
Safeguarding of Bellringers in the Bath and Wells Diocese.

I was appointed Safeguarding Officer of the Association on Easter Monday 2015 and I am writing this at the end of a 6 month period when I have been trying to assess what needs doing. It coincides with the news of the imprisonment of a former Bishop of Gloucester which serves to reinforce the importance of this subject.

There was no job description provided and the General Committee had not provided any sort of remit for the position. I therefore decided to explore guidance available in general and try and match that to what is done in practice within the Diocese, to see what things need doing that aren't being done, and then formulate a job description and role for the Safeguarding Officer position.

Guidance available

- 1) The CCCBR has published Guidance Note 3 which is the work of The Tower Stewardship sub- committee and the latest Issue is July 2014 and can be found on the CCCBR website (www.cccbr.org.uk/towerstewardship) and locally on the Bath-Wells website (<http://bath-wells.org/safeguarding.php>). This is a comprehensive analysis of the requirements both legal and practical.
- 2) The CCCBR also published a leaflet called "Protecting Young Ringers: Guidelines for maintaining a Safe Environment for Young People in the Belfry". This was produced in 2004 and is a bit dated in that it refers to CRB checks and not DBS, the service that has replaced CRB, and some of the phrases in it would not be thought politically correct today. It is however still current for the whole country and gives a very useful framework for any belfry teaching young people. It was designed to inform both PCC's and Tower captains and was produced in a form suitable to be pinned on Belfry Notice Boards.
- 3) Both documents above were not intended to be exhaustive and should be read in the context of Diocesan guidelines, PCC policy, and the Church of England House of Bishops' Policy on Child Abuse **Protecting All God's Children 4th edition November, 2010**¹ and equivalent documents from other churches, as well as the Home Office publication Safe from Harm. Reference should also be made to advice on the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, which has been partly implemented from October 2009 (see **Tower Stewardship Guidance note No. 3**)).
- 4) Our Diocesan Guidelines in the Bath and Wells are contained in The Diocesan "Child Protection Policy" dated Jan 2005 and a smaller booklet "Understanding Child Protection in the Parish" (also Jan 2005) which is an introduction to the

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- Policy. These documents cover bellringing but are not specifically tailored to it and should be known by each Parishes Child Protection appointed person.
- 5) Although not solely guidance documents there are 2 documents on the website <http://bath-wells.org/safeguarding.php> which are the diocesan guidance on publishing photographs and videos and also our Association consent form.
 - 6) There are also up to date documents on <http://www.bathandwells.org.uk/diocese/safeguarding/safeguarding-guidance> which reflect the new 2015 Church of England Guidance which is general guidance which could well impinge on ringing activities.
 - 7) I also attended a half day course run by the Diocesan Safeguarding team at the Old Deanery, Wells who will offer this course to any Tower captain who asks to attend.

What is done in practice.

This was, surprisingly for such an important subject, not easy to find out. Certainly there was an effort after 2004 /2005 period when leaflets were circulated to both PCC's and Tower Captains but little active work by the Association appears to have gone on in the last 11 years. By their very nature, when cases have arisen, they are not the subject of publicity and in that period they have been dealt with by Parish appointed persons, the Association Gen Sec and the Diocesan advisers.

I have talked to a number of Tower captains across the Diocese and I suspect that (but have no proof of) in the last 11 years Parish appointed persons and Tower captains have changed frequently and that there may be some towers where no person exists in either role.

What sort of things need doing

The Diocesan team were able to convince me with their general statistics of cases that this is a subject that merits a high priority for any organisation. Because the role of the Association is not defined I think we need to consider our aims and what we can do, and do that in relation to the Diocesan system which appears to be a sound one.

The diocesan system uses a central team to train a person on each PCC as an Appointed safeguarding person and that person then deals with ALL parish safeguarding issues which may or may not include the advice of the Diocesan team. . Within the Parish structure there are a multitude of volunteer posts such as a Tower captain where individuals have control of a facet of church life which, such as with learners in a belfry, may include young people. Provided that the Diocesan

Team ensure that appointed persons are in place and monitored this is a sound system and there is at present no clear role for the Association in it. The Diocesan team are conscious that Tower Captains do prefer to speak to another ringer when there is an issue and would welcome a two way interchange of information between Safeguarding Officer and the Diocesan team

The guidance leaflets are written supposing that each Tower Captain is appointed by the PCC (and I am pretty sure they are not) and that they are aware of the 2004 leaflet and that each PCC appointed person is aware when changes are made in the tower or learners taken on. Appointment by the PCC is not an issue for the Association but for individual parishes. The issues of making Tower captains aware of the current guidance and cooperating /liaising with the PCC appointed person is something the Association could and in my opinion should do.

In the last 11 years this Association has seen a remarkable change in teaching practices and procedures. Not only are several Branches running training courses at frequent intervals but there are many "Out of Home Tower" practices/ meetings/ competitions being run specifically for young people. These can involve non ringers such as parents and almost always include transport arrangements with volunteers and professionals. The current guidance covers all these issues but we have no Association monitoring arrangements to ensure that they are being followed. And of course the Parish appointed person is bypassed in such situations. This could be an important role for the Association.

Specific things to be done

- 1) I suggest that the Church Photography permissions form as on the website (<http://bath-wells.org/safeguarding.php>) be amended to include the name of the Safeguarding Officer instead of the Association General Secretary.
- 2) That the Safeguarding Officer should contact ALL Tower captains in affiliated and non affiliated towers and reissue them with the current Protecting Young Ringers leaflet with a covering letter. The letter would ask them to display the leaflet in the tower; find out who their appointed person was and display their name as well; and contact the Appointed person and arrange DBS checks for themselves and deputies if there was any chance that they would have young people in their tower as learners or visitors or if they might accompany young persons to other towers. This exercise could be repeated at intervals of (say) 5 years
- 3) That the Safeguarding Officer meets with the Education and Deputy Education Officers (and Branch Education Officers if necessary) to fact find and then

formulate a system that all can work to ensure that all are following the guidelines and a monitoring system is set up to ensure that there is continuity.

- 4) The normal route when an issues occurs which links Tower captain to Parish appointed person to Diocesan team doesn't have an obvious gap or role for the Association Safeguarding Officer. I am aware from the last 6 months that Tower captains do wish to talk to another ringer about issues that are current and ongoing and I suggest this role continues without in any way replacing the role of the Diocesan Team. I also think we should set up a dialogue between Safeguarding officer and Diocesan Team as they request to ensure information is exchanged as and when necessary.
- 5) I think times have changed enough for the Association to change its rules so that at least a mention of safeguarding is included as an objective. Possibly an amendment to Rule 1(2) or Rule 1(4) or even both.
- 6) At present the position of Safeguarding Officer is a stand alone one and the Association needs to consider whether that is correct. Being slightly different from other Association posts it is not an obvious candidate for Standing or General Committees which are already fairly weighty with numbers. I seek guidance from the current officers on this but would think that an invite to attend Standing or General committee meetings as and when necessary would suffice. I think it would be appropriate to include a short report each year on the website and possibly in the report.

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Change Ringers