

- In one case there were concerns about there being too little scepticism of an alleged perpetrator.
- Two cases involved issues around the decision-making in relation to making referrals to statutory agencies, with disagreements around whether or not the thresholds had been reached – one of these cases also highlighted the lack use of core groups in the Diocese (in accordance with section 7, Practice Guidance: Responding to Serious Safeguarding Situations Relating to Church Officers, June 2015).

The four issues raised through these cases are discussed in detail below:

- culture of too little scepticism
- responsibility for threshold decisions about referrals to statutory agencies
- lack of use of core groups
- written communications to alleged perpetrators and offenders.

National systemic implications are in 2.19.

2.10.1 Culture of too little scepticism

In one case, it was observed that there had been too much trust placed in what a member of the clergy said. This raised concerns for the auditors about an adequate acceptance of the ever-present possibility of senior clergy being groomed by actual or potential abusers, which can lead to alleged perpetrators being wrongly believed at the expense of alleged victim/s.

In one case, the police decided on no further action (presumably as insufficient evidence for a criminal prosecution), but advised that, on balance of probabilities, the alleged perpetrator should not continue in his role. This highlights the different standards of proof used for the legal process as opposed to safeguarding decisions. The subject of the allegations 'agreed' to have no unsupervised contact with children during a disciplinary process. The auditors considered that this might give the alleged perpetrator too much control. Although the Bishop does not have the legal authority to insist that the subject have no unsupervised contact with children, he might nonetheless have demanded it to make it clear that the priority is safeguarding and the risk of harm to children and vulnerable adults, as opposed to legal proof.

The Bishop observed that this diocese has fewer historic cases involving safeguarding than some other dioceses. This raised a question for the auditors, about whether the lack of such experience has resulted in practice still being based on admission or a definitive judgement of guilt, as opposed to current good practice which is based instead on risk.

2.10.2 Responsibility for threshold decisions about referrals to statutory agencies

As explained in 2.1, the Bishop of Chester does not delegate any of his safeguarding responsibilities and takes all decisions about if and when the threshold for referral to statutory agencies takes place.