Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency

Sisters of St Andrew

Baseline Audit Report
July 2026

Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency

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1. Introduction

1.1 This report is a baseline audit of the safeguarding arrangements for the Sisters of St Andrew[1]. It is undertaken as part of the CSSA programme of baseline audits for Religious Life Groups (RLGs) in England and Wales.

1.2 The Sisters of St Andrew is a congregation of Pontifical Right. The community in England consists of four Sisters, all of whom live at St Andrew's in Lewisham where they operate a Retreat Centre which has self-catering overnight accommodation for up to nine adults. The ministry includes residential and non-residential individually guided retreats, days of reflection, prayer evenings and spiritual accompaniment. Visiting groups are expected to follow their own safeguarding arrangements and have their own Safeguarding Leads appointed. Some Sisters also volunteer in their parish. The group has no formal employees. A freelance Trust Secretary works approximately half a day each week on compliance matters and also volunteers with the group. Four lay volunteers support the ministry of the Sisters. A Sister always remains present with them whilst they are undertaking these activities.

1.3 The scope of this audit includes safeguarding arrangements for the 12-month period preceding the audit week which took place in July 2026. The audit will not include comment on the safeguarding arrangements in place for the diocese in which the parish support is undertaken.

1.4 The CSSA has devised a categorisation scheme for Religious Life Groups taking part in safeguarding audits. This categorises groups on a scale of *Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3.* Level 1 is classed as a small community with minimal outreach and no known safeguarding concerns. Level 1 is itself divided into two categories: *Enclosed* (for Enclosed Orders) and *Apostolic* (for non-Enclosed Orders). Level 2 is for Orders of medium sized communities with some outreach with vulnerable populations and/or providing some diocesan activities such as a Parish Priest. Level 3 audits cover larger communities and/or one with significant outreach with vulnerable

[1] The Sisters of St Andrew is a registered charity with the Charity Commission as the Religious of St Andrew with the charity number 227315

populations and/or a disproportionately high number of open safeguarding cases. The Sisters of St Andrew has been assigned to a Level 1 Apostolic safeguarding audit.

1.5 The CSSA recognises the rich diversity of the Religious, and acknowledges that the Religious Life Groups within any particular 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 Local Superior for the Sisters of St Andrew was initially contacted by the CSSA Analyst via e-mail on 27 March 2026 to notify her of the intention to complete a safeguarding audit and the relevant audit guidance documents were shared. Over further e-mail contact a date for the in-person visit was finalised and a virtual meeting was arranged for 13 May between the CSSA Analyst, the Local Superior and the Secretary to discuss the audit requirements.

2.2 Following the virtual meeting the Self-Assessment (an assessment tool which provides background information on the Sisters of St Andrew's adherence to the eight National Safeguarding Standards[2]) was completed by the group and then emailed to the CSSA with accompanying evidence on 24 June. Following the review of the Self-Assessment and the supporting evidence provided, the CSSA Analyst completed the in-person visit to the Retreat Centre on 21 July.

2.3 The evidence provided in both the Self-Assessment form and the in-person visit has been assessed against the Level 1 Maturity Matrix and ratings for each standard have been assigned, together with a combined overall grade.

[2] A description and full details of the Standards can be found on the CSSA website here

2.4 The following evidence has also been considered in the preparation of this report in reaching decisions regarding scoring for the individual safeguarding standards and the overall grade:

- The Sisters of St Andrew website[3].
- Interview with the four members of the Sisters of St Andrew who are also four of the five Trustees of the charity. The Local Superior is the Chair of Trustees.
- Interview with the group Secretary who is also a volunteer.
- Safeguarding Policy
- Safeguarding Statement
- Complaints Policy
- Volunteers Policy
- Visitors Policy
- Safeguarding Pack
- Trustee meeting minutes
- Risk Assessments for guests, expected and unexpected visitors
- Display posters
- The Charity Commission website for the Sisters of St Andrew[4]
- E-mail liaison with the Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS[5])

2.5 No case audit work has been undertaken during the course of this audit as there have been no safeguarding allegations or concerns reported involving the Sisters of St Andrew within the last 12 months and hence there are no current case files to pass comment on.

3. Audit grading

3.1 Safeguarding practice is graded in accordance with the CSSA Maturity Matrix for Level 1 Religious Life Groups. Each standard is graded on an ascending three point scale of *Not Met, Met with Recommendations* and *Met*. Grades for individual

[3] www.sisters-of-st-andrew.com

[4] The Charity Commission website page can be accessed here

[5] RLSS is an independent team of Safeguarding professionals offering Safeguarding services to the Religious of the Catholic Church in England and Wales.

standards are combined in order to produce an overall grading for the Religious Life Group as an outcome of the audit.[6] The audit draws on evidence generated from self-assessment, interviews and the supporting documentation as listed in paragraph 2.4.

3.2 This report summarises the findings of the audit undertaken of the Sisters of St Andrew and their progress towards meeting the eight National Safeguarding Standards; the grading for each, and an overall rating, are tabulated below:

Overall grading	Met With Recommendations
Standard 1 - Safeguarding is embedded in the Church body's leadership, governance, ministry and culture	Met With Recommendations
Standard 2 - Communicating the Church's safeguarding message	Met With Recommendations
Standard 3 - Engaging with and caring for those who report having been harmed	Met With Recommendations
Standard 4 - Effective management of allegations and concerns	Met
Standard 5 - Management and support of subjects of allegations and concerns (respondents)	Met
Standard 6 - Robust human resource management	Met

[6] Full information on supporting documentation in respect of the audit methodology is available here: Quality Assurance Framework for Religious Life Groups

Standard 7 - Training and support for safeguarding	Met With Recommendations
Standard 8 - Quality assurance and continuous improvement	Met With Recommendations

4. Audit findings against each standard

4.1 Standard 1 Safeguarding is embedded in the Church body's leadership, governance, ministry and culture

4.1.1 The Sisters of St Andrew has a Safeguarding Policy which follows the RLSS template and contains sections on overview and scope, training, roles and responsibilities, practice guidance and procedures, whistleblowing, recording and storage of safeguarding concerns and case files and safer recruitment guidance. The policy was created in April 2025, formally adopted in November 2025, reviewed in April 2026 and is due for review in April 2027. A clear commitment to safeguarding children and adults is contained in the overview section of the policy.

4.1.2 Governance arrangements provide regular opportunities for safeguarding oversight. The four Sisters are Trustees of the charity and a fifth Trustee, who is the Regional Superior and is based in Belgium, provides an additional external and congregational perspective. The Trustees meet twice a year (with the Regional Superior attending in-person), and safeguarding appears as a standing agenda item for every meeting. The minutes for the most recent Trustee meeting in April 2026 record that no safeguarding matters had arisen, that DBS checks for Sisters and volunteers had been completed, that safeguarding training had been undertaken or booked and that preparations for the CSSA audit were being progressed. The trustees also reviewed the Safeguarding Policy and Guest Risk Assessment document. During interview the Trustees recognised the need to be informed of allegations and the need to notify the Charity Commission of serious incidents. The Local Superior would be responsible for any notification. In addition

to Trustee meetings, all four Sisters meet as a group each Monday and have informal daily contact. Safeguarding concerns could be raised at the weekly meeting, although these meetings are not minuted.

4.1.3 *Integrity in Ministry*[7] has previously been circulated to all members and was revisited at the most recent Trustee meeting. During interview the Local Superior also reported receiving safeguarding and governance information from the Conference of Religious, Charity Commission and Association of Provincial Bursars.

4.1.4 The Sisters of St Andrew has a close relationship with the RLSS and described confidence in approaching the service for advice and support. The RLSS confirmed that the Sisters have engaged with them in their preparation for this audit and in their policy reviews.

4.1.5 The Local Superior is also the Chair of Trustees and the Safeguarding Lead. Although this could potentially mean less resilience for the group, the concentration of several leadership roles in one person is understandable in a community of four, and the Sisters described routes for escalation beyond the local community to the Regional and General leadership where necessary.

4.1.6 The Sisters demonstrated awareness of the potential safeguarding risks associated with their ministry. They recognised that people attending for spiritual accompaniment may be vulnerable, that vulnerability may not always be immediately apparent, and that issues could include disclosures of past harm, low-level concerns, dementia, financial exploitation and trauma. This awareness is supported by specific risk assessments for expected and unexpected visitors, as well as a wider guest risk assessment covering security, fire safety and the physical environment. The expected and unexpected visitor risk assessments contain practical safeguards including advanced agreement of visits where possible, provision of a Safeguarding Lead and RLSS contact details, consideration of another person being present, use of rooms with visibility, safe seating and exits,

[7] *Integrity in Ministry* is a code of conduct for Religious engaged in ministry in the Catholic Church in England and Wales. It has been written for the guidance of those in ministry and for the information of those people with and among whom Religious exercise their ministry. A copy can be located here

and clear escalation to the police or RLSS where concerns arise. Within the centre the Sisters and guests have separate staircases to access their accommodation areas. These are positive examples of safeguarding being translated into operational practice.

4.1.7 A Development Plan has been produced following completion of the Self-Assessment using the template embedded within the document. The Development Plan identifies areas for improvement, including safeguarding communications with volunteers and consideration of whistleblowing arrangements. However, it does not yet allocate actions, owners and timescales.

Graded: Met With Recommendations

4.2 Standard 2 Communicating the Church's safeguarding message

4.2.1 A clear commitment to safeguarding is voiced by the Sisters of St Andrew through its Safeguarding Statement, which links its charism of welcome with a commitment to the physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of visitors and to the One Church Approach[8] to working. The statement outlines that its members will complete regular safeguarding training, implement necessary changes in practice and to respond to survivors promptly and compassionately.

4.2.2 In the entrance way to the Retreat Centre is a notice board which has a poster advertising the Safe Spaces[9] resource. At the foot of the poster is a QR Code taking the reader to the website and for those without immediate access to a mobile

[8] 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.

[9] Safe Spaces England and Wales 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.

telephone or other device there are tear-off slips with the service's contact number. Also on the noticeboard is the Sisters of St Andrew's Confidentiality Statement, Safeguarding Statement and a poster listing the group's policies, with an invitation to request a copy if required. A poster on the RLSS template is also featured which directs people on what action to take if they have safeguarding concerns and lists the Safeguarding Lead's name, email and contact number.

4.2.3 The Safeguarding Statement, Safeguarding Policy, Annual Report and GDPR information are all contained within the "about us" section of the Sisters of St Andrew's website. The Sisters acknowledged during interview that Safe Spaces was not included within the website's external resources and agreed this would be a useful addition. The Complaints Policy is not currently available on the website, although a physical copy is available at the centre.

4.2.4 Safeguarding messages are also communicated internally. All Sisters are Trustees and therefore participate in review and ratification of the Safeguarding Policy and other related policies. During the in-person visit the CSSA Analyst was shown a safeguarding pack which is kept in the community office but available for guests and contains the Safeguarding Statement, a confidentiality statement, Safeguarding Policy, Visitors Policy, Health and Safety Policy, Data Protection Policy, Complaints Policy and a leaflet on spiritual abuse. The Sisters also receive safeguarding updates through the Local Superior from external Church and charity-sector sources.

4.2.5 The Sisters of St Andrew does not have a formal safeguarding communications plan. The Development Plan within the Self-Assessment recognises the need to strengthen communication with volunteers and the Sisters identified their newsletter as a potential additional route for communicating safeguarding messages. A Communication Plan, as a stand-alone document or one which is incorporated into the Safeguarding Policy or Safeguarding Action/Development Plan, setting out audiences, messages, methods, frequency and responsibility would provide assurance that safeguarding information remains accessible and current.

Graded: Met With Recommendations

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

4.3.1 Given that there is no previous or current experience of handling disclosures or allegations of abuse the Sisters of St Andrew has limited opportunity to evidence working practices in Standards 3, 4 and 5. However, the Safeguarding Policy provides clear procedural guidance for responding to a person who discloses harm. It requires the person to be informed of next steps, to be given options where possible and an indicative timescale as well as requiring members to be supportive to those making a disclosure.

4.3.2 The Visitors Policy contains a clear explanation of the limits of confidentiality and recognises that speaking about abuse can be difficult and require considerable courage. It states that disclosures will, wherever possible, be shared with the agreement of the person and following discussion with the person making the disclosure. This is consistent with a compassionate and person-centred approach and aligns with the empathy and the need for respect and dignity in working with survivors demonstrated during interview.

4.3.3 During interview, the Sisters demonstrated an appropriate understanding of the ways in which to respond to disclosures made during spiritual direction or accompaniment including listening, providing support and reporting onwards. They also recognised that the person receiving a disclosure may themselves require support and identified the Local Superior and the wider community as sources of pastoral support. The Sisters also identified professional counselling and RLSS support as resources that could be accessed and reported that they receive professional supervision for their work.

4.3.4 The group's commitment to responding to survivors is expressed in the Safeguarding Policy overview, the Safeguarding Statement and the website. Safe Spaces is not currently advertised on the website but is publicised on the centre's noticeboard located in a prominent position in the entranceway.

4.3.5 As there has been no recent casework, there has been no opportunity to obtain feedback from a person reporting harm. The group should consider how learning from survivor experience, including learning shared by RLSS or other

appropriate bodies, can be incorporated into safeguarding review and development. It would also benefit the Sisters of St Andrew to create links with other RLGs or organisations with experience in working with survivors and managing allegations in order to learn from their experiences.

Graded: Met with recommendations

4.4 Standard 4 Effective management of allegations and concerns

4.4.1 Within the community office is a folder containing blank copies of the RLSS Safeguarding Referral form and a body map ready for use in the event of a safeguarding concern that needs recording. The folder also holds *Integrity In Ministry* and documents entitled *Guidance for RLG Leadership managing an active safeguarding case, Care and Safety Management Assessment* and *Mandatory Reporting* which are guidance and information supplied by the RLSS.

4.4.2 The Safeguarding Policy provides formal written guidance on responding to allegations and concerns. It identifies circumstances in which action is required, including risk of significant harm, concerns about children or adults at risk, mental capacity and concerns about a person in a Church role. It directs the Sisters to contact the RLSS Safeguarding team immediately and to pass the concern and associated records to them.

4.4.3 The policy requires relevant bodies to be contacted, records of communications to be maintained, leadership to be informed of new referrals and external referrals/reports to be made within 24 hours unless exceptional circumstances justify delay. It lists statutory and Church safeguarding contacts including police, local authority, adult and children's safeguarding services, LADO, RLSS, CSSA and the Charity Commission. During interview, the Sisters demonstrated that they were aware that serious incidents should be reported to the Charity Commission and described how responsibility would be reassigned if a concern involved the Local Superior. As covered in paragraph 4.4.1, the Sisters use an RLSS disclosure template for recording concerns. The process is that a handwritten

record of this form would be retained in a folder in the safe. The Safeguarding Policy requires records to be accurate, auditable, secure and retrievable and identifies the information to be recorded, including the concern, relevant history, risk factors, actions, investigations and rationale.

Graded: Met

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

4.5.1 During interview the Sisters demonstrated an understanding that a respondent would require support and that safeguarding management would need to be undertaken with advice from the RLSS. They identified counselling, spiritual support, Canon Law advice through diocesan or Conference of Religious contacts, and civil legal advice through an existing lawyer as some of the sources of support they would offer. A clear intent was demonstrated to fund appropriate intervention where necessary for any member facing an allegation.

4.5.2 The need to consider practical arrangements was expressed during the in-person visit in the event that a member would need to withdraw from ministry or move to alternative accommodation following an allegation. The Local Superior commented that they would involve Regional and General leadership and could potentially arrange a move abroad or resource alternative accommodation within England. They were aware that any such move would require a thorough risk assessment in the first instance and that the respondent would need to have continuing support.

4.5.3 The small size of the community could place pressure on local resilience if one member were unable to undertake ministry or safeguarding responsibilities. The presence of Regional and General leadership and the established relationship with RLSS provide important external support.

Graded: Met

4.6 Standard 6 Robust human resource management

4.6.1 The Sisters have no formal employees but work with four lay volunteers. The Volunteer Policy describes recruitment, support, supervision, confidentiality, insurance, expenses and routes for resolving problems. It states that volunteers will receive an appropriate level of scrutiny and will have a designated Sister who provides information, policies and support. Safer recruitment and practice guidance is also covered in the Safeguarding Policy.

4.6.2 The volunteers engaged with the Sisters of St Andrew have all received DBS checks as have all members of the group. DBS checks for both volunteers and members are processed through U-Check via the RLSS with two Sisters acting as identity verifiers. Details of certificates and anticipated renewal dates are recorded and tracked. The Safeguarding Policy also contains safer recruitment guidance for paid and unpaid roles and the safer recruitment process includes a requirement for new volunteers to provide references and undergo a DBS check.

4.6.3 The Visitors Policy contains arrangements for visiting clergy. If a member of clergy were to provide any form of ministry, the policy states that Sisters will confirm their background and active ministry status, seek a valid celebret and/or letter of good standing, request a relevant DBS is held and declare any relevant safeguarding information.

4.6.4 The Sisters of St Andrew receives no overseas visitors who come to minister in this country. The group are also not expecting any new members to join and therefore no safeguarding preparations are required in this respect.

4.6.5 The Complaints Handling Policy provides a process for complaints to be reported to the Local Superior, investigated and, where the complainant remains dissatisfied, appealed to the Trustees. It was last reviewed in November 2021 and is due for review in November 2026. This five-year review period should be reduced to annually or biennially. The policy is available physically at the centre but is not published on the website. The Safeguarding Policy contains a section on whistleblowing which allows serious safeguarding concerns to be raised without fear of victimisation and to direct relevant matters to the RLSS.

Graded: Met

4.7 Standard 7 Training and support for safeguarding

4.7.1 The Safeguarding Policy sets out the minimum training expectations for the roles of Safeguarding Lead, Local Superior, Trustees, volunteers and members who work with the public and that annual refreshers must take place. However, safeguarding training for members and volunteers is not tracked for compliance assurance. A single training matrix covering all Sisters, Trustees and volunteers, including training completed through other organisations, would allow gaps to be identified and would support a more systematic training needs analysis. Feedback on the quality and impact of training should also be captured.

4.7.2 Despite no formal record of training being made for the group, there is evidence of substantial safeguarding training for members. The RLSS records provided through the Self-Assessment and by the RLSS include Safeguarding Lead, Advanced Safeguarding, Safeguarding Adults, Basic Safeguarding, Safeguarding in Spiritual Accompaniment, refresher training, Social Media and Safeguarding, Suicide and Self-Harm Awareness and Supporting and Communicating with People with Dementia. The April 2026 Trustee minutes record that Sisters have undertaken or booked further safeguarding training and include examples of recent safeguarding-related courses. Only two of the five Trustees have completed Trustee training.

Graded: Met with Recommendations

4.8 Standard 8 Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement

4.8.1 The Sisters demonstrated a willingness to review and improve safeguarding practice during interview. The Trustees review safeguarding as a dedicated agenda item, review risk assessments and policies, and have used the self-assessment process to identify areas for development. The April 2026 Trustee meeting minutes record review of the Safeguarding Policy, training expectations, DBS completion and practical amendments to the guest risk assessment.

4.8.2 The group has established links with RLSS and draws on information from the Conference of Religious, Charity Commission and other networks. The Sisters

described the audit itself as an opportunity to identify what further safeguarding matters should be considered by Trustees, demonstrating an open approach to external scrutiny and improvement.

4.8.3 The Development Plan produced from the self-assessment identifies useful areas for improvement, including policy development, communication with volunteers, confidentiality/recording arrangements and communication of safeguarding. However, the plan remains a draft framework and does not allocate action owners or timescales.

4.8.4 Quality assurance would be strengthened by bringing the recommendations from this audit into one Safeguarding Action Plan with responsible persons assigned and target dates designated with routine review and monitoring by Trustees. The plan should also include training compliance, communication, review of complaints/whistleblowing arrangements and learning from safeguarding developments or survivor experience.

Graded: Met With Recommendations

5. Summary of overall findings

5.1 Safeguarding within the Sisters of St Andrew is supported by a comprehensive policy framework, regular Trustee oversight and a close working relationship with the RLSS. During interview the Sisters demonstrated a good awareness of the safeguarding risks associated with their ministry and this awareness is reflected in practical arrangements for the Retreat Centre, including detailed Risk Assessments, clear procedures for expected and unexpected visitors, appropriate physical safeguards and accessible information about reporting concerns.

5.2 Safeguarding topics are communicated both within the community and to those using the Retreat Centre. Safeguarding information, policies and contact details are displayed prominently, and the Safe Spaces service is advertised within the Centre. The Sisters also demonstrated a compassionate and person-centred understanding of how they would respond to someone reporting harm. Although the community has had no recent safeguarding cases through which to

demonstrate its practice, there are clear procedures for managing allegations and concerns, maintaining records and accessing support from RLSS and other statutory or Church bodies.

5.3 The Sisters do not currently have a dedicated Safeguarding Action Plan or formal safeguarding Communication Plan. Stronger oversight in relation to training for members and volunteers is required. Although there is evidence that members have undertaken a substantial range of relevant safeguarding training, there is no formal system for tracking this and only two of the five Trustees have completed Trustee safeguarding training at the time of the audit.

6. Recommendations

To support improvement, the following recommendations are made:

Within 3 months

- Publicise the Safe Spaces resource and the Complaints Policy on the website.
- Develop a tracking system for safeguarding training which is provided to the Trustees for assurance.

Within 6 months

- Develop a safeguarding action plan using the existing development plan and recommendations from this audit, including action owners and timescales.
- Agree a Communication Plan, which could be incorporated into a Safeguarding Action Plan, which sets out audiences, messages, methods, frequency and responsibility to provide assurance that safeguarding information remains accessible and current.

Within 12 months

- Form links with other groups who have experience of working with survivors and consider how learning from these experiences can be incorporated into safeguarding review and development.
- All Trustees should undertake Trustee training.

7. Arrangements for follow-up

7.1 In line with the overall rating of Met With Recommendations, the earliest date for the next audit of the Sisters of St Andrew by the CSSA will be in 2 years' time. However, this period may be reduced if the CSSA becomes aware of any significant concerns or allegations indicative of a weakening of safeguarding arrangements in the meantime.