

The Order of St Augustine

Baseline Audit Report
July 2026

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1. Introduction

1.1 This is the baseline audit of the safeguarding arrangements of the Order of St Augustine. This audit has been undertaken as part of the Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency's (CSSA) Baseline Audit phase of Religious Life Groups in England and Wales.

1.2 The Order of St Augustine, also known as 'the Augustinians' is a worldwide order of religious established in 1244 by Pope Innocent IV, unifying various hermits in Tuscany under a single mendicant order¹. The Order is founded on the rule of St Augustine of Hippo which stresses living in community, with 'one mind and one heart intent on God'. The Order of St Augustine includes priests, brothers, women religious and lay affiliates that are present in 49 countries serving communities through education, parish work, social justice and missionary work. The Generalate of the Order of St Augustine is based in Rome with the Order divided into geographical circumscriptions of three types: the major circumscriptions are known as provinces which are governed by a Prior Provincial; Vicariates are lesser circumscriptions who are governed by a regional vicar; and finally the smallest circumscription is known as a delegation and will consist of friars and houses in more distant areas where immediate governance is entrusted to a delegated superior.

1.3 The Order of St Augustine has a Province in England and Scotland that is made up of 20 Augustinian friars. At present, there is one friar in South Korea and another in Australia and there are 18 friars within the communities in England. This audit will look at the safeguarding arrangements for these 18 friars. The friars in England are living in four communities, two in London, one in Birmingham and one in Suffolk. Some friars are currently working as parish priests; some are in chaplaincy roles and others work in the Order's retreat centre at Clare Priory in Suffolk. There are currently four students in formation with three presently resident in England and

¹ History taken from the international website of the Augustinians. [Who We Are | The Order of Saint Augustine](#)

the fourth studying in Rome. The friars are variably active in ministry, with some being partially retired, some wholly retired and others in full time work.

1.4 Clare Priory offers an open programme of retreats, with accommodation, and also serves as a parish church within the Diocese of East Anglia. In 2025, a safeguarding review was carried out by the CSSA, in collaboration with the Provincial Superior and Trustees, looking at the safeguarding arrangements at Clare Priory. This followed safeguarding concerns raised by someone, who had been offered temporary accommodation due to homelessness. The review was not published at the time due to the identifiability of individuals referenced. Changes in circumstances during the ensuing period are such that publication is now appropriate and the review is included as an appendix to this audit report, with progress against the recommendations made following the review reported on throughout this report.

1.5 The Augustinians permanently employ a safeguarding consultant to support them in their safeguarding development. This consultant works alongside the provincial safeguarding delegate and provides advice and practical support in formalising the safeguarding arrangements and ensuring that policies, procedures and guidelines meet the required standards. The Augustinians also employ three staff who support the management of the retreat centre at Clare Priory providing office management and hospitality services there. The Augustinians are members of the Conference of Religious² and the Religious Life Safeguarding Service³ and contracted to the CSSA.

1.6 This audit seeks to assess the effectiveness of the current safeguarding arrangements by considering practice over the last 12 months. The CSSA has categorised Religious Life Groups (RLGs) on a scale from Level 1 (a small community with minimal outreach and no known safeguarding concerns), Level 2 (a medium

² 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 [Conference of Religious](#)

³ The RLSS is a team of independent safeguarding professionals offering safeguarding services to the Religious of the Catholic Church in England and Wales [Religious Life Safeguarding Service – Religious Safeguarding](#)

sized community with some outreach to vulnerable populations and/or providing some diocesan activities, such as parish priests), to Level 3 (a large community and/or one with significant outreach to vulnerable populations and/or a disproportionately high number of open safeguarding cases). The Order of St Augustine is categorised as a Level 2 community due to the number of members and ministries, and they completed a corresponding self-assessment.

1.7 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 notified the Augustinians of their intention to undertake a baseline audit on 6 October 2025, with a proposed audit date of Wednesday 25 March 2026 prior to which the self-assessment and supporting evidence were to be submitted by 20 February 2026. The self-assessment was returned with supporting evidence on 20 February 2026 which is listed in the Appendix.

2.2 The Augustinian audit took place as planned on the 25 March 2026. Due to the diverse locations of the Augustinian leadership, safeguarding consultant and friars on the day, the audit was carried out virtually using Microsoft Teams. As part of the inspection, interviews were undertaken with the following:

- The Provincial Prior and Vocation Director
- The Provincial safeguarding delegate
- The Trustees
- The safeguarding consultant
- A focus group of friars from across the province

2.3 The Order of St Augustine ministers within the Archdiocese of Westminster, the Diocese of East Anglia and the Archdiocese of Birmingham and are members of

the Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS). Information shared by these organisations showed that the members of the Order of St Augustine have regular and appropriate contact with them and are proactive in seeking advice and support when required. There were no concerns raised by these organisations as to the Order of St Augustine's commitment to positive safeguarding practice.

3. Audit grading

3.1 Practice was assessed against the eight national safeguarding standards adopted by the Catholic Church in England and Wales⁴ and graded in accordance with the CSSA Maturity Matrix for Level 2 Religious Life Groups⁵.

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

Overall grading	Comprehensive assurance
Standard 1 - Safeguarding is embedded in the Church body's leadership, governance, ministry and culture	Comprehensive assurance
Standard 2 - Communicating the Church's safeguarding message	Results being achieved
Standard 3 - Engaging with and caring for those who report having been harmed	Comprehensive assurance

⁴ The eight standards lay out what CSSA expects in terms of level of safeguarding practice in church bodies (that is, dioceses and religious life groups) A description and full details of the Standards can be found on the CSSA website [here](#)

⁵ [APPENDIX-5-LEVEL-2-MATURITY-MATRIX-FINAL.docx](#)

Standard 4 – Effective management of allegations and concerns	Results being achieved
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	Exemplary
Standard 8 – Quality assurance and continuous improvement	Results being achieved

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 Augustinians have a suite of policies and supplementary documents that are used for safeguarding. The safeguarding policy sets out the expectations for the friars in terms of safeguarding practice, and this includes individual roles and responsibilities as well as guidance on how to manage and report safeguarding concerns. The policy is supported by a range of documents including a code of conduct, complaints and whistleblowing policies and templates for reporting issues. There is also a flow chart that takes the friars through the processes they would need to follow should they become aware of a safeguarding concern. This policy has been recently updated in January 2026; a process that is completed every 12 months. The policy has been shared with all the friars in a safeguarding

pack that was distributed after the revised policy was ratified by the Board of Trustees earlier this year. The safeguarding pack contains the policy, a copy of Integrity in Ministry⁶, templates for recording and reporting concerns and the code of conduct for the friars. All friars have signed to say that they have received this safeguarding pack. Safeguarding packs are also available in hard copy in the offices and houses where the friars live and work. The safeguarding policy is accessible for all on the Order's website 'the Augustinians in Britain'⁷ in the safeguarding section together with the Augustinians' statement on safeguarding.

4.1.2 The Augustinians have five Trustees who are all Religious. The Provincial Superior and four other Trustees also make up the Provincial Council. The Provincial Council is elected at each Chapter meeting which happen every four years. There is a mid-chapter meeting held every two years, and any urgent changes required can be made at this, for example, if one of the Council members were to be too ill to continue in the role. All Chapter meetings are full membership meetings where the Provincial nominates members to the Council, and the friars vote to select their preferred choices. These individuals remain in post for four years. The Provincial Council has a secretary that is responsible for the minutes and the Provincial Bursar who oversees the finances. The Trustees/ Provincial Council meet once every quarter, and reviewing safeguarding is on every agenda at these meetings as evidenced by the meeting minutes. Safeguarding updates are also included in every house meeting and at the Chapter meetings, which also include some element of safeguarding training.

4.1.3 The Augustinians have employed a lay safeguarding consultant with extensive experience of safeguarding in Religious Life Groups who works with the provincial safeguarding delegate (a friar) and advises the Provincial Superior and the provincial council on all matters relating to safeguarding policy and process. The Augustinians have also created terms of reference for the provincial safeguarding delegate that set out his role and responsibilities clearly. The

⁶ Integrity in Ministry is a code of conduct for Religious engaged in ministry in the Catholic Church in England and Wales [Integrity in Ministry - Religious Life Safeguarding Service](#)

⁷ [The Augustinians](#)

safeguarding consultant and the provincial safeguarding lead meet regularly and have worked together to update the policies and procedures as well as plan and deliver training for the friars. The safeguarding consultant has worked with the Augustinians to identify gaps in their safeguarding practice and this has led to the development of a safeguarding implementation plan. This plan is now in place, and actions are tracked and reported on to the Trustees by the provincial safeguarding leads as demonstrated by the minutes from these meetings. The safeguarding implementation plan includes the recommendations from the CSSA safeguarding review at Clare Priory in 2025, many of which have now been actioned and in some instances completed.

4.1.4 The Augustinians have demonstrated that they have learned from their experiences at Clare Priory and have put into place robust reporting processes for raising low level concerns and escalating risk. Under the leadership of the Provincial Superior, systems are now in place that require closer scrutiny of decisions made regarding providing accommodation support for vulnerable adults and boundaries are agreed by the Provincial Superior and his council before help is provided. The Augustinians have developed a good working relationship with RLSS and consult them appropriately to seek advice and evaluate risk before engaging in such activity. The Augustinians have also developed safeguarding resources for Clare Priory that include an expectation of behaviours document for guests and information on how to share safeguarding concerns with the provincial safeguarding delegate, RLSS or Safe Spaces⁸ if they have them. This work has improved the safety of the environment from a safeguarding perspective at Clare Priory. The friars' safeguarding training both from the internal Chapter meetings and from the dioceses has also focused on creating a safe environment in which to provide ministry. Those spoken to at inspection felt confident that previous issues

⁸ Safe Spaces England and Wales are 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 [Home – Safe Spaces England and Wales](#)

in regard to having a safe environment have been addressed and although the work was ongoing, they reported an improvement in practice.

4.1.5 The Augustinians live across four communities in England. The friars range in age and in level of active ministry with some now in full retirement. The friars are visited regularly by the Provincial Superior and all have had one to one discussions regarding their wellbeing, and any additional care needs they may have now or in the future. The Provincial Superior stresses the importance of working collaboratively with the friars to make sure that all their needs are met and that their wishes in terms of where they live are respected and facilitated wherever possible. The Augustinians have a care home in Ireland which is available for friars should they wish, however the Provincial tries where possible to place friars with additional care needs together in a local nursing home to their community so that they can continue to be included in community activities and celebrations.

Areas for development

4.1.6 Under the leadership of the new Provincial Superior, the Augustinians have made a significant amount of progress in the development and implementation of their safeguarding policies and procedures and have taken previous recommendations seriously, actioning areas where gaps were identified. Much of this work remains in its infancy and will need to be evaluated to ensure that policies and procedures are both embedded in practice, consistently used and working effectively. Creating systems and processes to evaluate their safeguarding practice will be the next area for the Augustinians to develop.

4.1.7 The Provincial Superior has identified the benefits of introducing lay Trustees to the board to broaden the knowledge and experience they can draw on especially in terms of safeguarding. This could be developed further.

Graded: Comprehensive assurance

4.2 Standard 2 Communicating the Church's safeguarding message

Strengths

4.2.1 The Augustinians actions for sharing safeguarding messages sit within the safeguarding implementation plan. One of these actions has been the introduction of an annual Safeguarding Sunday held in August where the friars concentrate their ministry on recognising the importance of safeguarding and restating their commitment to supporting victims and survivors of all abuse including church-related abuse. In addition to this annual event other processes have been put in place to raise the awareness of safeguarding amongst the friars and the communities in which they minister. One of these is the creation of a safeguarding prayer that is spoken at the start of meetings and events. This prayer is available on the Augustinians website, alongside the Augustinian safeguarding statement. Messaging to guests and parishioners is also shared via monthly newsletters which contain safeguarding updates and the contact details for local diocesan safeguarding teams as well as the details of the provincial safeguarding delegate. Safeguarding updates are shared with the friars at their individual house meetings as well as at the Chapter meetings.

4.2.2 The Augustinians have developed safeguarding communications in the form of posters and additional safeguarding leaflets that are available for use in all communities of the province. Here information is available in both communal areas and in individual rooms. The information provided is both from the Augustinians directly and from RLSS as well as Safe Spaces. Internal safeguarding communications have been developed with the guidance and support of the safeguarding consultant. The Augustinians source their information from recognised bodies including the Conference of Religious and RLSS and benefit from the additional information their safeguarding consultant shares from her connections with the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors (PCPM)⁹

⁹ Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors (PCPM): A Vatican body established by Pope Francis aimed at advising on policies to protect minors within the Church.

and the International Union of Superiors General (UISG)¹⁰ and her work organising the annual international safeguarding conference in Rome.

Areas for development

4.2.3 The Augustinians have worked hard to develop their safeguarding messaging to ensure that it is comprehensive and includes signposting to relevant support should this be required. The next stage is for them to develop a method for both creating and evaluating the effectiveness of this messaging that includes input from the friars and parishioners and those who are survivors of abuse. This will ensure that messaging is in line with their expectations and the evaluation process will provide assurance that the safeguarding messages are being effective and if not, will provide insight into how the messaging can be developed and improved.

Graded: Results being achieved

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

Strengths

4.3.1 The Augustinians have established policy and procedures in place that must be followed if a friar receives a disclosure of harm and all friars have undertaken training to enable them to manage such a situation. The order also has the benefit of having a safeguarding consultant with whom they can discuss any issues and who will provide them with advice on any additional actions that need to be followed to ensure that the person reporting harm is supported. The Augustinians are members of RLSS and can also access their expertise and assistance in securing support for anyone reporting harm. The Augustinians have access to

¹⁰ International Union of Superiors General (UISG) focus on Ecumenism, Christian–Jewish relations and dialogue with other faiths. The aim is to encourage all General Councils to spread a “culture of dialogue” within their congregations and in their apostolic fields, providing a platform for discussion and study.

trained personnel through RLSS and their safeguarding consultant who can be engaged to support those reporting harm so that assessment of their needs can be carried out and services put in place to meet them.

4.3.2 As part of the development of their work in engaging with those that report harm the Augustinians have created a letter which is sent out to anyone who has reported harm to them. This letter is personalised to the survivor and acknowledges the courage of the person and thanks them for reaching out, offering ongoing support and contact with the order as they wish and in their own timeframe. The letter is sent out with an additional leaflet that signposts the person reporting harm to external agencies and services that can offer support and also has an evaluation form with a stamped addressed envelope, so that the person can feedback on their experience to the Augustinians.

Areas for development

4.3.4 The Augustinians have had limited practical experience of using and testing their procedures as they have not had any persons reporting harm come forward since they implemented them. The provincial safeguarding delegate may want to consider engaging with those who have more experience in this area to further the learning and development opportunities for the friars. This is especially important for those friars working at the retreat centre at Clare Priory and those in parish ministry who may receive disclosures from their guests about Church abuse not necessarily relating to the Augustinians.

Graded: Comprehensive assurance

4.4 Standard 4 Effective management of allegations and concerns

Strengths

4.4.1 The Augustinian policy document clearly sets out the expectations for friars about their reporting responsibilities if they receive safeguarding allegations or

concerns. All friars have been trained in these processes and have received a toolkit that includes a flow chart and templates for reporting concerns, together with additional guidance on supporting those reporting harm and managing their expectations in terms of reporting procedures. The Augustinians have adopted the 'One Church'¹¹ approach to managing safeguarding concerns; recording, actioning and if required reporting on allegations made to statutory authorities.

4.4.2 The friars spoken to as part of the inspection were all able to articulate the actions they would take if they received or witnessed a safeguarding concern. Those working in parishes had also attended the diocesan training and were aware of the processes to be followed in terms of reporting concerns to their local diocesan safeguarding teams. In addition to being able to access advice from their safeguarding consultant, the Augustinians are members of RLSS and can access their expertise and support if they receive an allegation about the Order. They have developed templates for recording allegations and for the ongoing management of concerns. All records are stored centrally at the Provincial offices by the provincial safeguarding delegate on a password protected database with hard copies stored securely in locked cabinets in line with the Data Protection Act (2018)¹². Any personal information shared is done so in line with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)¹³.

4.4.3 The management of allegations is overseen by the Trustees who would receive updates from the provincial safeguarding delegate. All friars spoken to at the inspection knew that all safeguarding concerns must be shared with the provincial safeguarding delegate in the first instance and that any issues requiring escalation to the Trustees will be shared at extraordinary meetings, should this be

¹¹ The One Church Approach was adopted by the Catholic Church in England and Wales and the Conference of Religious following a recommendation from the Cumberledge review *Safeguarding with confidence* (2007). The One Church Approach promotes a consistent, unified approach to safeguarding throughout the Catholic Church. [K.3: Embedding a culture of safeguarding and the 'One Church' approach | IICSA Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#)

¹² Data Protection Act 1998 (2018) Regulates the processing of information relating to individuals, sets out the Information Commissioner's functions and sets out a direct marketing code of practice.

¹³ GDPR – The General Data Protection Regulations are the UK's data privacy laws that have been in effect since May 2018.

required. The provincial safeguarding delegate works with the safeguarding consultant to ensure that all initial concerns are managed in line with the safeguarding policies and national guidelines and they will bring in RLSS for additional support if this is required. RLSS expertise would be used to carry out formal investigations and risk assessments to inform a safeguarding plan should this be required. The Augustinians have systems in place to report significant incidents to the Charity Commission¹⁴ and CSSA. The Provincial delegate and Trustees were aware of their responsibilities in relation to this.

Areas for development

4.4.4 The Augustinians have not had any allegations or safeguarding issues to manage since the inception of this procedure, so it has not been tested in practice, however they are well known amongst the Order and meet the expectations of the eight national safeguarding standards. An area for development would be to include an evaluation process in their case management procedures so that learning can be identified and action taken to improve practice if required. In addition, as these processes have recently been renewed and updated, it would be valuable to ensure through evaluation that they are fully understood by all friars and have been fully embedded in practice.

Graded: Results being achieved

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

Strengths

4.5.1 The Augustinians have established procedures in place for the management and support of the subjects of allegations and concerns. These procedures have

¹⁴ The Charity Commission for England and Wales register and regulate charities in England and Wales to ensure that the public can support them with confidence. [The Charity Commission – GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/the-charity-commission)

been enacted in the past year to manage concerns about a friar in terms of their conduct and due to this, some potential safeguarding risks. The evidence demonstrated that the Provincial Superior and provincial safeguarding delegate had worked with the individual to understand the issues and explain the need for a risk assessment, psychological assessment and a subsequent safety plan. The Augustinians had brought in the expertise of RLSS to help them with this work and were continuing to engage with them to monitor and review the plan as required. The individual has voluntarily stepped back from active ministry for the period of a year to undergo counselling and receive support and, when spoken to as part of this audit, reported feeling well supported by the Provincial Superior and provincial safeguarding delegate during this period.

4.5.2 The Augustinians' policy on the management and support of respondents includes the provision of a support person who can provide spiritual guidance and practical support for the respondent, and this was shown to be working well in practice. The Augustinians have the resources to enable any friar requiring stepping back from ministry to be housed away from their diocese and be provided with everything they need in terms of practical, physical, psychological and spiritual support. The friars spoken to during the inspection were all aware of the processes that would be followed in the event of an allegation being made against them and reported feeling confident that they would be listened to and supported throughout the process.

4.5.3 The Trustees would be informed of any allegations made against a member of the Order and would be kept up to date on any investigations or processes being followed and their outcomes. The Augustinians have access to both civil and Canonical Law expertise and demonstrated an awareness of the processes that would need to be followed should a safeguarding allegation be made in terms of reporting concerns to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.¹⁵

¹⁵ The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF) is a department of the Roman Curia in charge of the religious discipline of the Catholic Church.

Areas for development

4.5.4 The Augustinians have a robust process in place for the management and support of those who are the subject of an allegation or concern that has been tested in practice. Feedback from those involved has been positive, however at time of inspection there was no formal mechanism in place for gathering feedback or learning from this. Developing an evaluation process would benefit all by identifying any areas requiring strengthening or development.

Graded: Comprehensive assurance

4.6 Standard 6 Robust human resource management

Strengths

4.6.1 The Augustinians have safer recruitment policies and procedures in place for staff and volunteers. They currently employ three staff in the retreat centre at Clare Priory, and these staff have been employed using these policies that require the completion of an application form, interview and the provision of references. The staff at Clare Priory have had Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)¹⁶ checks carried out in accordance with their contact with the public. There are currently no volunteers working with the Augustinians, but they too would have to complete the same safer recruitment processes as the staff. Both staff and volunteers are required to undertake an induction process that includes safeguarding training. All Augustinian friars have current DBS certificates in place that meet the needs of their roles and ministry. The DBS checks are updated automatically, and a register is held centrally at the Provincial offices. Separate DBS checks are carried out for those friars who work in dioceses by their respective diocesan safeguarding teams.

¹⁶ The Disclosure and Barring Service processes and issues criminal record checks on individuals applying for employment or a voluntary role for employers.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service>

4.6.2 The Provincial Superior has held the role of Director of Vocations since 2017 and is therefore very experienced in the Augustinian processes that need to be followed if a person wishes to join the Order. These processes are robust and involve detailed assessments and reviews at every stage. Initially the director of Vocations will meet with individuals to ensure they are genuinely interested in becoming an Augustinian. If he feels their vocation does not align with the Augustinians, they will be signposted to the National Office for Vocations (NOV)¹⁷ where they can be put into contact with either dioceses or with other religious life groups that they might be better suited to. After this initial contact a meeting will take place in the individual's parish and they will be asked to provide a Curriculum Vitae (CV) and a biography of no more than four pages that talks about themselves and their journey so far, what their involvement is in their parish and community, and who they have spoken about their intentions. After this they are invited to lunch with the community and meet the friars. Following this meeting, if the individual wants to pursue their journey, they are invited to stay with the friars for the weekend, and the Director of Vocations will also meet with their family. The next step is they provide a formal letter, and this is the start of the application process in full. Three people will scrutinise their application and discuss them as a potential candidate. At this stage they will have a psychological assessment and a DBS check completed. The Provincial council will decide if they are to be progressed at which point they start their pre-novitiate year, followed by one year novitiate, more training follows and they are able to join the Order as a Brother eight years after they start, or two years longer if they are to be ordained as a priest. Those in formation undertake safeguarding training periodically through this process and will undertake training again once ordained as part of their induction into their community.

4.6.3 The Augustinians do welcome priests from overseas to their communities but for a maximum period of two weeks, usually for a retreat or to allow them to visit family. The priest must come with a letter of introduction and testimonials of

¹⁷ The National Office for Vocation, located in London, acts as a key agency for the Catholic Church in England and Wales, promoting calls to priesthood, diaconate, and religious life.

suitability from their own Provincial delegate as well as a Celebret¹⁸ to show that they have completed some safeguarding training. During their time in England and Wales they may be allowed to concelebrate a mass but are otherwise not allowed to perform any other public ministry.

4.6.4 The Augustinians have both a complaints policy and a whistleblowing policy in place. These are freely available on the Augustinian website and in hard copy in the community houses and buildings. A process has been established to manage both with complaints and whistleblowing disclosures being shared with the Trustees so that they can scrutinise the issues and agree the responses to them. The Augustinians have the benefit of the experience of their safeguarding consultant as well as that of RLSS and CSSA in the management of complaints. There had been no formal complaints raised or whistleblowing incidents in the 12 months preceding the inspection.

Areas for development

4.6.5 The Augustinians have recently renewed and updated both their complaints and whistleblowing policies, and these have included the learning from the safeguarding review at Clare Priory in terms of accessibility and responsiveness to issues before they escalate into complaints. There is no mechanism in place currently to review the complainant experience of raising a complaint and this would support more formal learning from complaints management that could inform future practice. In addition, there is no evidence that complaints and whistleblowing policies would be reviewed by RLSS should they occur to get the additional challenge and scrutiny that would support good quality assurance. This is something that could be considered by the Order.

Graded: Comprehensive assurance

¹⁸ Celebret – A celebret is a letter issued by a bishop or religious superior in the Catholic Church that authorises a priest to celebrate Mass in a diocese other than his own. It serves as a form of identification for the priest, confirming that he is free from canonical censures and is permitted to perform sacraments.

4.7 Standard 7 Training and support for safeguarding

Strengths

4.7.1 Training and support for safeguarding is a particular strength of the Augustinians. The decision to employ a safeguarding consultant has raised the profile of training and this work has included the completion of a comprehensive training needs analysis. This analysis has resulted in a training strategy and action plan which is now in progress. All friars have undertaken basic safeguarding training, with the training register showing 100% compliance. In addition, bespoke face to face training has been provided in Integrity in Ministry and a webinar was conducted on managing allegations of abuse. Training materials are supplied by the safeguarding consultant to act as an aide memoir for the friars. The training plan includes further webinars on safeguarding topics that will be held throughout the next 12 months for the friars as well as bespoke leadership training for the Trustees that will be taking place in October 2026.

4.7.2 In addition to the training provided by the safeguarding consultant the friars all have access to training opportunities provided by RLSS. Training opportunities are routinely shared with the friars, who are all welcome to suggest training subjects they feel may have benefit to the community. Friars working in parishes attend their respective diocesan training and this was confirmed by the dioceses where they are placed. Specialised training in supporting those against whom allegations have been made is also available to the friars and is provided by the safeguarding consultant should this be required. Safeguarding discussions and training routinely take place at each Chapter and mid-chapter meeting as was evidenced by the agendas and meeting minutes seen at inspection. All employed staff have undertaken basic safeguarding awareness training. Training records and certificates are kept centrally in the Provincial office.

4.7.3 All training undertaken is evaluated and the learning from this is used to inform future training provision. The provincial safeguarding delegate and the safeguarding consultant both attend safeguarding conferences and events and share their learning from these with the community usually at Chapter meetings

and through a newsletter. Trustees have training compliance oversight and are quick to act if training is not completed.

Areas for Development

4.7.4 No development points were identified at inspection.

Graded: Exemplary

4.8 Standard 8 Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement

Strengths

4.8.1 The Augustinians have, since receiving the recommendations from the safeguarding review at Clare Priory, taken positive and proactive steps to improve their safeguarding practice and to ensure that the actions they take support them to meet the requirements of the eight national safeguarding standards. They have achieved this by taking the learning from their experiences and formulating their response into a safeguarding implementation plan which has identified actions, timeframes for them and methods to review their effectiveness. They have made good progress with their implementation plan including reviewing and updating policies, the development of new resources in the form of the safeguarding toolkit and by completing a training needs analysis to ensure that friars have the knowledge and skills required to ensure good safeguarding practice. Much of this work is very new and time must be given to embed these activities and ways of working into practice. The Augustinians plan to evaluate their policies annually going forward and have three-, six- and 12-month review dates in place for the safeguarding implementation plan.

4.8.2 The Augustinians have used the knowledge and skills of their safeguarding consultant together with their positive working relationship with RLSS to develop their practice. They proactively attend conferences and training events to ensure that they are current with safeguarding developments. Progress against the safeguarding standards is reviewed and discussed at Trustee meetings and with

the whole Order at Chapter meetings. There is an awareness that the voice of those who have been harmed is recognised and respected and this is achieved through their contact with other religious at conferences and events and through their training with RLSS.

Areas for Development

4.8.3 The next stage for the Augustinians will be to embed and evaluate their new systems in practice and to use this learning to inform their current and future safeguarding implementation plans. Consideration should be given to how they will evaluate their actions and evidence the improvement. Creating SMART objectives¹⁹ would help with this as would the consideration of developing Key Performance Indicators²⁰ that can be tracked and reported on to the Trustees to provide assurance. These would also inform an annual safeguarding report.

Graded: Results being achieved

5. Summary of overall findings

5.1. The Augustinians have demonstrated at inspection that they have in place policies and procedures that meet the requirements of the eight national safeguarding standards. They have in the past 12 months achieved a great deal in formalising and updating their safeguarding processes to add robustness and resilience into their systems. There has been a significant amount of change for the friars to adapt to and now there should be a period of reflection and evaluation to ensure that the changes have all been accepted and embedded in practice.

¹⁹ SMART objectives are a structured framework for setting goals that are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant, and **T**ime-bound. This methodology transforms vague intentions into clear, actionable plans, ensuring objectives are attainable, trackable, and aligned with broader strategic goals.

²⁰ Key Performance Indicators are a quantifiable measure used to evaluate the success of an organisation, employee etc in meeting objectives for performance. (The Oxford English Dictionary).

5.2 The Augustinians have demonstrated an openness to scrutiny, with the previous Provincial delegate inviting and participating willingly in the safeguarding review that took place at Clare Priory in 2025. They have taken the recommendations seriously and have actively implemented them during a period of transition from one Provincial delegate to the next. They have shown a commitment to improving their practice which should be commended. Ongoing work to review and evaluate their safeguarding will ensure that they maintain the levels they have achieved.

6. Recommendations

To support improvement, the following recommendations are made:

Within 3 months

- Create systems and processes to evaluate safeguarding practice using SMART objectives and KPIs to gather evidence on the progress of improvements because of the safeguarding implementation plan
- Develop a template for an annual safeguarding report

Within 6 months

- Consider the engagement of a lay Trustee to provide expertise and a different perspective to the scrutiny of safeguarding actions and decisions made at board level
- Create processes to work with the friars, parishioners and survivors of abuse to develop safeguarding messages and a method for evaluation their effectiveness
- Create a system to evaluate the case management procedures so that learning can be identified and inform future practice

Within 12 months

- Create a formal mechanism for gathering feedback and learning from the processes used from the perspective of the respondent to an allegation
- Develop a process for reviewing the experiences of those who make a complaint or raise a whistleblowing concern as to the effectiveness of the policy and associated procedures
- Consider engaging with those who have more experience in working with survivors of abuse to further learning and development opportunities for the friars.

7. Arrangements for follow-up

7.1 In line with an overall rating of Comprehensive Assurance, the earliest potential date of re-audit by the CSSA is in three years. If the CSSA becomes aware of a significant safeguarding concern or allegation in the intervening period, then an earlier audit may be required.

8. Appendices

Appendix A

The following evidence was submitted at audit:

- Safeguarding Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Complaints Policy
- Safeguarding Mission Statement
- Safeguarding Prayer Card
- Terms of reference for the safeguarding delegate
- Roles and responsibilities document for safeguarding for Provincial Leaders
- Provincial Council meeting minutes
- Provincial Code of Conduct
- Safeguarding Implementation Plan
- Safeguarding Information Poster for buildings and churches
- Safeguarding Information poster- Claire Priory Guest Rooms
- Safeguarding Information Leaflet 'A guide to safeguarding in the Augustinian Provinces of England and Scotland'
- Safeguarding incident reporting form
- Safeguarding incident feedback form
- Safeguarding key reminders flow chart
- Safety plan documentation
- Policy for the management of a safeguarding plan and the role of the support person
- Victim Care Letter
- Training Needs Analysis
- Questionnaire for training needs analysis
- Training register of completion and certificates
- Training evaluation form
- DBS register

Appendix B

Order of St Augustine Clare Prior Safeguarding Review Report June 2025

Background

Clare Priory is a retreat centre in Suffolk run by the Order of St Augustine. It offers an open programme of retreats, with accommodation, and serves as a parish church within the Diocese of East Anglia.

The CSSA were made aware of safeguarding concerns that had been raised by a longer-term resident of the Priory, who had been offered accommodation due to being homeless.

Assurance has been received that these concerns have been reported to the relevant statutory authorities and RLSS, who remain responsible for the operational response to the allegation.

The CSSA, with the support of the Order of St Augustine, agreed to undertake a safeguarding review to assess the effectiveness of the overall safeguarding arrangements for retreats and those otherwise receiving accommodation at Clare Priory. In doing so it was anticipated that wider learning will emerge in respect of the provision of accommodation in these and similar circumstances and attendant safeguarding arrangements. This review process did not include correspondence with the individual who raised the concern.

The review has been completed in accordance with the CSSA Audit and Review Framework for Religious Life Groups (RLG).²¹

²¹ The Framework and associated documentation is available here: [Quality Assurance Framework for Religious Life Groups](#)

Scope

In common with other CSSA audit activity the review has considered safeguarding practice during the 12 months preceding the visit of the quality assurance analyst and covered the following areas:

- Safeguarding arrangements at Clare Priory only. (The responsibility for safeguarding in the parish sits with the Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia).

To include governance structures, organisational policies and procedures, roles and responsibilities (including leadership), culture and awareness of safeguarding, pathways for reporting allegations and concerns, and seeking advice about these (and member/ staff understanding of these), support available to those raising concerns and respondents to allegations, record-keeping systems, compliance with statutory guidance, risk assessments, staffing and safer recruitment, and training.

- The provision of accommodation at Clare Priory

To include the circumstances and terms in which retreat, and longer-term accommodation is offered, safeguarding practice related to the provision of accommodation, measures available to manage a breakdown in relationships.

- Transferable learning for Religious Life Groups and retreat centres

To include any gaps in national guidance or arrangements

Methodology

The CSSA quality assurance analyst attended a pre-arranged visit to Clare Priory on 26 June 2025. Interviews were held with the following:

- The Prior
- The Parish Priest
- A focus group of community members
- A focus group of staff

A documentation review was carried out that included the following:

- Safeguarding statement and policy
- Other policies and procedure documents
- Evidence of RLSS liaison
- Evidence of the management of safeguarding concerns (processes being followed)
- Evidence of safeguarding training compliance
- Evidence of DBS compliance
- Booking forms
- Procedure documents for guests booking into a retreat
- Guest information
- Evidence of accessibility to law support

Safeguarding arrangements at Clare Priory

Summary

This review of the safeguarding arrangements at Clare Priory found a good awareness of safeguarding and a culture of care and concern for others. Proactive efforts have been made to ensure that the environment is welcoming and safe for guests and visitors. Friars and staff were open and honest about their knowledge, experience and skills in safeguarding and showed good insight into where things could be improved, together with a willingness to work towards this. There are robust governance arrangements in place for managing safeguarding issues at Provincial level and the order has a designated safeguarding lead through whom all allegations and concerns are managed. At local level the safeguarding arrangements are more informal and would benefit from being more structured to provide the same level of robustness and assurance.

The community at Clare Priory have recently developed good links with the RLSS who have provided them with advice and support in creating a safeguarding policy, in managing low-level concerns and by providing training in safeguarding and safe boundaries. This relationship will be invaluable going forward as the Prior

and community develop their safeguarding practice, knowledge and skills as well as create more robust processes for managing safeguarding locally. The parish priest has established a positive working relationship with the Parish Safeguarding Representatives and the Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia safeguarding team, and this is an additional resource available for the order.

This review found that there are some gaps in process that need to be addressed to ensure that all safeguarding practice is standardised and follows a pathway that can be easily audited and reviewed. The lack of formal processes has resulted in an unstructured approach which is open to challenge and criticism despite all actions taken being done so in line with the charism of the order. Recommendations have been made to address this situation.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made for the improvement of the safeguarding arrangements at Clare Priory:

- There should be a review of the safeguarding policy to identify and develop practical tools for the reporting and managing safeguarding concerns such as flow charts detailing actions to be taken and templates for recording safeguarding concerns.
- A training needs analysis should be developed to identify how gaps in knowledge and skills can be addressed. The community have demonstrated good insight into this, and this should be used to inform the training needs analysis. In addition to the training offered by RLSS, the order should look at other training providers for specific training that falls outside the remit of RLSS. A training register needs to be created to provide clear oversight of training provision and compliance.
- Staff training needs to be put in place to ensure that all staff have a basic awareness of current safeguarding practice and regulation.
- There should be an audit trail that shows that safer staffing and recruitment processes have been followed, and this includes the need for a register of DBS status for friars and staff.

- There should be a risk register for Clare Priory that shows that risks have been identified and that mitigations have been put in place. There should also be an escalation process that allows risks that cannot be managed at local level to be passed to the Provincial risk register.
- A role description should be created for the Prior that details his roles and responsibilities regarding safeguarding at Clare Priory. These should include the level of oversight expected and lines of reporting for safeguarding concerns. It should also include the expectation of recording safeguarding discussions more formally to provide a record of decisions made and an audit trail that can be scrutinised in the event of a complaint being raised or an incident being escalated.
- The Prior should work with RLSS to ensure that all friars are aware of Integrity in Ministry and have a good understanding of the principles and guidance provided with the document and how this informs good practice in safeguarding.
- There needs to be consistency in record keeping and all discussions and decisions around concerns raised, including low level concerns need to be recorded and stored in line with statutory guidance on data protection.

Findings

1.1 Governance arrangements for safeguarding

- 1.1.1 The Order of St Augustine (known hereafter as ‘the Augustinians’) have five Trustees who are all Religious, none of whom are resident at Clare Priory. The Provincial and four other Trustees make up the Provincial Council. The Provincial Council is elected at each Chapter meeting which happen every four years. There is a mid-chapter meeting held every two years, and any urgent changes required can be made at this for example if one of the Council members were to be too ill to continue in the role. All Chapter meetings are full membership meetings where the Provincial nominates members to the Council, and the friars will vote to select their preferred

choices who then remain in post for four years. The Provincial Council has a secretary that is responsible for the minutes and the Provincial Bursar who oversees the finances. The Order are members of the Conference of Religious.²²

- 1.1.2 There is an annual safeguarding report completed which is included in the annual report provided by the Provincial to the Charity Commission. After Council meetings a summary of the minutes is provided to all Friars called 'Council News'. This contains the highlights of the meeting, and a record of any decisions made. The Provincial Council meet at least quarterly and more frequently if required.
- 1.1.3 There are currently four friars resident at Clare Priory under the supervision of the Prior and all safeguarding oversight is undertaken by the Prior. There is no formal safeguarding meeting held, but instead safeguarding issues are discussed at the community meetings as required. Communication from the Provincial on safeguarding is included in 'Council News'. Community meetings are attended by the priory administrator who makes records of decisions made, although no formal minutes are taken. Any significant issues are escalated to the Provincial and Provincial Council for consideration and advice. The friars have recently established good links with the Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS)²³ and were able to evidence frequent and appropriate contact with them for advice.

1.2 Policies and Procedures for safeguarding

- 1.2.1 The Order of St Augustine has a safeguarding policy which is available on their website ²⁴. This policy was updated in February 2025 and is scheduled for annual review. The Augustinians in the UK have a lead safeguarding

²² [Conference of Religious](#)

²³ [Religious Life Safeguarding Service](#)

²⁴ [Safeguarding](#)

officer who is a member of the Provincial Council and have recently employed a lay lead safeguarding officer. They have established links with RLSS who have provided advice on policies and procedures. All friars and staff spoken to were aware of the safeguarding policy and procedures and had signed to confirm that they had received an individual copy, read and understood them. The safeguarding policy has been created using resources and advice from RLSS and meets the requirement of the eight National Safeguarding Standards.

- 1.2.2 The parish priest for Clare is an Augustinian friar and in addition to their own safeguarding policy he abides by the Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia safeguarding policy²⁵ and procedures. The parish priest is supported in this by three Parish Safeguarding Representatives (PSRs)²⁶.

1.3 Roles and Responsibilities for safeguarding

- 1.3.1 The parish priest has a clearly defined role and responsibilities regarding safeguarding practice and the management of safeguarding concerns within the parish. There are established diocesan procedures in place for the priest to follow and there is an established and effective working relationship in place between the parish priest and the PSRs.
- 1.3.2 The Prior has not got any formal terms of reference or defined roles and responsibilities for safeguarding but assumes the lead for safeguarding matters as head of the community at Clare Priory. The safeguarding policy defines the expectations for the Augustinians as follows:

'All Augustinians have an obligation to ensure they know how to respond to safeguarding concerns by being familiar with the content of this policy and the procedure contained within it and any other associated policies/procedures'

²⁵ [Safeguarding - Catholic Diocese Of East Anglia](#)

²⁶ Parish Safeguarding Representatives (PSRs) are volunteers who provide assistance and support to their parish in Safeguarding matters.

- 1.3.3 There are no clearly defined responsibilities for staff in the Augustinian safeguarding policy other than to disclose any safeguarding concerns that may have been raised about them prior to and during employment.

1.4 Culture and awareness of safeguarding at Clare Priory

- 1.4.1 There are currently four friars living at Clare Priory, the Prior, the parish priest and two further friars. The order has 17 friars in the UK and due to smaller numbers, they are linked with the Irish Province for functionality. This connection does not affect their safeguarding practice as this is done independently in each country, in this instance maintaining English statutory requirements and English standards. The Order of St Augustine demonstrate their commitment to safeguarding through a safeguarding statement and safeguarding policy which are both freely available on their website. One of the Order is the named point of contact for safeguarding concerns whose details are also available on the website and who is responsible for the management of any safeguarding issues raised about members of the community.
- 1.4.2 There is a culture of awareness of safeguarding responsibilities at Clare Priory. During the interviews the Prior, parish priest, friars and staff spoken to reported that safeguarding was frequently discussed in house meetings with the focus on how to ensure that any visitors to the retreat are welcomed into a safe environment. The friars reported making a conscious effort to respect people's dignity and privacy. Out of respect they try not deal individually with women and if this is unavoidable, these consultations take place in rooms where they can be visible to others but not heard.
- 1.4.3 All areas where the friars may meet the public have glass panels in the doors as do the guest sitting rooms and other communal areas in the Priory. There are glass panels in the sacristy to ensure openness and transparency and the safety of altar servers and clergy. In addition, the parish priest has had a portable confessional made so confessions can be heard in private but in view in a public place.

- 1.4.4 There were no safeguarding notices on display in the Priory or in the accommodation areas, just diocesan safeguarding information in the church. The contact details for the PSRs are kept in the administrator's office.

1.5 Pathways for reporting and managing safeguarding concerns

- 1.5.1 At Clare Priory any concerns and allegations about any of the friars would be passed to the Prior to manage. This would be done with the support of the RLSS and the safeguarding lead for the Province. The safeguarding policy sets out the process for reporting concerns and for the management of those subject to an allegation although there are no reporting templates in place.
- 1.5.2 As they are a small community, the friars discuss all low-level concerns raised as a community to decide what steps need to be taken next. If escalation is required, they would contact RLSS and the PSRs depending on where the jurisdiction for management sat. Evidence was provided of low-level concerns discussed with RLSS. They would also report any escalation to the Provincial and the Provincial Council as well as the safeguarding lead for the province.
- 1.5.3 All friars and staff spoken to were aware of the safeguarding policy and demonstrated an understanding of their individual roles and responsibilities in reporting any concerns they had. They were able to articulate what they would do if they had a safeguarding concern and understood the need to take notes of any disclosure, ensuring that these would be given to the Prior or the parish priest depending on the circumstances. They spoke of how they would support and listen to any individual who had a safeguarding concern and would use the safeguarding policy to help them when deciding what to do. All friars and staff spoken to were aware of the role of RLSS and would be happy to contact them if the Prior was unavailable.
- 1.5.4 The friars and staff demonstrated an awareness of the types of abuse they might encounter and gave examples of different allegations that could be made about another guest, a volunteer, a staff member or one of the friars. The person raising the concern might themselves be unstable or distressed

or they might witness inappropriate behaviour or boundaries. They spoke about how if they witnessed something and situation was not easily diffusible, they would get help from another friar or if there was an immediate risk of harm they would contact the police. During the last 12 months a safeguarding allegation was made to a third party. On receiving this allegation, the friars did not initially contact the RLSS for advice and support and have learned from this experience that this is required if they are to secure the best possible outcome for all concerned. All spoken to were aware of local authority and other statutory agencies they could contact as required and all were now aware of the need to use RLSS as a first point of contact for advice.

1.6 Support available for those raising a concern and respondents to an allegation

- 1.6.1 The Prior and community recognise that anyone reporting or being the subject of an allegation would need care and support, and this would be arranged depending on the context and the individual circumstances. The Prior would manage the immediate response and would seek advice from RLSS. Any allegations would be shared with the Provincial who would lead the response with the support of RLSS and the safeguarding lead for the province. The order has access to both Canon and civil lawyers should this be required.
- 1.6.2 The friar's priority in these circumstances would be to provide a place of safety for the individuals involved and to provide someone they feel comfortable 'opening up' to, someone they could 'speak to without conditions.' They felt that there needs to be transparency over any process and that all involved should feel listened to and followed up on. They felt that everyone involved should have their opportunity to tell their side of the story and should be informed of any outcomes without delay.

1.7 Record keeping systems

- 1.7.1 All documents (personal files etc) are kept in the administrator's office in a locked cabinet. All DBS checks are current for friars and employed staff.
- 1.7.2 The PSR meets with parish priest regularly to review DBS checks and training for volunteers. The PSR is responsible for this and all documentation on the volunteers is kept at Clare Priory and is also stored in line with data protection legislation²⁷.
- 1.7.3 There were no processes in place for reviewing any documentation outwith those in place for the PSR. There were no safeguarding files available for review or tracking purposes. Documentation pertaining to discussions on low level concerns or safeguarding issues was not available, just evidence of discussions via email.

1.8 Compliance with legislation and guidance

- 1.8.1 The community at Clare Priory were unaware of Integrity in Ministry²⁸ and this is an area for development. There was some awareness of the eight national safeguarding standards²⁹ gained through RLSS training. The parish priest was aware of Caring Safely for Others³⁰ but the other friars not aware of this document. The safeguarding lead for the order supports keeping the friars aware of changes in safeguarding practice by providing feedback any key learning points from the conferences and training he attends in this role.

²⁷ [Data protection: The UK's data protection legislation - GOV.UK](#)

²⁸ [Integrity in Ministry - Religious Life Safeguarding Service](#)

²⁹ Full details of the eight standards and underpinning sub standards are available here: [The Eight National Safeguarding Standards](#)

³⁰ [Caring-Safely-For-Others.pdf](#)

1.9 Risk assessments

- 1.9.1 Informal risk assessments are completed on guests and the Prior and administrator both reported having had to send people away or refuse them coming if they are unsure that the environment at Clare Priory is suitable for them and they will be safe there. It is concerns about an individual's mobility that will prevent them from being able to safely exit the building in the event of fire that is the most frequent factor in refusing entry. There is no formal documentation for these risk assessments.
- 1.9.2 Clare Priory run an annual craft fair over two days each summer. A formal risk assessment is carried out for this to ensure that all mitigations have been put in place to prevent harm or injury. Private security is sourced to cover arrangements for the craft fair.

1.10 Staffing and safer recruitment

- 1.10.1 Staff recruitment takes place infrequently. There are recruitment processes in place which include the requirement for references, interviews and satisfactory DBS checks if these would be required for the role. Currently no staff roles require DBS checks. There are five members of staff in total; the administrator, a cleaner, two cooks and a gardener, all of whom have contact with the public and guests in their day-to-day work.
- 1.10.2 There are 18 volunteers working in the parish and all follow the diocesan safeguarding policy and procedures. The diocese hold responsibility for the safer recruitment of volunteers, and all have current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)³¹ checks in place in line with diocesan policy. All have completed diocesan safeguarding training and report directly to the PSRs if they have any concerns.

³¹ [Disclosure and Barring Service - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service)

1.11 Training

- 1.11.1 There is not a current training register for the friars and staff at Clare Priory, although certificates were available that showed all friars had received RLSS basic training and boundaries training in April 2025. Expectations for training are set out in the safeguarding policy.
- 1.11.2 The friars reported that they felt prepared through the training they have had to cope with any safeguarding issues that arise and that the profile of safeguarding had risen through training and having a designated safeguarding lead.
- 1.11.3 The friars reported that they preferred face to face training and discussions rather than online training. When asked about what training they felt would benefit them going forward they suggested the following topics:
- Risk assessments
 - Training on lawful and appropriate approaches to supporting individuals to leave when necessary
 - Supporting refugees and the homeless
 - Supporting those who provide accommodation for refugees
 - Support in recognising and responding to situations that feel threatening.
- 1.11.4 None of the staff has had any safeguarding training for their employment at Clare Priory. One member of staff is a school governor and had received safeguarding training through this role. When spoken to the staff felt they would benefit from some basic safeguarding awareness training.

The provision of accommodation at Clare Priory

Summary

Clare Priory have offered guest accommodation without issue for several years; however recent events require that they review their processes to identify any potential gaps that need to be addressed so that guests and friars are clear about the terms of their stay, particularly the length of stay. With increased vulnerabilities in society and an aging population there is a need to ensure that their current processes and booking form captures the right information to ensure the right decisions are made for the safety of the guest and the friars.

Information on safeguarding needs to be made available for the guests in their rooms and in communal areas to ensure that they are aware of how to raise any concerns they have to the right person. The friars have shared their feelings of vulnerability when it comes to any breakdown in relationships with guests and when they are exposed to uncivil or inappropriate behaviours. Consideration should be given to the creation of a document that sets out the expectation of conduct and behaviour of guests who are welcomed to the priory that guest sign up to on arrival. Processes for the management of breakdowns in relationships are not established and the lack of these has resulted in unfortunate consequences for the friars both in the short-term and longer-term with trust and with emotional resilience.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to address the issues found at review

- A review and development of the booking system and booking documentation for retreat guests on short stays to ensure that the information gathered is sufficient to allow a more robust risk assessment of guests who wish to stay at Clare Priory and that details such as length of stay and conduct are non-negotiable.
- Consideration should be given to creating a more detailed process and documentation for the management of guests who wish to stay for a longer-term at the priory to ensure that clear boundaries are in place and there is clarity on length of stay and expected behaviours and conduct whilst a guest at Clare Priory. Any third party involved in the stay of a longer-term guest must agree in writing to the arrangements and provide assurance that

they will take on the responsibility of an individual should they be asked to leave. The friars are recommended to seek legal advice for this to ensure that any agreements are in line with legal requirements.

- Safeguarding information for guests should be made available in their rooms and in communal areas. Links to partner organisations such as RLSS and Safe Spaces³² should be shared with guests who might wish to contact them. An information folder could be developed to include this as well as the other information currently provided to guests, together with a document outlining the expectations of behaviour and conduct whilst a guest at Clare Priory.
- Development of a system and processes to manage any breakdown in relationship between the friars and guests. Consideration should be given to providing mediation and support to those involved in a breakdown in relationships to ensure better outcomes for all.

Findings

2.1 Circumstances and terms in which retreat, and longer-term accommodation is offered

- 2.1.1 Clare Priory welcomes guests for retreats that normally last between two to three days and one week. It is only in certain circumstances that a guest can stay for a longer period. In these instances, the circumstances and details about the individual are discussed by the whole community and a collective decision will be made by them as to whether the individual can stay for a prolonged period. These situations are rare and usually involve a priest or friar from another part of the Catholic Church rather than a lay person. Recently the friars had for the first time offered

³² **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

hospitality to a homeless individual for a prolonged period who remains in residence at time of this review. The community has confirmed that consideration will not be given to this form of accommodation in the future.

- 2.1.2 Guests secure their booking by contacting the priory administrator who is responsible for allocating spaces. Basic details are taken over the telephone or via email and a booking form is completed. This includes the date and length of stay and contact details for the individual and their emergency contact. An informal risk assessment takes place over the telephone where the administrator uses experience and judgement to determine whether the individual wishing to come on a retreat is going to be able to cope independently and has no additional needs that would make Clare Priory an unsuitable environment for them. The priory can accommodate people with mild physical disabilities in the stable block but not in the main house and guests have been turned away if the judgment is that they will not cope. The priory does not take children or families and have a no under 18's policy. There was no specific paperwork or additional booking form for guests who request to stay longer than one week at the priory.
- 2.1.3 Guests to Clare Priory are not required to sign in or out to confirm the details of their stay. On arrival they are shown to their rooms and provided with the priory's daily schedule of prayer and mealtimes. Guests are told about the fire safety plan and shown fire escapes and are directed to the emergency phone for use overnight should there be an issue.
- 2.1.4 There is no additional information provided, or any expectations set out regarding behaviour and conduct as the community have not felt there to be a need for this. Leaving instructions are available in the rooms for guests.
- 2.1.5 The consensus of the friars at interview was that the access to booking into a retreat is robust enough, however more information needs to be secured about the individuals before they are welcomed to the Priory. This should be achieved by adding more questions to the booking form to identify the needs of the individuals prior to their arrival and to allow

more informed discussions on whether to accept them as guests and whether the friars and Clare Priory can meet their needs. A more robust process is required for individuals who may need temporary accommodation for social reasons such as homelessness or as refugees awaiting immigration decisions.

2.2 Safeguarding practice related to the provision of accommodation

- 2.2.1 There is no information on safeguarding displayed in the accommodation block such as the safeguarding statement, a link to the safeguarding policy or the contact details of the person responsible for safeguarding at Clare Priory. There was also no information on organisations available to guests to raise safeguarding concerns or make disclosures of harm to such as RLSS and Safe Spaces.
- 2.2.2 Access to the accommodation is via a locked door and guests are provided with a key to this and their rooms. There are no ring doorbells or cameras at the retreat centre to scrutinise who might come to the main door of the priory or to the entrance door of the accommodation in the stable block. Within the priory care has been taken to add glass panels in the doors where guests meet friars and in communal areas as a safety precaution. All doors to the Priory are locked overnight with new locks having been added to the doors recently following the issue with the overstaying guest.
- 2.2.3 From a safeguarding perspective, assessment of the vulnerability of guests is carried out with an informal chat at time of booking. On arrival the administrator and Prior will talk to people if they have concerns about elderly and vulnerable people and will advise them to leave if they feel that the priory is not a safe place for them to be.

2.3 Measures available to manage a breakdown in relationships

- 2.3.1 There is no formal process or guidance available for the Prior and friars if relationships break down with guests and visitors and they need to ask

them to leave. The Prior and friars noted that a process is difficult to create as they are unsure of their rights and what they can legally do if an individual refuses to leave. The booking form may not in its current format equate to a binding contract with guests and the friars need to seek legal advice on what changes might be needed to achieve this.

2.3.2 There is no information available to guests on how to raise a concern or make a complaint in either their rooms or in communal areas. There are no formal processes in place by which guests can evaluate and provide feedback on their experiences to the friars from which they could learn and develop the service they provide. They have received thank you cards in the past by way of appreciation for the work they do and the positive impact this has on their guests.

2.3.3 The friars spoke about the impact of the recent breakdown in the relationship between a guest and themselves and how they had felt helpless in how they should manage this deterioration and its impact. At time of interview one friar shared his view that there is an unspoken fear in the community after recent events.

Transferrable learning from Religious Life Groups and retreat centres

Summary and Findings

Discussions with the friars and the staff at Clare Priory demonstrated the gap in provision of national guidance for retreats on safeguarding practice. Currently there is no guidance provided by the Conference of Religious, the RLSS or the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales on the specific issues that RLGs might face in welcoming vulnerable people into their retreat centres. At present the retreat centres are adapting current best practice guidelines to attempt to bridge the gap, however many are not experienced in doing this and are left exposed to issues that might otherwise be prevented such as people who may abuse their hospitality and overstay or behave in unacceptable ways. It is not uncommon for RLGs and other church bodies to be faced with decisions about providing longer-

term housing for vulnerable people and there is a need to think through the implications of this and have policies in place to manage these instances in addition to those in place for managing short-term retreat guests. This review has highlighted some of the potential issues that could be common to all retreat centres who traditionally have relied on the goodwill and honesty of those they welcome to stay and how by making systems and processes more robust and relevant to today's society that current and future harms could be prevented. The balance will need to be struck between ensuring the safety and wellbeing of the Religious that run retreats and those that visit them alongside the need to be able to provide the valuable service they do in the least restrictive way.

Recommendation

There is a need for further investigation and consultation on the need to review the safeguarding guidance that organisations provide to ensure that it meets the requirements of those who run retreats. A consultation process should be considered to seek the views and examples of good practice that could inform future guidance for all.