

9. Safeguarding Committee

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1. Overview

- 1.1 The past year has seen us continue to move through the different phases of the pandemic, sometimes going forward before going backwards again, and throughout we have sought to maintain our safeguarding services and support across the Church. Often working online, the Safeguarding Committee (SGC) has continued to widen its scope as it takes a greater strategic approach to the work before it, and District Safeguarding Officers (DSOs), District Safeguarding Groups (DSGs) and the Connexional Safeguarding Team (CST) have continued to strengthen the Church's safeguarding work in safe recruitment, training and policy development.
- 1.2 The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) hearing into religious organisations issued its report in September 2021. It found that religious organisations had failed in six key areas and required them and the government to respond to the Inquiry's recommendations, including its timetable, within six months. The Methodist Church had already submitted substantial evidence to demonstrate how it already works in the six key areas and has active child protection policies in place. The Methodist Church's response listed the various measures undertaken since the September 2021 report and was published at the beginning of March 2022 (see Appendix A for the full statement). The Inquiry's final report into all 15 separate hearings is expected before the end of 2022. IICSA has indicated that it will be bringing forward recommendations that will include the mandatory reporting of child abuse concerns, vetting and barring (DBS), regulation of religious organisations, and legislation to meet minimum child protection standards amongst other matters. The Methodist Council has agreed plans for auditing of safeguarding practice across the church and the SGC intends to begin this process later in 2022 in order to assess the extent of cultural change and identify further work that may be required. This will be a supportive, iterative process rather than an inspection and will be conducted in the spirit of mutual support and discovery in order to assist the church in reviewing, learning and improving. The Methodist Council has already approved minimum standards for the operation of DSGs and work is now underway to do the same for DSOs. Training for members of Monitoring and Support Groups (for safeguarding contracts) has also been approved.
- 1.3 The SGC's responsibility to oversee effective safeguarding practice across the Church means that it keenly awaits the outcomes of the IICSA inquiry to ensure that the Church responds accordingly. As plans are advanced for the reshaping of Districts, the provision of safeguarding services and how the CST is best constituted to support new structures will be assessed.
- 1.4 Whilst there is still much to do we want to pay tribute to all those volunteers, officers and paid staff who work so hard to improve the awareness, implementation and development of safeguarding in the Church and its activities in order to ensure safe spaces for all.

2. Oversight

- 2.1 The SGC has refreshed its membership and is engaged in looking at how it continues to fulfil its brief in light of the review of connexional committees. The relationship between the dual roles of strategic oversight and undertaking safeguarding panels has to be held together so that one can inform the other. The annual training event focused on gaining a better understanding of discrimination and sexuality and was led by an external consultant.

- 2.2 The SGC Chair and Deputy Chair consult regularly with the Secretary of the Conference, the Director of Safeguarding and safeguarding panel chairs, in the course of their work, in order to ensure that key decisions are carefully assessed and considered.
- 2.3 Following the adoption of the Theology of Safeguarding report (Conference 2021) the Council mandated various actions that should take place in order to produce resources to assist the Church in engaging with the subject and a working group is now meeting to develop these for 2023. There have been a number of district and regional conferences already on this theme and there has been a very positive reception to this report and the clarity it brings to the foundations for our safeguarding work.

3. Safeguarding Casework and Development work

- 3.1 Case statistics and safeguarding panels completed for 2020/21 and first six months of 2021/22 (compared with previous three years):

Period	1/9/17-31/8/18	1/9/18-31/8/19	1/9/19-31/8/20	1/9/20-31/8/21	1/9/21-28/2/22 (6 months)
DBS cases open	81	96	89	28	23
DBS cases closed	90	181	186	50	18

Non DBS cases open	61	106	57	27	17
Non DBS cases closed	78	71	13	17	2

Safeguarding Panels

	1/9/18-31/8/19	1/9/18-31/8/19	1/9/19-31/8/20	1/9/19-31/8/20	1/9/20 - 31/8/21	1/9/20 - 31/8/21	1/9/21-28/2/22	1/9/21-28/2/22
Outcome	Number	Appeals	Number	Appeals	Number	Appeals	Number	Appeals
Not cleared	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1

Restrictions on role and Safeguarding Contract	4	0	2	0	3	0	3	0
Cleared with conditions	5	0	8	0	0	0	2	0
Cleared with no conditions	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
No changes to current Safeguarding Contract	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0
Safeguarding Contract ended	6	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Safeguarding Contract ended with conditions	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0
Resigned from Role	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0
Total	15	0	19	0	10	1	7	1

- 3.2 The numbers demonstrate that as Covid restrictions have been lifted and face to face activities recommenced, subsequent safeguarding activity has picked up correspondingly. We are now collecting more detailed case work data from DSOs on a six-monthly basis which provide the SGC with more insights into the profile of safeguarding cases across the connexion.
- 3.3 The Council has now approved a Domestic Abuse policy as part of our safeguarding procedures and we have hosted another well attended webinar on the subject. An active working group is looking at developing further training materials and resources to assist the Church in continuing to develop greater awareness of domestic abuse which affects all age groups and can often be hidden. The Council has also adopted a clear statement on bullying and this is now in use in both safeguarding and complaints and discipline processes which gives more clarity to what it is and where the threshold is for taking action to investigate and deal with unacceptable behaviour. The focus on anti-bullying was supported with three separate webinars on the theme.
- 3.4 The review of the Church's safe recruitment procedures has been completed and approved by the Council. This updated and shorter version has been widely welcomed. Work is now underway to review other aspects of the main safeguarding policies.
- 3.5 Work has continued on procuring a new case file system that can be shared with DSOs in order to streamline recording systems and aid communication. Potential providers have now been assessed and work is underway with the connexional IT team, as part of the wider connexional systems review.
- 3.6 At last year's Conference we reported on consultation work with recipients of grants from the Global Relationships fund on a set of safeguarding principles. This was in order to ensure that when making grants there could be some assessment of safeguarding arrangements with the partner and, if required, assessing what help might be offered. The process has worked well and we have been able to respond to specific requests such as for a series of training sessions to a theological college in Karachi, Pakistan. Following on from last year's online work with church leaders in Peru, we have been offering similar training to leaders in Ghana and are also due to return to Southern Africa for face to face training in the summer. All of this international work is enabling us to build a library of

resources that can be arranged to suit specific requests and we are working closely with the Global Relationships Team in developing this approach.

- 3.7 Safeguarding is integral to the Church's strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity (JDS) and over the past year we have worked with the Inclusive Church Implementation Officer and EDI Adviser to develop the discrimination and abuse response service so that all those who are experiencing discrimination, or abuse in any way, can speak to someone about their experience and be advised about the various channels open to them. This has been a fruitful piece of work and we are very hopeful that it will be received as another clear message from our church that we are committed to listening to and supporting any survivor of abuse.
- 3.8 Developing resources to increase awareness about the needs of vulnerable adults has taken a step forward over the last year with an active group who put together a well received webinar focusing on the work of 'dementia friendly' churches and we are looking at future topics including guidance to avoid financial abuse etc.

4. Safeguarding training

- 4.1 The Safeguarding Training Group has begun to work on revising the Advanced Module course for a new 2023 edition. Meantime we now have both online and face to face options for the current Foundation and Advanced Foundation courses. Regional training groups have been working very hard to catch up with all those who require training and those who were unable to undertake it during the COVID-19 restriction period. It is good to report that our standard training offer has been enhanced by a series of webinars that has taken place over the last year. It is not possible to cover all topics in the mandatory training courses so it is pleasing to have been able to offer a wider portfolio of safeguarding topics through webinars which are also recorded and made available to those unable to be present at the time of broadcast.
- 4.2 **Domestic Abuse training**
New training materials have been developed which are being piloted. A second Domestic Abuse Webinar took place in November 2021 on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Further Webinars and a Podcast are planned.
- 4.3 **Spiritual Abuse**
Work continues with Dr Lisa Oakley from Chester University and Thirtyone:eight to produce training for church leaders and a draft version of the half day training will shortly be ready for wider consultation.
- 4.4 **Young People**
The SGC have welcomed proposals to seek greater engagement with children and young people in the work of safeguarding and to explore ways in which this can be achieved including ideas of mentoring future generations of safeguarders. One aspect of this is to look at the current training programme and develop something that can be used more readily with younger audiences. We are also in the process of developing young people's safeguarding training materials in conjunction with the Children, Youth and Family Team.
- 4.5 We are collaborating with ecumenical partners in consultation with the NSPCC. They are engaging with children and young people to produce and distribute a series of short films and accompanying learning resources aimed at children and young people between the ages of 11-16 to help them explore the impact of their faith and values on their online activities.

4.6 **Dementia**

In November 2021 we hosted a *Making Our Churches More Dementia-Friendly Webinar* which covered areas including: raising awareness of dementia, safeguarding vulnerable adults with dementia, advice on understanding 'challenging' behaviours and positive stories from Methodist churches who already are leading in this area.

4.7 **Monitoring and Support Groups (MSGs)**

This training has been developed and is being piloted in several Districts; feedback will be used to fine-tune the materials. The focus of the training is to develop the confidence and competence of MSG members, building on the skills and experience they bring to the role and to equip them further.

4.8 **World Mission Fund**

Grants to global Partners are given from the World Mission Fund and the committee charged with undertaking this has been re-constituted and members have been invited to participate in the Foundation module in order to assist them in making decisions on agreeing grants to ensure that projects comply with safeguarding principles.

4.9 **Mission Partners**

Online Foundation Module sessions for Mission Partners placed around the world are now being offered.

5. **District Safeguarding Officers (DSOs)**

- 5.1 The Connexional Safeguarding Team (CST) has continued to work closely with Districts in providing professional casework supervision to all DSOs. Quadrant meetings have provided greater communication and sharing of practice. A range of resources have been provided to enable DSOs to keep their skills and knowledge up to date and evidence professional development. These have included *Induction for new DSOs* and various topics at DSO days, eg IICSA, *Contextual Safeguarding* and *Cultural Competence*. A recent workshop entitled *Understanding the role of risk in successful safeguarding* focused on sexual abuse and explored the principles of developing evidence based risk assessments. There has been a meeting with National Safeguarding Learning & Development Managers from the Church of England to discuss and share resources for ongoing professional development of DSOs/Diocesan Safeguarding Advisors.

Connexional DSO meetings have continued online but we were pleased to host face to face the annual conference in March. This took the theme of safeguarding and the JDS strategy which afforded a rich opportunity to engage in two key areas of the Church's work to create safer and more just communities.

- 5.2 Conversations have continued with DSOs, District Chairs and DSG chairs about the best model for structuring our safeguarding provision across the church. Firm proposals will be made once IICSA have published their final report, when we can assess what model should be adopted for the future provision of safeguarding services. This will need to be aligned to new district boundaries.

6. **Developing Survivors' work**

- 6.1 Efforts to take a survivor focus in all that we do continue to be well supported by our Methodist Survivors' Advisory Group (MSAG) and Methodist Survivor Policy Group (MSPG). The work of these groups and the perspectives that members offer continue to be invaluable to our practice and the development of new policy and training. We have hosted two webinars with members of the group which have been moving, challenging, and well received. The Methodist Church is fortunate in having such a dedicated group of survivors who are so willing to give of their time, skills and experience. We are very grateful.

A guidance document has been written to support the Reflect and Respond guide and both the MSAG and MSPG will be engaged as we develop the theology of safeguarding study materials.

7. Ecumenical working

- 7.1 The Anglican Methodist Safeguarding Group is now meeting with a new focus and a number of shared areas of work.

Collaboration on safeguarding training continues. The two denominations continue to have reciprocal agreements to recognise each other's Foundation and Advanced/Leadership Modules. Recently a number of District Chairs and members of the Connexional Safeguarding Team have undertaken the Church of England's Senior Leadership Training, which is designed for ordained staff and senior post holders.

- 7.2 The chair of the Safeguarding committee sits on the Church of England's National Safeguarding Panel which has offered an additional point of contact, mutual learning and sharing.

- 7.3 The Christian Forum for Safeguarding has become stronger under the leadership of Thirtyone:eight and now supports the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Safeguarding in Faith Settings.

- 7.4 The CST has taken a lead with an ecumenical group to refresh Local Ecumenical Partnership safeguarding guidance as well as an Information Sharing Protocol.

- 7.6 The Director of Safeguarding sits on the Scripture Union Safeguarding Advisory Group and has also contributed to discussions with colleagues from Jewish organisations in relation to IICSA and domestic abuse during the last year. The Director has also been invited to take a seat on the URC Safeguarding Committee

*****RESOLUTION**

- 9/1. The Conference received the Report.**

Appendix: RESPONSE TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: CHILD PROTECTION IN RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS AND SETTINGS

The Methodist Church is grateful for the opportunity to participate in the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and has taken careful note of the conclusions and recommendations of the Investigation Report for the module of Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings.

Recommendation 1

In relation to the first Recommendation, the Church strongly agrees that the creation and review of child protection policies and procedures is essential. The Methodist Church has a detailed child protection policy with supporting procedures, which includes advice and guidance on responding to disclosures of abuse and the needs of victims and survivors. These documents are published on its website.¹

The Church regularly reviews its policy and procedures for child protection and safeguarding vulnerable adults, with six-monthly updates taken to the Safeguarding Committee for approval before confirmation by the Methodist Council.

As part of its response to the investigation into Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings, the Church provided IICSA with a full copy of its policies and procedures and the contents were noted in the Investigation Report (Annex 3, Page 161).

Following the publication of the Investigation Report in September 2021, the Church has again reviewed its policy and made a number of changes and additions, including:

- 1. The policy statement now includes a definition of “safeguarding” and why it is integral to the mission of the Methodist Church. It includes a definition of the term “abuse”, information about contextual safeguarding and examples of the various forms which abuse can take, including peer-on-peer abuse;*
- 2. The policy includes a “Code of safer working practice with children and young people”, which sets standards for appropriate conduct and provides a template for local churches to produce their own version of the document;*
- 3. It includes a section entitled “Procedures for responding well to safeguarding incidents” which gives guidance on how to respond to allegations and when to make referrals to statutory agencies;*
- 4. Safer recruitment procedures have been reviewed and amended;*
- 5. The role and purpose of District Safeguarding Groups have been made clearer and core standards and criteria have been introduced;*
- 6. A new comprehensive training programme for all those involved in monitoring and supporting those subject to safeguarding contracts is being piloted.*

The Church recognises the dangers of resisting external scrutiny and managing responses to allegations internally. There are two areas of the Safeguarding policy that are currently subject to development and review:

- 1. Proposals for a system of internal audit of all Methodists Districts by the Safeguarding Committee has been presented to members of the Methodist Council and consultation with District Safeguarding Officers is in progress. with a view to reporting back to the Council in April;*

¹ Available online at:

[<safeguarding_policy_procedures_and_guidance_for_the_methodist_church_oct_2021docx.pdf>.](#)

2. A version of the Safeguarding policy document which uses more simple language is being drafted to increase accessibility.

Recommendation 2

The second recommendation relates to the introduction of legislation to amend the definition of full-time education to include any setting which is the pupil's primary place of education, and to empower Ofsted to examine the quality of child protection when it undertakes inspections of suspected unregistered institutions.

The Church supports this recommendation and notes that all Methodist schools are already registered educational settings.

Other matters

The Church recognises the issue of gender disparity in the life of the Church, which the Inquiry identified as a potential risk factor and barrier to disclosure (C6, page 29). In 2021, the Methodist Conference adopted a "Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity" which is intended to increase awareness of and to address issues of power and privilege in the life of the Church.²

The safeguarding training which is mandatory for those in positions of leadership in the Church has recently been revised and the Methodist Council is confident that it covers the points raised in the IICSA report (paragraphs 14 and 15, page 113)

Whilst the Church is clear that it does not use its internal disciplinary processes as a substitute for external reporting of safeguarding matters, the Methodist Council acknowledges the potential for intersection between the Complaints and Discipline process and safeguarding matters and it has listened carefully to the evidence given to the Inquiry by the witness PR-A10. A review of the Church's Standing Orders relating to Complaints and Discipline was directed by the Conference in 2019. That review has been taking advice from survivors (including an interview with PR-A10) and will now report to the Conference in 2023. This is a year later than originally planned but allows the Conference fully to consider the implications of the Justice, Dignity and Solidarity Strategy and work that is being done to pilot reconciliation projects.

In conclusion, the Methodist Church has a detailed suite of policies and procedures which meet the requirements of the Inquiry's first recommendation and which are publicly available online. The Church remains committed to regularly updating these documents in line with best practice and new developments in the field of child protection. The Church supports the second recommendation, noting that all Methodist schools are already registered institutions.

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08/02/22

² Available online at: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/21045/counc_mar_21_mc21-32-strategy-for-justice-dignity-and-solidarity.pdf>.