

15. Safeguarding Committee

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1. Overview

- 1.1 In common with all other areas of church life our safeguarding activities have been deeply affected by the COVID pandemic and the varying restrictions this has placed on our activities over the last year. Staff working for the Connexional Safeguarding Team (CST) and District Safeguarding Officers (DSOs) have all had to adjust to different ways of working often at short notice and with uncertain information about timescales and requirements. Whilst the closure of churches and some church activities meant that there was less opportunity to engage in poor safeguarding behaviour, new challenges have arisen through the use of online contact and pastoral care. The Connexional Team has worked hard to provide new guidance and increased contact with those responsible for safeguarding in each District and the Safeguarding Committee wants to thank them for all that they have undertaken during this time to maintain the momentum in making a safer church for all.
- 1.2 The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) hearing into religious organisations began its two week session in March 2020, but this was delayed because of COVID and did not complete until August. We have been advised (at the point of writing this) that we will hear the conclusions at some point before the summer. The Inquiry's full report into all 15 separate hearings is now expected at some point in 2022. We are expecting the Inquiry to make recommendations, amongst other things, on training, auditing implementation of minimum standards (possibly through an independent audit body), clearer processes for supporting survivors of abuse and reviewing the DBS scheme. The Safeguarding Committee (SGC) has already begun to look at approaches to auditing our safeguarding practice and will be confirming these later this year.
- 1.3 Whilst there is no complacency here it does seem right to acknowledge the hard work that has been done and continues to be done on a daily basis to make the Methodist Church a safer place for everyone and a place where safeguarding practice and behaviour is done joyfully and expectantly. People from outside the Church looking at our current policies, procedures and training often comment on how well these compare with other organisations and we are committed to maintaining this in all we do.

2. Oversight

- 2.1 The Safeguarding Committee continues to broaden the scoping of safeguarding work across the Church in order to fulfil its terms of reference. The annual training event focused on the operation of Safeguarding Panels and ensuring a clearer process for the senior members of the committee to work more closely together in determining consistent practice.
- 2.2 We are pleased to report that there is a greater inclusion of a survivor perspective with input from a representative of the Methodist Survivors' Advisory Group (MSAG) on the SGC.
- 2.3 Engagement has continued with the Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee in respect of the theology of safeguarding report which is before this year's Conference.

3. Safeguarding Casework and Development work

- 3.1 Case statistics and Safeguarding Panels completed for 2019/20 and first six months of 2020/21:

Period	1/9/17-31/8/18	1/9/18-31/8/19	1/9/19-31/8/20	1/9/20-28/2/21 (6 months)
DBS cases open	81	96	89	21
DBS cases closed	90	181	186	42
Non DBS cases open	61	106	57	19
Non DBS cases closed	78	71	13	16

Safeguarding Panels	1/9/18-31/8/19	1/9/18-31/8/19	1/9/19-31/8/20	1/9/19-31/8/20	1/9/20-29/2/21 (6 months)	1/9/20-29/2/21
Outcome	Number	Appeals	Number	Appeals	Number	Appeals
Not cleared	0	0	1	0	1	0
Restrictions on role and Safeguarding Contract	4	0	2	0	1	0
Cleared with conditions	5	0	8	0	0	0

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Cleared with no conditions	0	0	1	0	0	0
No changes to current Safeguarding Contract	0	0	2	0	1	0
Safeguarding Contract ended	6	0	2	0	0	0
Safeguarding Contract ended with conditions	0	0	1	0	0	0
Resigned from Role	0	0	2	0	2	0
Total	15	0	19	0	5	0

The figures show lower numbers since March 2020 due to church buildings being closed, but there have still been safeguarding activity and assessments to undertake.

- 3.2 Work has been undertaken to update the 2010 Domestic Abuse guidelines with new policy and procedures. This will be followed with good practice guidance. A webinar focusing on this area of growing concern during the pandemic was hosted including contributions from the President, Vice-President and Secretary of the Conference, and from the government's commissioner for domestic abuse services. 500 people from across the Church joined the discussion on line.
- 3.3 Due to the impact of COVID and some change in staffing we have extended the review of the Safe Recruitment procedures which should now be completed by the end of the year.
- 3.4 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 timescale for introducing this has been put back in order for sufficient inquiries to be made about the type of system to recommend and to investigate if there are existing systems that we can buy rather than funding a bespoke system built solely for our purposes.
- 3.5 Work to support Mission Partners and the Coordinators has continued with bespoke input prior to starting work abroad and a review of safeguarding training that has been undertaken by existing Mission Partners. Work has been

undertaken to consult with grant recipients on a set of safeguarding principles that can be applied in the grant making process. Planned visits to work with the Methodist Churches in South Africa and Columbia have had to be postponed this year due to the travel restrictions but we have been able to engage with church leaders in the Methodist Church of Peru through Zoom and provide a series of safeguarding training sessions and development of their safeguarding procedures. This is a first and may lead to other countries working with us in a similar way.

- 3.6 As part of the inclusive church work reported elsewhere at this year's Conference, the CST has been supporting some of the work streams and will engage in assisting plans to offer direct support to those who may have been discriminated against.
- 3.7 Plans are underway to increase awareness and provide guidance in areas that affect vulnerable adults who are older such as the development of dementia friendly churches and guidance to avoid financial abuse etc.

4. Safeguarding training

- 4.1 The Safeguarding Training Group has undertaken the task of converting the Foundation and Advanced training modules into versions that can be used online. This was more complex than simply transferring the training notes and slides online and has required the re-writing and recording of new material to make it appropriate for a blended style of self-study and facilitated learning. As free movement becomes possible again, we will be in the advantageous position to begin to offer both face to face and virtual versions of our core training courses which should make them more accessible and aid take up. We have also been assisted greatly by representation from the MSAG in the re-writing of materials for the new online versions.
- 4.2 Work is underway in collaboration with Thirty-one eight and Chester University to update the current Spiritual Abuse training course (devised by Thirty-one eight) so that it is specific to a Methodist context.

5. District Safeguarding Officers (DSOs)

- 5.1 Despite the COVID restrictions the Casework Supervisors (CWS) have continued to work closely with Districts in providing professional casework supervision to all the DSOs. DSOs have been able to meet in four 'quadrant' areas with their CWS and due to the absence of travel it has meant these meetings have been more frequent and enabled greater communication between DSOs. Connexional DSO meetings have continued online although the annual conference was postponed and it is hoped this might be rescheduled for later in the year.

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- 5.2 As noted above, when IICSA reports, it may make recommendations about supervision and line management of safeguarding officers in organisations and we will respond to this when there is a clearer picture.

6. Developing survivors' work

- 6.1 The MSAG has continued to meet and has worked closely with the Revd Helen Cameron in producing a study guide, *Reflect and Respond*, to enable a greater consideration of and awareness about how the Church can better listen to and respond to the needs of survivors in all of its work. In addition to this a leaflet for use in all churches has been produced to give a clear message to anyone who may be in or visit a church about how they can be supported.
- 6.2 A newer more policy-focused group has also been established to give additional capacity to respond to new procedures, initiatives and developments which may require short response times as well as giving space for more survivor perspectives to be heard.
- 6.3 As reported last year, the review of the Complaints and Discipline system and where it intersects with safeguarding processes is affording us the opportunity to assess how well our shared procedures support victims and survivors when they take the difficult step of coming forward and expressing their concerns. Survivors have been interviewed as part of this work and are central to the considerations. We assisted in the production of the church's Sexual Harassment guidelines and, as reported above, are contributing to the work to combat racial harassment. We have also drawn together a number of officers from different parts of the church to host a series of webinars on tackling bullying and will be consulting on the development of clear definitions to add to the main safeguarding policy.

7. Ecumenical working

- 7.1 The Anglican Methodist Safeguarding Group has had a series of staffing changes and is re-assessing its focus in light of a number of structural changes in the Church of England.
- 7.2 We have continued to contribute to meetings with the Christian Forum for Safeguarding and are leading on a piece of work to create an information sharing protocol.

***RESOLUTION

- 15/1. The Conference receives the Report.**