

Carlisle Diocese Authorised Listeners Service

Introduction

Carlisle Diocese has developed this service in response to 'Responding well to those who have been abused' published by the Church of England in 2011¹. This report highlighted the fact that:

'Survivors of sexual abuse still see a need for better support and action in recognition of their pain. They continue to press the Church to provide safer communities where their experience of abuse can be heard and support offered.'

This report is one of the key safeguarding policies adopted by the Church of England and places a responsibility on each Diocese to appoint 'carefully chosen, competent and trained people who will be able to be 'authorised listeners' for those who disclose abuse, in particular for those who disclose abuse from within the church community'.

The Service

The Diocese has recruited a small number of Authorised Listeners, who will be for this purpose independent from potential or actual Diocesan roles, and available to respond to referral from the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser (DSA).

Further Listeners will be recruited if the need arises to ensure the availability of Listeners of both genders throughout the Diocese.

The service is available to those who are victims/survivors of abuse. The abuse may be alleged and there is no expectation that it will have been proved or substantiated. The Diocese acknowledges a particular responsibility to provide this service to those who have experienced abuse within the church community.

An Authorised Listener may also be offered in the following circumstances:

- To a member of a church with a grievance or complaint which relates to safeguarding in the church community.
- To a vulnerable adult with a grievance or complaint of any kind relating to the church community.
- To members of other Christian denominations in Cumbria who may need this service.

Listeners are volunteers who will be reimbursed travelling and other expenses in providing a service.

¹ Responding Well to those who have been sexually abused: Policy and guidance for the Church of England, 1st edition 2011, copyright The Archbishops' Council, section 4.6, and section 5.

In exceptional circumstances where the Diocese is not able to identify a suitable listener the DSA may recommend to the Diocesan Secretary the need to commission a fee paid service from an appropriately trained professional or agency.

Referrals to the service must be made to the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser ('DSA') who can be contacted by phone on 07775 290139 or email at safeguarding.adviser@carlisle-diocese.org.uk. The DSA is responsible for the provision of a safe and reliable service to those who need it and will arrange for the provision of an Authorised Listener.

Job description of an Authorised Listener

i) Duties

- To provide an attentive and attuned listening ear to assist the client in talking about their experiences in relation to present or past abuse, or their concerns.
- To assist the client to consider their next steps, and to support them in making them. Such next steps may include reporting abuse to instigate a statutory investigation or disciplinary process, facilitating counselling or pastoral support, mediation etc.
- To share relevant information from sessions with the DSA, in order to facilitate the next steps by the client and the Diocese.
- Where appropriate, and with the client's agreement, to enable referrals to be made to other professionals and/or support the client in doing so.

ii) Extent of the work

- To offer in the first instance, 3 sessions with a client, which may be either face to face or by telephone.
- To review the process with the DSA after the third session, in order to decide what further ongoing work may be necessary from the Listener. It is expected that most cases will be short term, with longer term involvement being exceptional.

iii) Confidentiality and information sharing

- The Listener should maintain a record of each Listening Session and keep the DSA advised of the progress of the sessions so that the DSA can agree with them the most appropriate outcome at the end of the first three sessions.

The following restrictions apply to information shared with Listeners:

- *With the exceptions below*, to maintain client confidentiality, and only share information to other parties with the client's consent.
- *With or without the client's consent*, to share information with other parties if the information shared puts others at risk; or the client is assessed to be at risk and unable to protect him or herself; or information is pertinent to a current statutory services investigation or assessment.

- *For information which must be shared with or without consent*, the Listener must share it without delay, in the first instance with the DSA, who will decide what information should be disclosed, to whom and by whom.
- If information refers to complaint about the DSA, it should be shared with the Bishop of Penrith, who will decide with the chair of the Diocesan safeguarding panel on appropriate future action.

Listeners are responsible for keeping records of their sessions in a secure place returning them to the DSA when the service ends.

iv) **Accountability, training and supervision**

- To be accountable to the DSA for delivery of the work.
- To receive professional supervision in periods when working with clients.
- To access appropriate training as required for the role.

Person specification for Authorised Listeners

- Ideally a background in counselling or an allied profession.
- Ability to manage sensitive and difficult information.
- Capacity to understand the boundaries of confidentiality and information sharing.
- Willingness to work appropriately with the Safeguarding Adviser of the Diocese, both in the interests of the client, and of others who may be at risk.
- Assessment skills to identify needs for specialist support, and knowledge of available resources.
- Training and experience in safeguarding children and adults, preferably in a church context.
- Knowledge of Church of England and Diocese of Southwark safeguarding policies, procedures and guidelines, and a commitment to following them.
- Understanding of the structures and processes of the Church of England.

Process for referral

- All referrals must be made directly or indirectly to the DSA, who in most instances will communicate directly with the client.
- Wherever possible a referral will be made to the Listener without a direct meeting with the DSA to ensure the person does not have to 'repeat their story'.
- Having discussed the client's needs and preferences, the DSA will make a referral to an appropriate Authorised Listener.
- The DSA will aim to offer the client an appropriate Authorised Listener within 3 weeks of the referral being made.
- The DSA will share with the Listener the details of the referral and also if is a current statutory investigation or diocesan disciplinary process.