

## Responding to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse

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<b>Status of Paper</b>	For Information
<b>Action Required</b>	None
<b>Draft Resolutions</b>	9/1. The Council receives the report.

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and Aims</b>	To inform the Council of the work undertaken to date and the legal advice obtained in respect of the Independent Inquiry into Sexual Abuse.
<b>Main Points</b>	To ensure the Council is aware of the requirements and potential impact of the Inquiry on the Methodist Church. To identify the work that is required by the Inquiry and in preparation for potentially being named in the Inquiry. To ensure provisions are in place to respond to the Inquiry if and when necessary.
<b>Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)</b>	None
<b>Consultations</b>	Methodist Insurance and Methodist Independent Schools Trust

### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	Being named as an institution to be investigated would require significant expenditure of legal fees.
<b>Personnel</b>	Being named as an institution to be investigated could require significant amounts of Connexional team time to resource the lawyers instructed to represent the Church.

## Responding to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse

### Introduction

1. Members of the Council will be aware of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) established by the Home Secretary which is being chaired by Justice Lowell Goddard. Work has been undertaken by the Conference Office in recent months to ensure the Methodist Church is able to respond appropriately to the Inquiry whether or not it is named as an institution to be investigated. This paper has been prepared to inform the Council of the work undertaken to date and steps that need to be taken to enable the Church to be able to respond positively to the Inquiry.

### Impact

2. It is recognised by all institutions who have a responsibility for the safeguarding of children that being named as one of the institutions to be investigated by the Inquiry would lead to a significant amount of work. It is on this basis that many organisations with a responsibility for safeguarding children have begun to seek professional advice on how to respond to the Inquiry and to begin to take steps to ensure their safeguarding practices, policies and procedures would stand up to investigation by the Inquiry. It should also be noted that Justice Goddard in her concluding remarks to her opening statement said “I urge you to take a proactive stance towards the Inquiry – to review your files, records and procedure voluntarily and to take the initiative to self-report instances of institutional failures – rather than waiting for us to come and see you.” It is therefore not only those institutions to be named in the Inquiry that need to give the concerns of the Inquiry some thought.
3. The Methodist Church is in a better position than many other institutions given the recent Past Cases Review (PCR) and the work already being undertaken to implement the recommendations of the Past Cases Review report. However it is still necessary for work to be undertaken to ensure that the PCR can stand up to the scrutiny of the Inquiry and to identify any gaps in the review or existing processes. It is also possible that other Methodist bodies such as schools and Methodist Insurance could be named in the Inquiry and it is important that given the potential reputational damage, liaison takes place between these organisations and the Church on how to prepare or and respond to the Inquiry.
4. Justice Goddard made a statement on 27 November 2015 detailing the twelve investigations for the first phase of the Inquiry. The Methodist Church was not named as one of the institutions to be investigated in the first phase although the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England are to be investigated. It is still possible the Methodist Church will be named in forthcoming phases of the Inquiry. The statement confirmed that the Inquiry would be conducting research into child sexual abuse in other faith communities and will be investigating the extent to which organisations in England and Wales have satisfied their duty to protect children abroad and looking at institutions based in England and Wales who recruit people to work abroad. The Methodist Church could potentially be pulled into the Inquiry via these investigations.
5. If the Methodist Church was named as an institution to be investigated it would mean being involved in public hearings lasting four to six weeks with evidence being heard, submissions made and findings of fact made. If the Church was to be investigated it is likely the Church would want to seek core participant status which would give the Church the right to submit evidence and make opening and closing statements as well as the right to suggest lines of questioning to be pursued by Counsel to the Inquiry. Such participation would obviously

require legal advisors to be instructed and probably a QC to represent the Church. Provision will be made in the budget for 2016-17 for these potential costs.

### **Next Steps**

6. Legal advice is that, given the positive light the Church finds itself in after the Past Cases Review, it would be prudent to write to the Inquiry to provide them with a copy of the report and let them know who to contact. It is suggested that the Conference Officer for Legal and Constitutional Practice is the key contact with the Inquiry. The advice is that a self-referral would be well received by the Inquiry, although it offers no guarantee that the Church will not be named as an institution to be investigated or that this will not in fact raise the profile of the Church in the eyes of the Inquiry.
7. It is also suggested that a group is established by the Secretary of the Conference to offer advice on:
  - (i) Responding to the Inquiry if the Methodist Church is named as an institution to be investigated;
  - (ii) Liaising with the PCR Implementation Group;
  - (iii) Liaising with Methodist institutions in respect of their response and preparation for the Inquiry;
  - (iv) Identifying the documents to be disclosed to the Inquiry if named;
  - (v) Identifying the people to provide evidence to the Inquiry if named;
  - (vi) Identifying appropriate training for people who would provide evidence to the Inquiry;
  - (vii) Ensuring appropriate communication is presented to the Connexion on the approach of the Church to the Inquiry.
  - (viii) Any further work that needs to be undertaken in order to comply with the requirements of the Inquiry.
8. This advisory group will include the Safeguarding Adviser and the Conference Officer for Legal and Constitutional Practice (who will serve as convener) along with two members of the Safeguarding Committee, and at least four others with either legal or safeguarding experience or experience of working with statutory inquiries. The chief executive of Methodist Insurance and the General Secretary of the Methodist Independent Schools Trust have both agreed to make appropriate people available to the group if and when necessary to ensure a consistent approach to the Inquiry by all Methodist entities.

### **\*\*\*RESOLUTION**

- 9/1. The Council receives the report.**