

## Appendix II

# URC Annual Safeguarding Report 2019

## 1. Background

The data presented in this report is taken from the annual synod safeguarding reports, collected by all synods in two consecutive years (2018 and 2019). In alignment with URC's safeguarding policy – Good Practice 5 Guidance, each synod collates safeguarding data from local churches (through the annual church returns process) and other relevant information held in their recording systems (appendix H2). A copy of the Annual Synod Safeguarding Report is given to the URC Safeguarding Adviser to allow the Church as a whole to review its commitment to safeguarding children and adults at risk, and provide suitable support and guidance to Synods and local churches. All the data and information in this report should be viewed in this context. In any report of this nature, it is important to recognise that behind each data is a person. Safeguarding is about everyone's wellbeing and means the action the Church takes to protect everyone, particularly those in greatest need and promote a safer culture across the denomination.

## 2. Definitions

### Concern

Safeguarding concerns are matters relating to an individual and reported to a safeguarding designated person for guidance or action; this may or may not result in a referral to statutory agencies.

### Worker

A person who is appointed by the church to work with children or adults at risk on behalf of the church, on a paid or voluntary basis. This includes Ministers of Word and Sacrament, Church Related Community Workers (CRCWs), youth workers, adult workers, and others, including volunteers, who are involved in regulated work and activities with children, young people and adults at risk.

### Regulated activity

Activity relating to children is defined in Schedule 4 to the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 (as amended).

### Safeguarding contract

A written agreement used to establish appropriate and clear boundaries for those who may pose a risk to others and want to attend church services and activities.

### 3. Summary of key statistics (URC database)

	May 2018	April 2020
Synods	13	13
Synod Safeguarding Officers/Coordinator (Scotland)	14	11
Churches	1400	1345
Local Church Safeguarding Coordinators (incl. Deputies)	624	1660
Churches that have declared their safeguarding policy	252	1250
Churches that have not declared a safeguarding policy	1148	95
Members	49,517	44,446
Average congregation attendees including children	53,379	49,817
Children associated with the life of the Church	30,865	32,844
Paid workers working with under 26 across the URC	257	249
Volunteers working with under 26 across the URC	8984	8884
Ministers of Word and Sacraments on roll	1369	1408
Active Ministers of Word and Sacraments	608	685
Community Church Related Workers on roll	32	31
Active Community Church Related Workers	15	15
DBS/PVG checks for ministers/CRCWs/Lay preachers	450	262
DBS/PVG checks for workers and volunteers	1640	1607
DBS signatory people recorded in the URC internal system	2667	2242
Charities with URC on the title registered with Charity Commission	110	320
Scotland-based URC charities registered with OSCR	40	38
Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) with URC	390	385
LEPs with known safeguarding policy (not URC's)	187	291
LEPs with URC safeguarding policy	38	66
LEPs with unknown safeguarding policy	165	28

### 4. Introduction

- 4.1 The URC consists of 1345 churches in England, Wales and Scotland; with 49,817 congregation attendees (including children) on average attending services of the Church. In 2018, we have recorded 12,748 children that have attended our church services (Children's and Youth Work review).
- 4.2 Each synod has one professional Safeguarding Officer (coordinator in Scotland) to whom all concerns or allegations relating to workers (lay or ordained, paid or unpaid) must be reported. In Scotland, responses to safeguarding incidents are handled by Church of Scotland. The Church currently has 11 Synod Safeguarding Officers, and three of them serve two synods. Their role is to support the local churches in implementing their safeguarding responsibilities, working closely with local Church Safeguarding Coordinators. There are currently 1652 Safeguarding Coordinators and Deputy safeguarding coordinators according to reports.<sup>1</sup> As well as responding to the needs of children and adults who may be at risk of abuse, Synod Safeguarding officers provide professional advice to promote the welfare of people in the Church.

<sup>1</sup> It is positive that the equivalent number recorded in the URC database (1660 safeguarding coordinators) does not differ significantly. The very small difference explained on the basis that data provided at different times.

## 5. Summary of data (annual synod safeguarding reports)

	2018	2019
Number of Safeguarding Coordinators	841	1096
Number of Deputy Safeguarding Coordinators	442	556
Number of churches with no Safeguarding Coordinators	152	66
Number of allegations against volunteers, workers, church goers	34	18
Number of Risk Assessments	9	21
Number of Covenants of Care/Safeguarding Contracts	52	46
Number of people attended URC safeguarding training	1717	1559
Number of people attended other non-URC safeguarding training	624	1402
Number of DBS-PVG applicants with blemished disclosures	21	15
Number of churches sought advice on safer recruitment	25	44

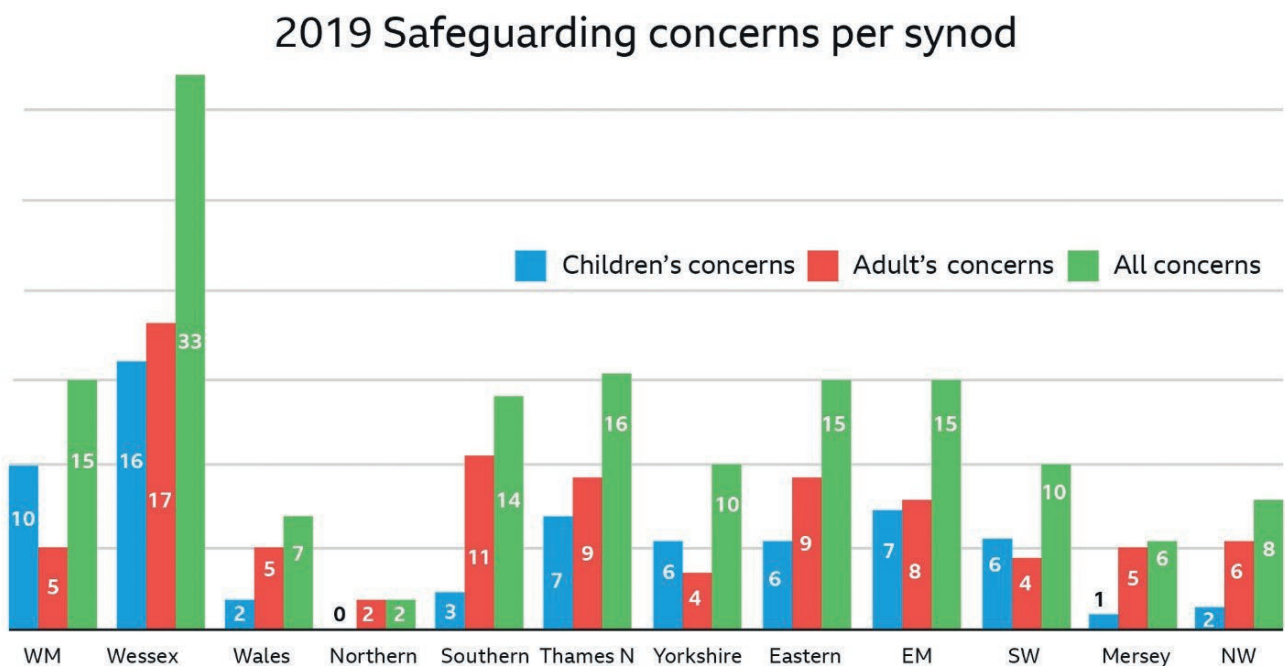
## 6. Key Headlines

- 1147 local churches provided annual safeguarding returns in the end of 2019. The return rate was increased from 56.45% (2017) to 71.44% (2018) to 84.8% (2019).
- 937 Churches today declare using URC's safeguarding policy, and 313 follow other denomination's safeguarding policy.
- In 2018, 11% of our churches said they had no safeguarding coordinators. This percentage dropped to 4.5% in 2019.
- In 2018, 25.84% of reported safeguarding coordinators attended safeguarding training. The same percentage dropped to 22% in 2019
- In 2018, 390 churches (28.5 % of URC churches) were part of Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEP). Of them, 210 churches were using different safeguarding policy to URC (53.84%). Last year, 359 churches were part of LEPs, and 245 of them were following different safeguarding policy (68.2%).
- 479 Trustees/Elders attended URC's safeguarding training in 2019. By adding last year's equivalent number (431 attendees), 910 trustees/elders in the URC so far attended safeguarding training.
- 683 workers (ministers, CRCWs, paid and voluntary staff members) attended URC's safeguarding training in 2019, dropping 47% from 1290 workers in 2018. Last year, 1402 URC workers attended other non-URC safeguarding training. The equivalent number in 2018 was 624 workers.
- The overall number of concerns reported to synods relating to children, young people and vulnerable adults in the Church has risen by 114 from 2016 to 2019 (37 concerns in 2016, 90 concerns in 2017, 125 in 2018, 151 in 2019).

- In 2019, 18 safeguarding allegations were made against workers of the church, the vast majority of which were related to churchgoers.
- In 2019, 12 synods were managing 46 safeguarding contracts for people who attend a worshipping community and may pose a risk to others. The Synod of Wales is the only synod with no safeguarding contracts because they are managed by other denominations. The number of contracts reduced 11.53% (52 contracts in 2018). 14 contracts have been terminated last year.
- 61 offenders known to synods were attending URC churches in 2019. The number of offenders known to the Church was 26 three years ago (2017).
- 2961 people attended safeguarding training, either URC or other, across synods last year.

## 7. Responses to safeguarding concerns and allegations

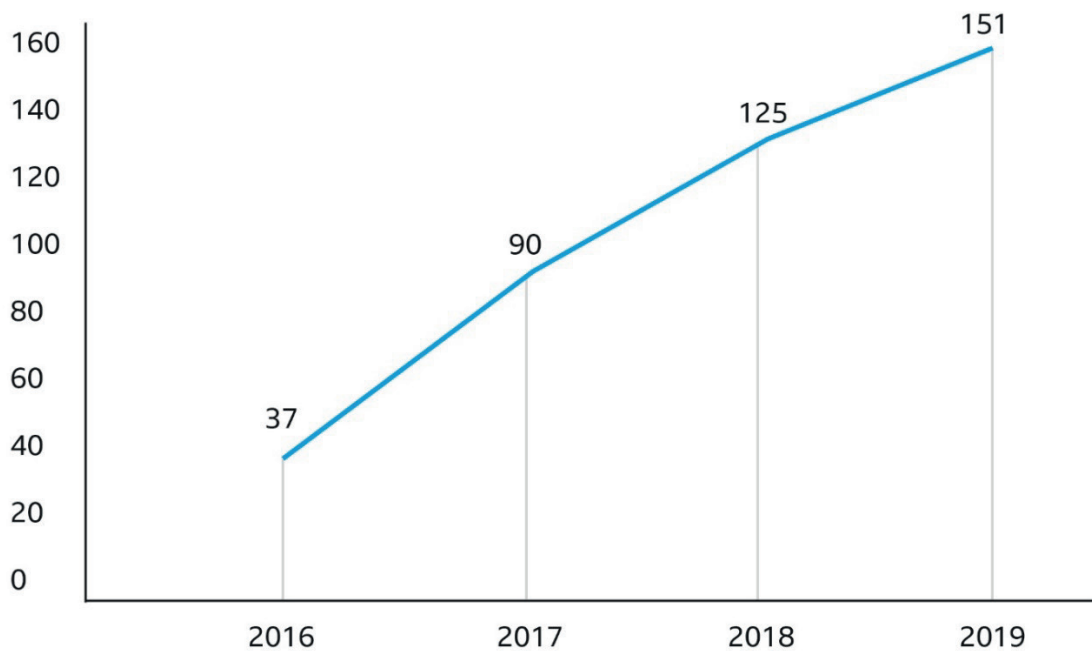
7.1 Most safeguarding-related concerns or allegations are related to children or vulnerable adults who attend or who have contact with the Church and its communities in England, Wales and Scotland. The chart below shows the number of safeguarding concerns and allegations per synod, except Scotland.<sup>2</sup>



7.2 The overall number of safeguarding related concerns or allegations in respect of children or adults reported to synods significantly increased over a three-year period (between 2016 and 2019). The number rose from 37 concerns in 2016 to 151 concerns in 2019 (see chart below).

<sup>2</sup> Scotland was unable to provide this data due to Coronavirus restrictions. In 2018, the synod of Scotland had two cases.

## Safeguarding concerns across the URC

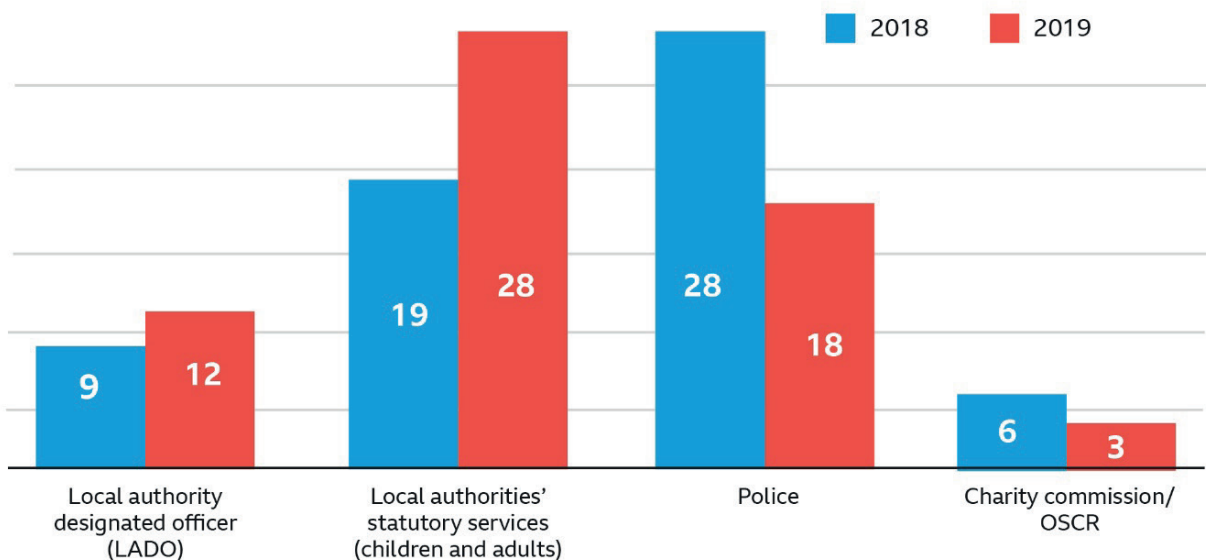


- 7.3 Although safeguarding concerns or allegations are reported in different ways, the incidents that they relate to may not necessarily have occurred during the same year. In terms of types of abuse, there is a consistent lack of information regarding what type of safeguarding incidents are being responded to. In 2019, there was more information available regarding the forms of abuse in the Church. The largest category of concerns or allegations relating to adults at risk, particularly those with mental health disorders and issues (e.g. dementia and Alzheimer's) and those adults at risk of financial abuse. A fair and increasing amount of concerns refers to physical abuse, domestic abuse, sexual abuse and historical cases of child abuse. Other referrals to designated safeguarding professionals relate to online abuse, child exploitation, bullying/harassment and radicalisation.
- 7.4 One of the key elements of our procedures is for people to respond promptly and sufficiently to keep people safe. However, there is a need for clarity about when to contact the Synod Safeguarding Officer. Some incidents are being managed in local churches without referring to the Synod Safeguarding Officer. Clarity about channels of reporting safeguarding concerns and the importance of involving the Synod Safeguarding Officers were highlighted in the returns from the synods.

## 8. Outcomes of concerns or allegations

- 8.1 Of the 151 safeguarding concerns relating to children and adults in 2019, 28 (18.6% of all concerns) were reported to statutory services (children or adult social care services). Last year, it was recorded that nine referrals to children's services and 19 referrals to adult social care services took place as a response to safeguarding concerns/incidents. The proportion of concerns or allegations which required reporting to statutory agencies has increased over the last two years. The chart below compares the referral routes to external services/agencies in the last two years.

## Referral routes



- 8.2 The data within the two-year period point at the need to prioritise a clear policy related to survivors of abuse, and how URC provides pastoral care and support. In 2019, pastoral care provision and its interrelation with safeguarding procedures are still not clear. In addition to little referral to statutory services or signposting to specialist agencies for those who have been impacted by abuse, there is no case management system, and information about pastoral care and how access to appropriate support and services is being managed in each Synod. There are safeguarding implications with providing care to survivors of abuse, but frequently synod safeguarding officers are not included in these discussions, or even informed of them.
- 8.3 The self-evaluation process does not presently capture individuals who were referred to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) for consideration of barring, or those who were suspended or placed under disciplinary measures following child or adult protection procedures. The Church has currently a defined disciplinary process only for ministers and CRCWs.

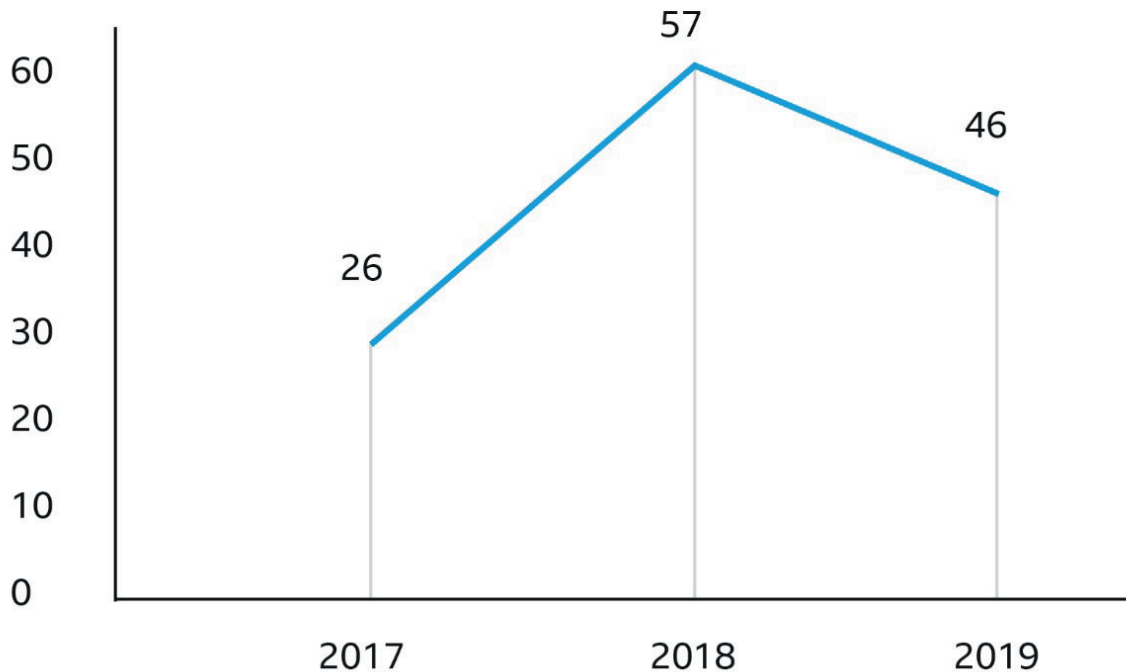
## 9. Risk assessments and safeguarding contracts

- 9.1 There has been significant change in the number of risk assessments in the last two years. In accordance with *Good Practice 5*, where someone is known to pose a risk, or is suspected of posing a risk, robust measures (risk assessments and safeguarding contracts) need to be put in place in order to allow this person to attend church activities and/or worship in a particular church. In 2019, 21 risk assessments were completed in the synods, compared to nine risk assessments undertaken in 2018. Last year, risk assessment processes involved 10 of the Synod Safeguarding Officers. Only three synods reported no risk assessments in 2019.
- 9.2 The Church appears in a better position to identify and support offenders. The number of offenders known to the Church three years ago was 26 (2017). 61 known offenders appear to be currently attending URC churches. The number



of safeguarding contracts put in place for known offenders or those who may pose a risk has sharply reduced from 57 in 2018 to 46 in 2019 (see chart below). Contracts are generally ongoing, although subject to review and termination. The termination of 14 contracts last year might explain the reduction of contracts.

### Safeguarding contracts across the URC

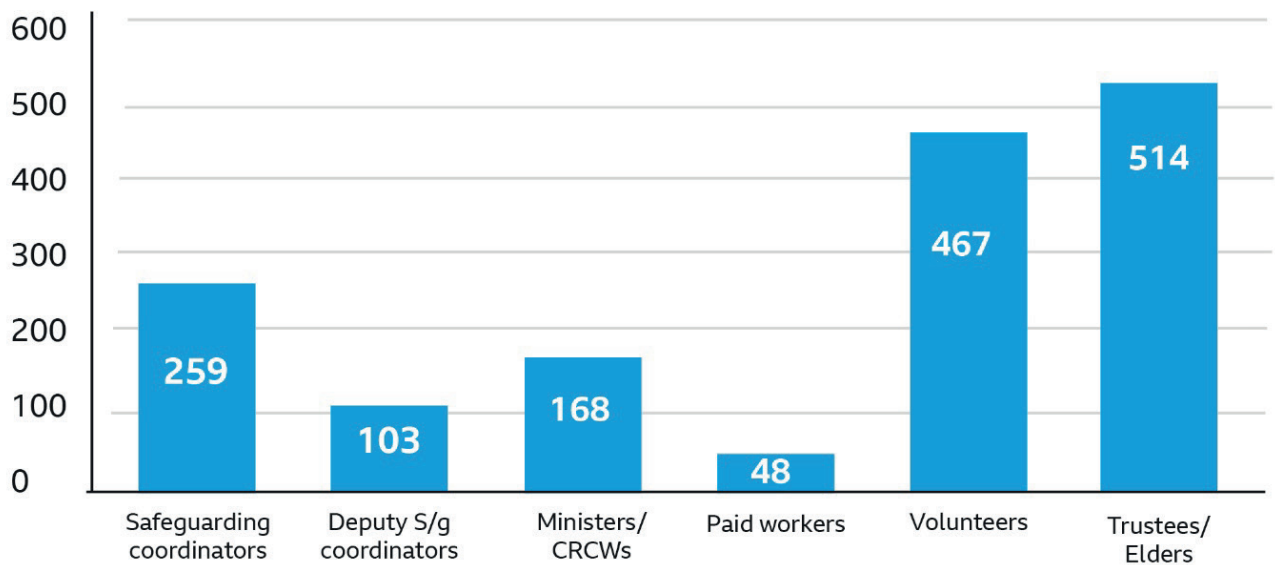


- 9.3 Although the Church shows increased understanding and capacity to assess and manage safeguarding risks and develop stronger working relationships with statutory partners, the annual synod safeguarding reports mark the need to further monitor this area of work. Some synods do not have information relating to how many offenders are in their congregations, what roles they might hold, and whether they are involved in regulated activity with children or adults at risk. Additionally, Synod Safeguarding Officers are not being informed of contracts being in place, or local Churches are refusing to draw up safeguarding contracts with ex-offenders. Safeguarding contracts also are not being reviewed consistently.
- 9.4 *Good Practice 5* provides a clear policy framework regarding the management of offenders or alleged offenders to prevent harm from those who may pose (or continue to pose) risks to the Church. The frontline practice flags up that there are no guidelines of good practice and clear lines of accountability when Churches do not follow designated safeguarding persons' advice regarding risk assessments and /or safeguarding contracts (previously known as covenants of care). In the last two years, the feedback from across the Synods confirm that managing those who pose a risk in the Church community requires urgent improvements. A guidance on managing risk and offenders will be first introduced to the Church this year (Appendix Z).

## 10. Safeguarding training

10.1 The data provide evidence of the importance of the Church's role in safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults in the community as well as increased awareness of safeguarding issues across the denomination. In 2019, 1308 persons attended safeguarding training offered by another denomination or agency. On top of these people, the synod safeguarding reports show that 1559 persons have completed URC safeguarding training with the URC. The chart below shows the role these individuals were holding when they attended URC safeguarding training last year.

URC safeguarding training attendance in 2019



10.2 In 2019, the majority of Synod Safeguarding Officers reported that there was an increased request for safeguarding training, indicating a rising awareness of why safeguarding is important. This resulted in more people looking for a safeguarding training offer in other denominations, especially the Methodist Church. Although there is still no URC training programme across the denomination, this is under review at the moment, and a package is currently being trialled, with a view to introducing a standardised safeguarding training programme for the whole Church by the end of 2020.

## 11. Safer recruitment

In the last two years, URC and its churches across the synods in England, Wales and Scotland processed 3247 DBS/PVG Disclosure applications. Based on the last year's figures, there is a 3% decrease on the number processed during 2019. Efforts continue to further refine DBS/PVG eligibility decision-making to ensure that we are compliant with the legislation and are undertaking checks at the appropriate level for different roles within the Church. The transfer of processing ministerial checks from in-house to DDC last year also help provide an umbrella body to the church, and support a consistent 'one-church' approach to safeguarding.



## 12. Conclusion

- 12.1 The collation and analysis of these data forms a key element of quality assurance work undertaken by synods and the central safeguarding office of the Church. The self-evaluation process has been an evolving tool, and the results have been collated centrally since 2017, in alignment with the safeguarding policy and guidance of the Church (*Good Practice 5*). This year's process has resulted in the production of the first annual denomination safeguarding report, and has allowed the United Reformed Church to access data and trends being analysed over a two-year period. The commitment is to provide a brief oversight of safeguarding policy and practice throughout the denomination, and to produce an update each year with further refinements on the self-evaluation process.
- 12.2 It is promising that more local churches and synods provide data and information about safeguarding through the annual church returns process to enable everyone in the Church to see what works well, and what improvements are required. The commitment and expertise of Synod Safeguarding Officers and local Church Safeguarding Coordinators are valuable, as well as the increased capacity of the Church to liaise with local authorities and statutory services. However, there are still churches that do not have a safeguarding policy in place for children or adults at risk, and there are many churches who are not using URC's common safeguarding policy (*Good Practice 5*). Appendix A of GP5 is a model local church safeguarding policy document (shorter in format) with seven appendices which help local churches align with URC's safeguarding policy. In the case of LEPs, they are generally using other safeguarding policies, and it could be worth exploring why this happens and how we can improve URC practices and procedures.
- 12.3 This annual denominational report will be used to inform current and future planning and improvement activity in the light of URC's safeguarding strategic plan (2020-2025). It is vital to embed *Good Practice 5* and its appendices in the daily practice of congregations, work with survivors of abuse, increase the capacity of the Church to manage safeguarding risks and offenders and invest in the frontline by providing effective safeguarding training to church safeguarding coordinators, workers and volunteers of the Church. These priorities, along with the other strategic priorities of the plan, will help the Church create safer spaces across the denomination.