

Paper R1

Safeguarding Advisory Group: New terms of reference

Safeguarding Advisory Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Ioannis Athanasiou safeguarding@urc.org.uk Richard Church richard.church@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council approves new Terms of Reference for the Safeguarding Advisory Group as set out in Appendix I of Paper R1 and affirms the membership of SAG as listed in Appendix II.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Mission Council directed the Safeguarding Advisory Group to oversee the development, implementation, review and monitoring of the safeguarding strategic plan (2020-2025). New terms of reference aim to enable current and future members of the Group to oversee this enormous task for the Church and deliver the plan in fuller and more holistic ways.
Main points	The new terms of reference for the Safeguarding Advisory Group/Committee will support the monitoring and delivery of the safeguarding strategic plan (2020-2025).
Previous relevant documents	Paper R2, Mission Council, November 2019 Paper R, Mission Council, November 2013 Paper N, Mission Council, May 2013.
Consultation has taken place with...	SAG members General Secretary.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

1. In November 2013, Mission Council confirmed the appointment of the Safeguarding Advisory Group (SAG thereafter), to meet at least three times per year. Its membership included the Safeguarding Officer, the Secretary for

Children's and Youth Work, the Secretary for Ministries, the appropriate Deputy General Secretary, and up to three co-opted members with relevant experience.

2. Current Terms of Reference for SAG describe the group's responsibilities as follows:

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. to oversee the development of policy and the implementation of Good Practice across the Church in the safeguarding of children, young people, and adults in need of protection, making recommendations to Mission Council as appropriate2. to ensure that Good Practice documents are published, circulated and updated as appropriate3. to develop systems for monitoring local church and synod compliance with Good Practice, and to devise strategies for addressing identified weaknesses4. to foster collaboration with ecumenical partners across the full range of safeguarding issues, including engagement in the development of public policy specifically to work closely with the Baptist Union in the development of policy, the delivery of safeguarding education, and the support of synod/regional safeguarding officers5. to oversee the service which the United Reformed Church receives from the Churches Agency for Safeguarding and other relevant agencies. |
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3. Many changes since 2013 indicate the need to review these Terms of Reference: the approval of the URC's Safeguarding Strategic Plan 2020-2025 (November 2019), continuous and extensive changes in public policy and legislation and the increasing attention by government to matters of safeguarding in faith-based settings and institutions have all prompted the Group to review its responsibilities and objectives in alignment with the requirements of *Good Practice 5 - Safeguarding for Children and Adults at Risk* (URC's safeguarding policy).
4. Mission Council is invited to approve new terms of reference for the Safeguarding Advisory Group. SAG also requests Mission Council to increase their overall membership by two in order to bring additional professional skills into the group. These requests reflect the strategic priorities of the plan (especially instilling ethos and providing safeguarding training) and the increased workload of SAG.
5. Members of the Group have discussed whether it is time for the SAG to be constituted as a committee of General Assembly in view of its increasing interface with statutory bodies on behalf of the Church and its growing responsibility to ensure that measures to keep children and young people and adults at risk safe are properly implemented across the denomination. Advice has been received to suggest, however, that this step may not be appropriate at the moment, as the Church ought not to adjust substantially the pattern of its committee work until it has taken up the new rhythm of an annual Assembly.
6. Nonetheless, SAG notes that the area it oversees has become more complex and prominent in recent years, and for this reason it asks for a direct reporting line to General Assembly, rather than always working through Mission Council. The Church's proposed new pattern of meeting – more Assemblies, and fewer Mission Councils – makes this access, in the Group's view, important.
7. The proposed terms of reference and the proposed membership of SAG are attached below for Mission Council's consideration and approval.

Appendix I: Proposed terms of reference

1. Background

The Safeguarding Advisory Group (SAG thereafter) is the main body of the Church to maintain a whole-church approach to safeguarding and protection for children, young people and adults at risk throughout the URC as well as to oversee the development, implementation, review and monitoring of the Safeguarding Strategic Plan (2020-2025).

2. Membership of the SAG

The SAG will be chaired by the appropriate Deputy General Secretary (or the General Secretary in the absence of the DGS) and administered by the URC's safeguarding adviser, who will act as secretary for the SAG and will be the central point of contact for all SAG matters.

The membership will include the Head of Children's and Youth Work, the Secretary for Ministries, and up to five further members with relevant skills and experience, including safeguarding children and adults at risk, safeguarding law, police, and employment issues. These five shall include up to three nominated members and up to two whom the Group may co-opt. All of these members may vote, and count towards a quorum.

Nominated members will be appointed to terms of three years and will normally serve no more than two terms. Nominations for membership are to be brought by Nominations Committee to General Assembly (or to Mission Council acting on its behalf).

Co-opted members will be appointed for a term of service relevant to their contribution to the work of the SAG.

The Secretary may invite others with specialist knowledge or to contribute to meetings as occasional visitors if required.

3. Meetings

The members of the SAG will meet at least three times per year, normally at URC Church House.

A meeting quorum will be one half of the current members of the SAG.

Meeting agendas and minutes will be provided by the Secretary of the SAG, and these will include supporting papers or documents for review in a timely manner.

4. Responsibilities of the SAG

The SAG oversees the development of policy and the implementation of Good Practice across the United Reformed Church in safeguarding and protecting children, young

people, and adults from harm, abuse or neglect, making recommendations to Mission Council and General Assembly as appropriate.

The SAG ensures that Good Practice documents are updated, published, and circulated as appropriate.

The SAG develops systems for monitoring local church and synod compliance with Good Practice and devises strategies for addressing identified weaknesses.

The SAG fosters collaboration with ecumenical partners across the full range of safeguarding issues, including engagement in the development of public policy.

The SAG advises on the development and delivery of safeguarding training, and the support of synod/regional safeguarding officers and coordinators.

The SAG oversees services which the United Reformed Church receives from external or other relevant agencies and contractors to support its safeguarding policies and practices.

The Safeguarding Advisory Group reports to Mission Council and General Assembly when appropriate.

5. Amendment, modification or variation

This Terms of Reference may be amended, normally after recommendation by SAG, and always subject to the approval of Mission Council or General Assembly.

Appendix II: Membership of the Safeguarding Advisory Group

Chair

The Revd Richard Church, Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship)

Secretary

Mr Ioannis Athanasiou, URC Safeguarding Adviser

Members

The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith, Secretary for Ministries

Dr Sam Richards, Head of Children's and Youth Work

The Revd Zaidie Orr

Mr Paul Smillie

Co-opted members

The Revd Elizabeth Gray-King, Education and Learning Officer