

16. Safeguarding Committee

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1. Overview

- 1.1 The Safeguarding Committee reported to last year's Conference that not only was safeguarding integral to the mission of the Church, but *"we also expect to be facing closer public scrutiny when the Government's Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse reports next year and all these measures will help us demonstrate how seriously the Methodist Church takes our duties and witness in this area"*.
- 1.2 What was not known last year was that the Inquiry would decide to extend its focus to a further 20 religious organisations and include the Methodist Church in this new thematic review of current safeguarding procedure and practice. This has involved producing two statements totalling over 100 pages and some 120 separate appendices detailing the different policies that have evolved over time.
- 1.3 The hearing began in March but was postponed after only one day. At the time of writing, therefore, it is not known what the Inquiry will recommend but it is likely there will be proposals in the following areas: training; auditing implementation of minimum standards (possibly through an independent audit body); clearer processes for supporting survivors of abuse; and reviewing the DBS scheme.
- 1.4 What is clear is that the work that has been undertaken in the past few years within the Church has enabled us to respond positively to the areas of inquiry. In particular, the Past Cases Review has enabled us to demonstrate the seriousness with which the Church was already responding to improving its approach and processes as well as its willingness to learn from the experience of those who have been hurt, not listened to, misunderstood or just ignored. A key aspect of this shift in culture is an understanding that the learning does not stop and there are always improvements to be made to policies and achieving consistent practice. A fundamental building block has to be a continuous feedback loop. As a church community, this idea of discerning the will of God and growing in awareness and love is a familiar one.

2.0 Oversight

- 2.1 The Safeguarding Committee has further strengthened its membership with the addition of a member of the Methodist Survivor Advisory Group along with newer professional members and senior persons to oversee the development and implementation of safeguarding work across the Church.
- 2.2 The Committee has streamlined its meeting schedule in order to dovetail with Methodist Council meetings so that relevant changes to safeguarding policy and/or Standing Orders can be proposed.
- 2.3 New risk assessment procedures introduced last year are now enabling Safeguarding Panels to work more efficiently. They also offer greater clarity in relation to how decisions are reached in the management of risk across Church work.
- 2.4 Further work is underway with a smaller sub group looking at safeguarding strategy; it is developing an action plan to direct the further development of the Church's work as we move forward. The emergence of new research in safeguarding practice, growing expectations of what is now

expected from all public organisations, and the Church's own understanding of its role and function within society mean that the Church's understanding of how it needs to deliver its responsibilities in this area does not stand still. Work has been undertaken by the Faith and Order Committee on the theology of safeguarding, and this is reported on elsewhere in the Conference Agenda.

3. Safeguarding Casework and Development work

3.1 Case statistics and Safeguarding Panels completed for 2018/2019 and first six months of 2019/2020

Period	1/9/17 – 31/8/18	1/9/18 – 31/8/19	1/9/19 – 29/2/20
DBS cases open	81	96	43
DBS cases closed	90	181	29

Non-DBS cases open	61	106	39
Non-DBS cases closed	78	71	1

Safeguarding Panels

	1/9/18 – 31/8/19	1/9/18 – 31/8/19	1/9/19 – 29/2/20	1/9/19 – 29/2/20
Outcome	Number	Appeals	Number	Appeals
Restrictions on role and Safeguarding Contract	4	0	0	0
Cleared with conditions	5	0	8	0
Safeguarding Contract ended	6	0	2	0
Resigned from role	0	0	0	0
Total	15	0	10	0

3.2 The online Safeguarding Procedures are now updated on a six-monthly basis, which means that churches can be directed to the most up-to-date guidance and policy with confidence. Over the course of the next year, further model job roles will be addressed and the Safer Recruitment and DBS guidance will be revised.

- 3.3 In addition to clearer procedures, a more user-friendly safeguarding section of the website has been developed. It is intended that the new structure will enable the development of more accessible material in coming months including help videos. The Charity Commission requires that a safeguarding policy be displayed. However, feedback received from Local Churches was that displaying their own policy was unsatisfactory. A new safeguarding poster has therefore been introduced; this can be displayed by churches in place of individual policies.
- 3.4 Final approval from the Charity Commission for the new bulk reporting process is awaited. Contact has been made with Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes to start to explore the most effective ways of providing information about the role of trustees in relation to safeguarding.
- 3.5 Colleagues within the connexional safeguarding team are working with partners across the Church to review three further areas: Domestic Abuse Guidelines, Local Ecumenical Partnership Practice Guidance and the Safer Recruitment Policy.
- 3.6 Further work has been undertaken on a new case file system that can be shared with district safeguarding officers in order to streamline recording systems and aid communication. It is important that any procurement work in this area is carefully scoped and resourced and therefore the date for introducing this has been put back to allow sufficient inquiries to be made about the type of system to recommend, and to investigate if there are existing systems that may be bought, rather than funding a bespoke system.
- 3.7 Closer working with Mission Partners and regional World Church Coordinators to develop safeguarding policy has continued and includes offering training in child protection to the Methodist Church in Southern Africa, guidance to the Methodist Church in Hong Kong and a planned visit to the Methodist Church in Columbia. These developments have enabled greater confidence in our approach to safer working, opportunities for learning from other traditions and cultures, and the sharing of the investment British Methodism has put into safeguarding in recent years.
- 3.8 Work with those involved in candidates being selected for ministry has continued to develop, and we work alongside colleagues in equalities and diversity. Candidates for ministry include both applicants from Britain and from other countries and conferences.

4. Safeguarding training

- 4.1 The Safeguarding Training Group, which includes both colleagues from Safeguarding and the Learning Network, has completely re-written the Foundation Module which is now in use.
- 4.2 The previously reported guidance and input for volunteers on Monitoring and Support Groups (MSGs) for those with Safeguarding Contracts will include information to support safer recruitment for new MSG members. It will explain the role and include a briefing outline for DSOs to ensure consistency for new groups, and a half-day training programme for those already on MSGs and for new members.

5. District Safeguarding Officers (DSOs)

- 5.1 The annual safeguarding conference considered '*Courage, Cost and Hope – the Report on the Past Cases Review 2013–2015*'. The conference discussed what has changed in the last five years and what is still to do. It was led by Jane Stacey, the original author of the report. DSOs, chairs of district safeguarding groups and colleague church safeguarding officers addressed what had been learned, how practice has changed and areas that still need attention and have emerged as new needs over this period.

5.2 The connexional Safeguarding Team has embedded casework supervision to support DSOs and Districts in their duties. This has enabled a greater focus on identifying where practice can be improved; encouraging staff, who often are working alone; and sharing best practice between different parts of the Connexion.

6. Developing survivors' work

6.1 Our Survivors' Reference Group has been renamed the Methodist Survivors' Advisory Group and has proved instrumental in developing understanding and growth of a more informed perspective on a victim and survivor voice in all current and new development work. Indeed, the very term 'survivor' has been debated, with some of the group now referring to themselves as 'thrivers'. It indicates that for some the journey is one from victim to survivor to thriving. At the same time, we recognise that this is not the story for everyone who has been hurt in some way while in our Church. The President of the Conference, Barbara Glasson, has been the facilitator of the group and we are grateful that she has been able to bring a greater focus on the survivor experience during her year of travelling the Connexion.

6.2 The review of the complaints and discipline system and where it intersects with safeguarding processes will afford us a new opportunity. We will be able to assess how well our shared procedures support victims and survivors when they take the difficult step of coming forward and expressing their concerns. We have also contributed to the early discussion on the Church's response to sexual harassment and developing better responses to this, and similar considerations about racial harassment and bullying within the Church.

6.3 The Methodist Survivors' Advisory Group has produced prayers that have been added to our training materials. It is also planning to produce a publication relating to *Our Calling* from a survivor's perspective. This is being led by the Revd Helen Cameron and will be published later this year.

7. Ecumenical working

7.1 The Anglican-Methodist Safeguarding Group has continued to meet in regional areas across England to discuss and listen to what is working well between sister churches and where there are shared challenges in safeguarding work.

7.2 We have contributed to meetings with the Christian Forum for Safeguarding and contributed to evidence being gathered by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Safeguarding in Faith Settings, which is working towards introducing legislation to make it mandatory that ordained ministers are included in 'positions of trust' categories in line with professionals such as teachers.

7.3 Work is underway to look at equivalency between our Foundation and Advanced modules with sister churches. This will assist those in local ecumenical partnerships as different denominations' safeguarding training packages can be recognised.

*****RESOLUTION**

16/1. The Conference received the Report.