

Standing Orders Governing the Safeguarding Duties of Churches and Circuits

MC/24/13

Date of meeting	29-30 January 2024
Contact name and details	Nicola Sylvester, Safeguarding Policy Manager. sylvestern@methodistchurch.org.uk
Action required	For approval/decision
Resolutions	13/1. The Council receives the report. 13/2. The Council notes the policy requirement for each church and circuit to have a designated safeguarding officer and asks the Law and Polity Committee to bring to the Conference the necessary amendments to Standing Orders to reflect this.

Summary of content

Subject of aims	To propose amendments to Standing Orders to clarify the requirement to appoint safeguarding officers in churches and circuits.
Main points	The Church's safeguarding policy contains requirements which are not reflected in Standing Orders.
Background context and relevant documents (with function)	Policies and guidance (methodist.org.uk)
Consultations	The Law and Polity Committee

Summary of impact

Standing Orders	Amendments are needed to mandate the appointment of church and circuit safeguarding officers
Wider connexional	Amendments to Standing Orders will provide clarity to churches and circuits regarding their safeguarding duties
External, including ecumenical	All users of circuit and church premises know there is a named officer for safeguarding
Risk	Availability of volunteers can be limited and circuits/churches may have to be creative about how they fulfil this duty.

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Introduction

Queries from around the Connexion about the requirements to appoint church and circuit safeguarding officers as stipulated in the Church's Safeguarding Policy and Procedures document (page 41) indicate that there is a discrepancy between Standing Orders and the Safeguarding Policy of the Methodist Church.

Background

The Safeguarding Policy of the Methodist Church states:

'Circuits and churches should appoint a safeguarding officer and there should be no gaps in this crucial provision.' (*Section 5.1, page 41*)

The policy goes on to say that 'Local churches and circuits may wish to join together to implement the policy and procedures, but it is important to remember that legal responsibility will continue to rest with the members of the Church Council' in recognition of the need to be flexible and consider individual circumstances. There has been a number of communications from people from across the Connexion questioning the mandatory nature of the statement (ie 'there should be no gaps') given that this is not reflected in the Standing Orders.

The policy states that safeguarding is a shared responsibility and that this is supported by 'consistent policies promoting good practice across the whole Church' (page 12). Moreover, the policy dictates that all churches and circuits are required to display the name of the person responsible for safeguarding (section 2.22, page 13). However, there is currently no provision in the Standing Orders to require churches and circuits to appoint such a person. The discrepancy is one that requires rectifying so that there is synergy between the constitutional practice of the Methodist Church and the agreed policy for keeping people safe.

Summary of the Change

It is therefore recommended that Standing Orders are amended to include the requirement that all churches and circuits appoint a designated safeguarding officer, but with provision for flexible arrangements across churches and circuits where there may be challenges in respect of recruiting volunteers to the role.

***RESOLUTIONS

13/1. The Council receives the report.

13/2. The Council notes the policy requirement for each church and circuit to have a designated safeguarding officer and asks the Law and Polity Committee to bring to the Conference the necessary amendments to Standing Orders to reflect this.