

23. Safeguarding Committee

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1. Overview

1.1 The Church's work in safeguarding has continued to develop in a number of areas as the understanding of what it means to be a safer organisation grows and we respond to increased public expectations and professional practice. This can be reflected in public debates and government inquiries where children have been seriously mistreated or killed and where vulnerable adults have been neglected and abused. The work of safeguarding strives to assist the Church in being a model of a safe place for all.

1.2 The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA), set up in 2014 following a series of high profile sexual abuse cases, issued its final report in October 2022. The report to the 2022 Conference described some of the work that had been undertaken in respect of a specific inquiry into religious organisations in which the Methodist Church was included. The final IICSA report was drawn from seven years of investigations, 15 separate Hearings, and the Truth Project which was set up to listen to victims and survivors. The final report set out the extent to which statutory and non-statutory institutions failed in their duty of care to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation and marked 20 recommendations for reform. These included:

- The creation of a Child Protection Authority (CPA) in England and Wales;
- a Cabinet level Minister for Children;
- greater use of the DBS Barred List;
- the establishment of a national redress scheme for England and Wales;
- The introduction of a statutory requirement of mandatory reporting;
- a public awareness campaign.

At the time of writing this report we have not received the government's formal response to these recommendations.

1.3 Overall, the work that has been undertaken in order to respond to the Inquiry has enabled the committee to review all our policy and training programmes. The new system of district audits that have been introduced this year (see below) will be a key part of how we learn from our practice and further develop best practice across the church.

23. Safeguarding Committee

1.4 Once again, the Safeguarding Committee wishes to thank all those volunteers, officers and paid staff who work so hard to improve the awareness of, implementation and development of safeguarding in the church and its activities in order to ensure safe spaces for all. This is not always easy and sometimes involves personal cost but we are beginning to see clear evidence of where the culture of the church is developing into one which is incorporating a broader and more proactive approach to building and maintaining a safe space for everyone.

2. Oversight

2.1 The Committee said goodbye to a number of long standing members and gives thanks for all that they have contributed over many years. New members have taken up the seats following an open recruitment process. We gave particular thanks to the committee chair, the Revd Henry Lewis, and the deputy committee chair, the Revd Anne Brown, who completed their term of service at the end of 2022. The Conference had given its thanks last year in advance of them both stepping down. Again, following a recruitment process the committee has been pleased to welcome Judith Davey-Cole as the new committee chair and has appointed the Revd John Hellyer as the new deputy.

2.2 The annual training event focused on the newly created training course concerning spiritual abuse and we plan to launch this later in 2023.

2.3 In order to assist with its work overseeing the review and development of safeguarding policy, the Council directed the Committee to nominate for appointment by the Council a small group with responsibility on the Council's behalf to review and amend the Safeguarding Policy and to report through the Safeguarding Committee to the Council.

2.4 As reported to the 2022 Conference, work has been undertaken on developing study materials to encourage churches and local preachers to engage with the themes of the Theology of Safeguarding report (which the Conference adopted in 2021); these will be launched shortly.

2.5 The Methodist Council has approved a programme for safeguarding audits in Districts by members of the Safeguarding Committee to be undertaken over a four-year period. These will enable greater insights to be gained into how well an understanding of safeguarding is being implemented in everyday church work and assist in identifying how effective policy and training programmes have been in affecting our safeguarding culture

23. Safeguarding Committee

3. Safeguarding Casework and Development work

- 3.1 Case statistics and safeguarding panels completed for 2021/22 and first six months of 2022/23
(compared with previous three years):

Period	1/9/19-31/8/20	1/9/20-31/8/21	1/9/21-31/8/22	1/9/22-28/2/23
DBS cases open	89	28	79	39
DBS cases closed	186	50	56	26

Non DBS cases open	57	27	17	20
Non DBS cases closed	13	17	2	3

Safeguarding Panels

	1/9/19-31/8/20	1/9/19-31/8/20	1/9/20-31/8/21	1/9/20-31/8/21	1/9/21-31/8/22	1/9/21-31/8/22	1/9/22-28/2/23	1/9/22-28/2/23
Outcome	Number	Appeals	Number	Appeals	Number	Appeals	Number	Appeals
Not cleared	1	0	1	1	3	1	0	0
Restrictions on role and Safeguarding Contract	2	0	3	0	4	0	1	0
Cleared with conditions	8	0	0	0	5	0	0	0
Cleared with no conditions	1	0	1	0	2	0	1	0
No changes to current Safeguarding Contract	2	0	1	0	2	0	1	0

23. Safeguarding Committee

	1/9/19-31/8/20	1/9/19-31/8/20	1/9/20-31/8/21	1/9/20-31/8/21	1/9/21-31/8/22	1/9/21-31/8/22	1/9/22-28/2/23	1/9/22-28/2/23
Outcome	Number	Appeals	Number	Appeals	Number	Appeals	Number	Appeals
Safeguarding Contract ended	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Safeguarding Contract ended with conditions	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Resigned from Role	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Total	19	0	10	1	16	1	3	0

- 3.2** A new case work management system is being introduced to improve recording of all safeguarding cases. Part of this amalgamation of records will enable a more efficient and wider collection of data and information from which trends can be identified and more informed forecasts made.
- 3.3** As reported to the 2022 Conference, the review of all the main safeguarding policies has now been undertaken and approved by the committee. This has included a full revision of the safe recruitment policy. This has resulted in a shorter more concise set of procedures. Work is now underway to review risk assessment processes and the Standing Orders related to safeguarding, following an external case review.
- 3.4** The Safeguarding Team has supported the creation of the Discrimination and Abuse Response service (DARS) in order to offer a first point of contact to anyone who may require guidance and advice where discrimination of abuse may be experienced. This has enabled a closer sharing between safeguarding officers and those leading on work contained within the Justice, Dignity and Solidarity (JDS) strategy.
- 3.5** The Safeguarding Team has continued to work with colleagues in the Global Relationships team in writing policy and developing practice in order to support grant giving and responding to specific safeguarding matters in different parts of the world where mission partners are based. A visit was made to the Methodist Church in South Africa to lead some training by two members of the team and there has been close cooperation with the appointment of a new mission partner based in Togo who has responsibility for developing safeguarding work internationally.

23. Safeguarding Committee

3.6 The Safeguarding Team has supported two key new developments in the church this year with guidance documentation and advice given for the Homes for Ukraine scheme and the Warm Spaces initiatives.

4. Safeguarding training

4.1 The Safeguarding Training Group has completed the writing and publication of the new Advanced Module 2023 training and will now turn its attention to the next edition of the Foundation Module. This has been a big undertaking as the group has sought to incorporate feedback from those who have done the course previously along with the new learning and legislative changes that have occurred since the 2019 version was written. Our core safeguarding training will be enhanced with the new Theology of Safeguarding study materials and links to the Reflect and Respond guide on responding to survivors, and by our developing programme of webinars which have been well received by a wide audience across the church.

4.2 Domestic Abuse training

The Safeguarding Team has continued to work on new training materials in relation to domestic abuse, broadcast further webinars and produce posters and stickers for all churches to draw attention to support that can be accessed for anyone who wishes to seek advice about domestic abuse situations.

4.3 Spiritual Abuse

The course developed in conjunction with Dr. Lisa Oakley from Chester University and Thirtyone:eight has now been drafted and trialled with the Safeguarding Committee. We intend to make this available during this year.

4.4 Young People

Work has begun to look at young people's safeguarding training materials in conjunction with the Children, Youth and Family Team.

4.5 As reported in last year's report, there has been collaboration with ecumenical partners, in consultation with the NSPCC, 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. This work has now been commissioned.

23. Safeguarding Committee

4.6 Financial Abuse

A very well attended webinar took place focusing on various types of financial abuse that vulnerable adults can be subject to and practical ways in which churches can respond.

4.7 Global partners

Members of the Safeguarding Team have continued to engage with Methodist churches across the world in online training and conferences. As reported above, we now have a dedicated mission partner who will take a lead in this area with direct support from the connexional safeguarding team (CST).

5. District Safeguarding Officers (DSOs)

5.1 Across the Connexion, the CST has identified an increase in work for District Safeguarding Officers and a number of districts are reviewing the number of hours that the work now requires. Along with professional supervision the CST has assisted in the induction of new DSOs and responded to specific requests to review district safeguarding arrangements. Regular connexional meetings have been held on zoom and face to face as well as some dedicated training sessions via webinars. The annual conference brought DSOs together with other safeguarding officers and colleagues from the Learning Network as we journey together in developing our safeguarding and training practice.

5.2 Following on from the memorial to the 2022 Conference, work has begun to explore and consult on the consideration of connexional employment of DSOs. A report will come to the Conference in 2024.

6. Developing Survivors' work

6.1 Increasingly central to all safeguarding work is considering the input and perspective of victims and survivors as we review and develop policy, training and practice. The committee is very grateful to members of both the Methodist Survivor Advisory Group (MSAG) and Methodist Survivor Policy Group (MSPG) for all that they contribute in these areas. This year the CST has also added a Survivors' Forum to which new people can be welcomed and introduced to the work that is underway, giving them the opportunity to identify ways in which they might wish to become more involved with safeguarding developments. This continues to be an evolving area of our work and we have been reviewing the operation of safeguarding panels in order better to address the needs of those who have been abused when it comes to our formal processes.

23. Safeguarding Committee

7. **Ecumenical working**

- 7.1 The Anglican Methodist Safeguarding Group has refreshed its membership with a new Director for the Church of England and lead Bishop. We also wish to thank the Revd Helen Cameron for all her commitment in this area as she steps down and her role as joint chair is taken on by the Assistant Secretary of the Conference.
- 7.2 The chair of the Safeguarding Committee continues to attend the Church of England's National Safeguarding Panel.
- 7.3 The Director of Safeguarding attends the Christian Forum for Safeguarding and sits on the URC Safeguarding Advisory Group and the Scripture Union Safeguarding Group.
- 7.4 Work has continued to refresh Local Ecumenical Partnership safeguarding guidance as well as an Information Sharing Protocol; these should both be completed this year.

*****RESOLUTION**

- 23/1. **The Conference receives the Report.**