

Audit of Safeguarding Practice across the Church MC/22/52

Date of meeting	2-4 April 2022
Contact name and details	Nicola Sylvester, Safeguarding Policy Manager sylvestern@methodistchurch.org.uk Tim Carter, Director of Safeguarding cartert@methodistchurch.org.uk
Resolutions	52/1. The Council receives the report. 52/2. The Council approves the implementation of the audit framework

Summary of content

Subject of aims	Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults
Main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The need to assess the effectiveness of safeguarding in the districts. ▪ To identify best practice to be shared across the Connexion.
Background context and relevant documents (with function)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To provide information on the effectiveness of the implementation of safeguarding policy and procedures in each district. 2. To independently assess how effectively safeguarding structures/ processes are working across the Connexion.
Consultations	The Safeguarding Committee, District Safeguarding Officers, Chairs of District Safeguarding Groups and District Chairs.

Summary of impact

Financial	Additional financial resources may be required for the external audit process however, this is yet to be identified.
Wider connexional	Framework to be implemented across the Connexion.
External, including ecumenical	Framework may be adopted by Local Ecumenical Partnerships where applicable.
Risk	The Government's Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse has highlighted numerous failings in public agencies, not least faith based organisations. The Methodist Church is committed to high standards in relation to both children and vulnerable adults. Failure to demonstrate that we are taking clear action to continually assess and review the implementation of our safeguarding policies puts potential victims at risk as well as impacting on the mission and reputation of the whole church.

PROPOSED AUDIT FRAMEWORK

Introduction

- 1 This report is a follow up to a previous proposal to the January 2022 Council which requested further information.
- 2 On 24 March 2021, Jane Stacey attended the District Safeguarding Officers' (DSOs) connexional meeting and outlined proposals for a church-wide audit framework. Entitled 'Quality Protects', the presentation set out the context for the proposed framework including the Church's responsibility to survivors, the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) and the Past Cases Review.
- 3 The presentation outlined the purpose of the audit including evaluating how well the safeguarding policy and procedures are being implemented across the Church and to identify what contributes to effective practice and what impedes it. Jane Stacey requested feedback from all DSOs on the proposals which included details such as the document review and the process for interviews. No feedback was received until the publication of the paper prepared for the Council meeting that took place in January 2022.
- 4 During a meeting of the Safeguarding Committee on 20 July 2021, members approved the plans and requested that the paper was brought to the Council. At the Council meeting that took place in January 2022, the proposals were withdrawn with an agreed action for further consultation with District Safeguarding Officers. Feedback from Council members was noted and amendments were subsequently made to the proposed framework before a revised framework paper was circulated to DSOs for further feedback and comment; these are now all incorporated into this paper. A Zoom meeting was held with a number of DSOs on 4 March 2022 with Jane Stacey to discuss the revised proposals and this included addressing concerns that had been raised by the Southampton and Northampton Districts. A further face to face session was undertaken at the Safeguarding Conference on 10 March 2022 which identified no further amendments to the proposals other than those included in this paper.
- 5 Other feedback has come from a consultation survey in the Manchester and Stockport District which identified general support among respondents (mostly circuit safeguarding officers) for an audit framework and that they appear to be less apprehensive and more receptive to the idea of reviewing practice. However, there remains concern about the impact of being audited in for circuit staff who are already pressurised. This is addressed in section three of the current document. The South East District Safeguarding Group fed back that it would favour a system of a standard church and circuit audit introduced across the Connexion before a connexional wide audit is undertaken. It is felt that this would be a much larger and longer undertaking at this juncture.
- 6 Ultimately, the proposed audit framework is to support the Connexional Team's shared values of 'providing quality service' and 'being accountable'. Moreover, the Council's objective of 'A Church for all people/an inclusive Church' that 'strives for justice and peace' is in keeping with the sentiment in the IICSA report (September 2021) that standard oversight arrangements are necessary to safeguard children (and in our case, vulnerable adults) effectively.

The Audit Process

- 7 The proposals include plans for a level of audit provided by an external party (such as the Social Care Institute for Excellence, SCIE) for the activity of the Safeguarding Committee (SGC) itself, including its audit work. There would also be an additional function for the senior and professional members of the SGC, as they would be carrying out the core audit activities. In order to ensure a robust process, there is a further suggestion that a final level of quality assurance is undertaken by an external organisation in respect of the audit process as completed by the SGC.
- 8 The Church's safeguarding policy makes the following commitments:
 - To promote a safer environment and culture.
 - To safely recruit and support all those with any responsibility for children and adults within the Church.
 - To respond promptly and appropriately to every safeguarding concern or allegation.
 - To care pastorally for victims and survivors of abuse and other people who have been affected.

- To care pastorally for those who are the subject of concerns of allegations of abuse and others who have been affected.
- 9** The proposed audit is structured around these commitments. Therefore, the objectives of the audit process are to:
- assess the effectiveness of safeguarding leadership at church/circuit and district level;
 - provide information on how well the Safeguarding Policy, Procedures and Guidance are being implemented in each district; and,
 - extract learning from each audit so that best practice can be shared across the Connexion.
- 10** It is important that the audits do not duplicate the quality assurance processes that are in place but add an independent element to assess how effectively these structures/processes are working.

The Audit Team

- 11** Standing Orders stipulate that the Safeguarding Committee be composed of a mix of people, with professional safeguarding experience and members who carry respect within the Church. In terms of gaining the trust of those who are to be audited, the mix of skills and personnel seems very relevant. As a consequence of the Past Cases Review (PCR), the Safeguarding Committee was charged with promoting effective safeguarding practice across the Connexion, a role which would be strengthened by the knowledge acquired through taking part in the audit process. It is proposed that each audit team has one of the senior members of the SGC in the role of chair, one/two professional member(s) of the SGC and input from a member of a survivors' group. The members of the audit team would not hold or have held any formal role or be resident within the district being audited to maximise independent scrutiny.

The Audit Process

a) Document review

- 12** District level documents to be reviewed as part of the of audit:
- DBS stats for district broken down by circuit
 - Training stats for district broken down by circuit
 - List of safeguarding contracts broken down by circuit
 - Any action plans made at district level to improve safeguarding practice plus plan reviews
 - DSG – minutes of meetings for previous 3 years
- 13** The scheduling of audits will be agreed in consultation with District personnel and take into consideration local needs and commitments.

b) Interviews

- 14** There will be a process of consultation with the SGC and DSOs to determine the questions that will inform the interview discussion prior to the first audit taking place.
- 15** All interviewees will have advance notice of the questions that they will be asked. All interviews will be conducted by Zoom or another IT platform and involve two members of the audit panel, one of whom will take the notes.
- 16** Interviews will be conducted at district level with the District Chair, the DSO(s) and members of the DSG in a group interview. Where possible this will be complemented with randomly selected and anonymised interviewees holding leadership roles at circuit and church levels represented by superintendents and ministers (consider mix circuit size, rural, urban etc).
- 17** The size and number of personnel in the District will be taken into account when scheduling the interviews.
- 18** Similarly, timings of interviews will be arranged in consultation with key stakeholders to take into consideration local commitments such as synods or conferences and staffing levels.

Proposed Timetable for audit programme

- 19** It is proposed that districts would be asked to volunteer to be part of the first year of the roll out of the audit process so that the audit is seen as less daunting and learning from best practice can be maximised. Starting the audit process in the autumn of 2022 is a timescale that would enable reflection on the District Safeguarding Group standards that would have had a year of implementation. It would also work well with the timescales of the final IICSA report.
- 20** The programme is designed to cover all districts over a four-year period and the cycle is repeated on a rolling four-year basis. The proposed timetable is to undertake two/three audits in the autumn (October/Nov), two/three in January/early Feb and two/three in late April/May. Each audit would have interviews scheduled over a two-day period. The audit team would need preparatory reading time, an end of audit discussion session and time to complete records of interviews plus the panel chair writing the final report. This report would be shared as a draft with the District Chair, DSO and DSG for their comments before a final version is produced.

Confidentiality

- 21** Safeguarding records included within the scope of the audit will be expected to be anonymised and where there is special or personal data, that it is redacted as appropriate. The documents pertaining to the outcome of audits will be stored centrally with the Connexional Safeguarding Team in line with GDPR legislation.

External audit

- 22** It would strengthen the independence of the process if there was an external input. It is proposed that an external organisation is commissioned to assess the audit and risk assessment panel functions of the Safeguarding Committee. A helpful timescale for this could be an external assessment two years into the audit roll out so that lessons can be learnt to inform the programme going forward. IICSA recommendations could have a bearing on this.

Resources required

- 23** Senior members of the Safeguarding Committee would be asked to commit to doing two audits per year. This will involve a commitment of six days per year. Professional members of the Committee who volunteer would also be asked to commit to doing two audits a year.
- 24** At district level those identified to be interviewed would require the interview time plus some preparation (approximately two hours each person/group once every four years). Admin support will be provided from the CST to arrange the audits. There would be a resource requirement to commission an external organisation to conduct an audit of the Safeguarding Committee.
- 25** Discussions need to take place with the Survivors Advisory Group to assess how they could input into the panels.

***RESOLUTIONS

52/1. The Council receives the report.

52/2. The Council approves the implementation of the audit framework.