

Paper T1

Safeguarding Strategic Plan – end of year one

Safeguarding Advisory Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Ioannis Athanasiou safeguarding@urc.org.uk Adrian Bulley adrian.bulley@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	Paper L1 Mission Council, November 2020. Resolution 29 and its two appendices, General Assembly, Book of Reports 2020 (pages 227-254). Paper R3 Mission Council, March 2020. Paper R2 Mission Council, November 2019. Paper R2 Mission Council, May 2019. Paper R2 Mission Council, November 2018.
Consultation has taken place with...	Members of SAG All Synod Safeguarding Officers through the Synod Safeguarding Practice Group (SSPG) Synod Moderators.

Summary of impact

Financial	
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

- 11 In November 2019, Mission Council directed the Safeguarding Advisory Group to oversee the development, implementation, review, and monitoring of the safeguarding strategic plan (2020-2025), and to advise the Mission Council and the General Assembly on its progress. The adoption of the plan has reflected the continuing awareness of the need to protect adults at risk and vulnerable children in any aspect of life in the Church. The Safeguarding Advisory Group has managed this enormous task with the support of the General Assembly safeguarding team at Church House and the commitment of Synod Safeguarding Officers and Advisors to serving local churches throughout a very challenging first year due to pandemic. Led by God's grace, members of the Safeguarding Advisory Group share the first-year report with the members of Mission Council (Appendix I).

- 12 To deliver the plan in fuller and more holistic ways, the Safeguarding Advisory Group decided to fill its vacant co-opted member positions with two representatives from Synod Moderators' Group and Synod Safeguarding Practice Group and invited the safeguarding training and development coordinator to join the group. Revd. Ruth Whitehead, moderator of the South Western Synod, has agreed to serve as SAG member. Her membership brings a wise and experienced moderator into the group and an important link with other moderators. Sharon Barr, synod safeguarding officer in Wessex Synod, and Penny McGee, our Safeguarding Training Coordinator, enhance the safeguarding expertise of the group with their social work ethics, frontline experience, and specialist knowledge.
- 13 The Clerk of the Synod of Wales has also been a great asset to safeguarding work in the Church. Adrian Bulley joined the General Secretariat team, on secondment from the Synod of Wales bringing a wealth of experience of the United Reformed Church. On behalf of General Secretariat, Adrian took responsibility for safeguarding and is working closely with the denomination's safeguarding adviser and the safeguarding team to continue the implementation of the strategic plan and embed safeguarding more clearly within the URC governance structures.
- 14 In addition to work mentioned in the first-year report, members of the Safeguarding Advisory Group (SAG) and Synod Safeguarding Officers (SSO) met in December 2020 to address the feedback related to the Safeguarding Training Framework received from Mission Council. Since this meeting there have been the following changes and updates to this document.

15 Content

- 15.1 The basic training module has been renamed to Foundation Training. All training levels contain discussion of writing risk assessments and advanced training refers directly to writing and reviewing risk assessments for others to complete. All levels of training contain information about support agencies available for participants as well as reference to the need to keep ourselves safe and to recognise subjects that may be more difficult to learn about. Content of the training for the foundation module and the intermediate module currently being used across the denomination is robust and is in line with ecumenical partners training. Feedback from participants suggests they have found the training valuable in embedding safeguarding knowledge.

16 Monitoring of training

- 16.1 As part of the Past Case Review Learning Group report, the URC has made a commitment to ensuring that training and its recording are standardised across the denomination to prevent records being lost, incomplete or inaccurate. SAG will ensure a consistent approach to the recording of training records on the central database in line with the appropriate data privacy policy.

17 Smaller congregations

- 17.1 Mission Council expressed a concern that the safeguarding training framework may not cater for the needs of smaller congregations. The Training Framework has been designed so that the message of safeguarding is universal across the denomination and caters for the congregations that the URC could have rather than the ones that they do have currently. We trust our synod safeguarding officers who know their synods and local churches well and they understand how to tailor their delivery to suit the needs of any church community and deliver a consistent message about safe practices across the URC.

- 17.2 The Training Framework is currently being developed to address concerns that smaller congregations may have and to help this group to understand how the safeguarding training programme is designed to work alongside them, not against them.

18 Participants of training

- 18.1 The recommendations for those who should undertake certain levels of training is largely unchanged with the exception of a clearer distinction being made between youth volunteers and paid employees and which training this group is expected to undertake.
- 18.2 At present it is recognized that mandatory training for volunteers cannot be enforced. However, there is a clear desire to train as many people in safeguarding as possible and to ensure that those in leadership roles have a robust and clear understanding of their responsibilities.

19 Further consultations and ecumenical work

- 19.1 As per the recommendations from Mission Council in November, the Training Framework has been shared with the Youth Moderator for comment as well as Safeguarding Officers and Synod Moderators for updated comments.
- 19.2 We also plan to join forces with the Methodist Church and other denominations in conversations about developing an interdenominational safeguarding information protocol and inform the Mission Council accordingly. Moreover, alongside other denominations, we expect from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) to publish its report on the investigation on Faith Settings and Organisations, in which the United Reformed Church is a core participant. It is important to keep an eye on this statutory inquiry and their next report which is expected in early summer. Their reports from the investigations in the Church of England and Church in Wales, and the Catholic Church already published last autumn bringing into the public realm important issues regarding the effectiveness of current child protection policies, practices and procedures in religious institutions in England and Wales to protect children from child sexual abuse.

20 Concluding remarks

- 20.1 The importance of safeguarding is such that it is vital to address all the identified issues before returning to Mission Council. Therefore, the decision has been made not to bring the Training Framework back to Mission Council until such a time as the above considerations can be ensured across the denomination. It is important to note that all levels of safeguarding are currently being used across the denomination and this has not been impacted by the delay in approving the Training Framework.

Appendix 1

Report for mission council on the first year of implementation of the URC Safeguarding Strategic Plan

1. Executive Summary

1.1 URC mandate on safeguarding responsibilities

Mission Council passed by a two-thirds majority, Resolution 29 in July 2020 which is a mandate for further internal work and developments to acknowledge that safeguarding is everybody's responsibility in the United Reformed Church.

On behalf of the General Assembly, Mission Council directed all local churches and synods and those who oversee safeguarding arrangements in the Church, to implement the Safeguarding Strategic Plan in ways that promote welfare in the URC, the well-being of the community and the individuals with whom the Church comes into contact.

1.2 Launch of Safeguarding Strategic Plan

The URC Safeguarding Strategic Plan, with its six key overarching objectives designed to imbed the principle that “Safeguarding is Everyone’s Business” was wholehearted welcomed by the two hundred and ten participants who attended the online Safeguarding Strategic Plan symposium in October 2020. Participants attended the online launch from every region of the UK and from every discipline within the church, including Synod Officers, Ministers, Elders and Church Safeguarding Coordinators. Momentum from the symposium led to a series of webinars to be coordinated to further the strategic objectives of the plan, namely “the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Mental health,” “Domestic Violence” and “Spiritual abuse”. The first webinar is scheduled for March 2021 with nearly one hundred bookings to date, with the expectation of many others to follow.

1.3 Communication

An internal communication network has been established which includes a quarterly safeguarding newsletter with national and regional news, a new URC central website, and events following the publication and distribution of the URC safeguarding policy and guidance document, Good Practice 5. This ensures that research-based changes to policy or practice are communicated throughout the URC quickly and effectively by the denominational safeguarding team.

1.4 Monitoring and review

Monitoring and review of delivery of the key tasks of the Strategic Plan is being undertaken within the Safeguarding Advisory Group, based on data supplied by the Church Safeguarding Coordinators in the Annual Safeguarding Returns. Following receipt of 2020 returns, the monitoring format is being modified to further reflect and flush out the key targets within the Strategic plan and to reflect percentages of compliance of the tasks across the denomination. Two additional tasks to deliver the strategy had been identified as essential and a priority namely, a process for the management of offenders known to pose a risk, and a standardised central case management system. These tasks are well under way with the former to be completed in March 2021 and the latter by the end of 2021.

1.5 Survivors of church based abuse

A URC Reference group for those who have experienced abuse is an important development which has been initiated in 2020, inclusive of support to facilitate the healing process for survivors. It is hoped that the URC will be able to work with specialist charities to understand how to support those who have experienced abuse to engage in conversations in a safe and meaningful way. The URC are currently developing a safe process and protocol before inviting survivors to be part of the process.

The inclusion of safeguarding expertise within the Ministerial Disciplinary process is an important step to further embed good safeguarding ideology and practices within the URC. This step is also reflective of the learning from the IICSA reports into the conduct of the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church.

1.6 URC’s first Annual Safeguarding Report

Compiled from the data in the Annual Church Safeguarding Returns, the first denominational Annual Safeguarding Report was presented to General Assembly in July 2020 and as such provided the first snapshot of safeguarding in practice in the URC. This is the basis upon which future safeguarding practice can be compared and contrasted, trends identified, and training programmes adjusted.

Concerningly, the report identified several churches without a safeguarding policy in place while others were not adhering to Good Practice 5. Notably, LEPs were generally trusting and using other denominations' safeguarding policies.

A key lesson learned was the weakness of the Church to manage safeguarding risks and allow offenders to worship if safe to do so. This indicates that managing that risk is a number one priority for the URC. A risk assessment form to assess offenders and those who may pose a risk was approved by the Safeguarding Advisory Group and a Good Practice 5 appendix to support this is underdevelopment. The URC are also looking into sourcing specialist training for Synod Safeguarding Officers to equip them with the necessary skills to manage conduct these assessments.

1.7 Synod Safeguarding Development Plan

In July 2020, £34K funding within a Synod Safeguarding Development Plan (SSDP) was made available to synods on application to support the implementation of the Strategic Plan. Eleven synods who applied had their applications agreed while a further synod request was achieved through a different funding route. Full details of the applications are contained in Appendix 3.

1.8 URC Safeguarding team

Crucial to the delivery of the URC Strategic plan, is the availability of a fully staffed denominational safeguarding Team, supporting the fully trained and competent Safeguarding Officer in each synod. They, in turn, support and advise the Church Safeguarding Coordinator within each church in the URC. The Safeguarding Advisory Group then review evidence of the delivery of the plan through the Safeguarding Strategic Plan Monitoring process.

2. Summary of implementation of Safeguarding Strategic Plan

Plans are under way within the denominational and synod safeguarding teams to progress each of the 29 key tasks within the six overarching objectives, with seven of these tasks prioritised for particular action in 2020 (see below). Due to the global pandemic, it is recognised that these tasks might not necessarily come to fruition in this calendar year, but a coherent safeguarding foundation has nevertheless been created.

Task No	Task	Planning stage	Ongoing	Partially Complete	Complete
4.5	Ensure people in positions of leadership and accountability are aware of any changes to safeguarding policy and practice				√
4.1	Update URC's safeguarding policy every two years following the publication of Good Practice 5 (annually for each local church)			√	
4.1	Connect safeguarding policy and procedures with URC's disciplinary processes, especially those related to ministers/CRCWs			√	
2.3	Consult and engage with survivors and relevant groups and organisations in all safeguarding developments		√		

2.4	Use internal or external specialists to support local congregations affected by serious incidents of abuse		√		
5.5.	Value the expertise of and contribute to continuous development of Synod Safeguarding Officers		√		
6.4	Endorse close partnership and knowledge exchange of best practice with other denominations to support LEP's and church communities		√		

A full analysis of these tasks are included in the Appendix 2.

Appendix 2

An analysis of the delivery of seven key tasks:

Key Task	Actions	Ongoing	Partially Complete	Complete
4.5. Ensure people in positions of leadership and accountability are aware of any changes to safeguarding policy and Practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quarterly Safeguarding Newsletter created Newsletter includes denominational and synod safeguarding information Communication team are updating safeguarding webpages with space for safeguarding news, and a new section entitled "Safeguarding Resources" to provide additional advice and guidance for synods and local churches. 			√ √ √
4.3 Update URC's safeguarding policy every two years following the publication of Good Practice 5 (annually for each local church).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good Practice 5 was produced in January 2020 following a whole church consultation Good Practice 5 was circulated to all churches by the end of February 2020 Good Practice 5 has 35 Appendices, 30 which are now available online with three still being developed and two being finalised by the Graphics Team Joined up working with the Equalities Committee to develop guidance and training related to Bullying and Harassment 		√	√ √ √

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New resources created include the Modern Slavery Awareness Guidance and Training and Lone Working Guidance. 			√
4.4 Connect safeguarding policy and procedures with URC's disciplinary processes, especially those related to ministers / CRCWs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safeguarding advice from the Synod Safeguarding Officer is incorporated into initial Ministerial Disciplinary Process Safeguarding advice from Denominational Safeguarding Adviser to Ministerial Hearing and Panel recommended to MIND for consideration within the Ministerial Disciplinary Process Disciplinary Process for Office Holders in process with Secretary for Ministries Pastoral Supervision to take into account safeguarding considerations within its remit. 		√	√ √ √
2.3 Consult and engage with survivors, relevant groups, and organisations in all safeguarding developments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultation and direct engagement with survivors regarding the development of the safeguarding training framework that seeks to standardise safeguarding training across the denomination A draft project plan has been prepared by working group of Synod Safeguarding Officers and Safeguarding Advisory Group members and shared for review with survivors who expressed interest in this work Work commenced on creating reference group to consult and engage regarding safeguarding policies, procedures, and processes in relation to survivors Liaison with other denominations and relevant organisations namely SCIE (Social Care Institute of Excellence), NAPAC (the National Association for People Abused in Childhood), Church of England and the Baptist Church. Publicised SCIE Training on effectively engaging with survivors of abuse in faith-based organisations. Several URC staff attended, and the 	√ √		√ √ √

	Denominational Safeguarding Adviser was a panel speaker.			
2.4. Use internal or external specialists to support local congregations affected by serious incidents of abuse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Revd Carla Grosch-Miller's expertise in Congregational Trauma was utilised at the online symposium to launch the Safeguarding Strategic Plan where 212 people were in attendance. The Revd Carla Grosch-Miller also completed two further training sessions to Synod Safeguarding Officers and Church House staff respectively. 			<p>√</p> <p>√</p>
5.5 Value the expertise of and contribute to continuous development of Synod Safeguarding Officers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mission Council approved the terms of reference for the Synod Safeguarding Practice Group (SSPG) in March 2020 SSPG as subgroup of the Safeguarding Advisory Group, are an important step in valuing the expertise and work undertaken by Synod Safeguarding Officers at a synod and local level A series of briefings and online meetings in addition to three scheduled SSPG meetings per annum on account of safeguarding needs during the pandemic The SSPG offers some peer support and the opportunity to share safeguarding practice throughout the Church in alignment with Good Practice 5 Members of the SSPG have developed several Good Practice 5 appendices and guidelines The SSPG provides opportunity for continuous professional development, including training by Dr Carla Grosch Miller. 			<p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p>

<p>6.4. Endorse close partnership and knowledge exchange of best practice with other denominations to support LEP's and church communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Denominational Safeguarding Advisor represents URC at Christian Forum for Safeguarding (CFS) • Denominational Safeguarding Adviser elected as Vice Chair of CFS in June 2020 • Denominational Safeguarding Adviser is part of an inter-denominational working group with Baptists and Methodists to conduct a survey regarding safeguarding needs in Local Ecumenical Partnerships • Denominational Safeguarding Adviser is working with Methodists and Church of England to review lessons from the national delivery of safeguarding training • Denominational Safeguarding Adviser is part of consortium of eight denominations working with the NSPCC to establish an online safety project for young people. 	<p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p>		<p>√</p> <p>√</p>

Appendix 3

Synod Safeguarding Development Plan:

Synod	Amount	Purpose	Target Key Tasks
Northern Yorkshire North Western Mersey Scotland	£10,000 (£2,000 per synod)	Additional working hours for part-time Synod Safeguarding Officers to deliver safeguarding training (refresher and initial) and address a large back log.	1.4, 3.2, 3.4, 4.1, 4.5, 5.1, 5.2, 6.1
Thames North Southern	£2,000	To organise a two-day training session that will bring together all Safeguarding Coordinators and deputies in both synods to help improve understanding of abuse, create relationships and to assist in the implementation of the strategic plan.	1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5
West Midlands	£1,300	For a certified training qualification for the Synod Safeguarding Officer and for the purchase of resources (portable screen, projector and one-year subscription to Zoom) for face-to-face and online training.	1.3, 5
Wales	£15,000	The appointment of a Synod Safeguarding Officer.	1.1, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 4.5, 5.2, 5.4, 5.6
South West	£5,700	An independent review of a serious disciplinary case.	4.4
	£34,000		