, as a result of our investigation, the Birmingham Diocesan Trust is now providing a safer environment for the many thousands of people who are beneficiaries of the charity. The trustees of the charity have engaged positively with our inquiry and have already made some important changes.

But there is no room for complacency. The trustees must demonstrate that continued momentum in their work to strengthen and prioritise safeguarding, and we will be holding them to account against the legal direction we have issued. It is an essential duty for trustees to take reasonable steps to safeguard beneficiaries and to protect them from abuse or harm.

The public have a legitimate expectation that charities are places where the welfare and wellbeing of people are prioritised.

ENDS