

Paper R2

Safeguarding Advisory Group
Historic Cases Review

United Church 2015
Church 2015
Reformed Church 2015
Church 2015



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Safeguarding Advisory Group Historic Cases Review

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Richard Church richard.church@urc.org.uk
Action required	Information on Phase 1 Decision in principle on Phase 2
Draft resolution(s)	Mission Council, recognizing the need for an open consultation on issues of abuse in the Church requests the Safeguarding Advisory Group to bring detailed proposals to the next Mission Council meeting.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	Outline of actions taken since May, concerning the triaging of ministers' files. Request for authorisation of a wide consultation in 2016, to invite reporting of incidents of alleged abuse.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	<i>Good Practice Four</i> (2015) , <i>Courage, Cost & Hope</i> (2015); <i>Protecting All God's Children</i> (2010)
Consultation has taken place with...	Safeguarding Advisory Group Coalition of Survivors of Clergy Abuse The Methodist Church Ms Julie Ashby Ellis, external Safeguarding Consultant

Summary of Impact

Financial	Five thousand pounds are set aside for this review work in 2015, and ten thousand in 2016. If new and difficult cases emerge, there could be substantial extra cost to attend to them properly.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	We have tried to learn from other churches' practice and experience, particularly from the Methodist Church.

Historic Cases Review

1. This review was initiated following Mission Council's meeting in May 2015 which authorised the triaging of Ministers' files. This was to ensure that nothing had been missed with regard to the safety of those young people and at-risk adults who are associated with congregations of the United Reformed Church
2. The current plan is that ministers' files be read in synod offices between the end of September and the middle of November. This job is to be done by volunteer readers drawn from the synods (although not deployed within their own synods), and from lists of volunteers supplied by the Coalition of Survivors of Clergy Abuse (although not themselves survivors).
3. All URC ministers were sent an email in July about this process. This stimulated some correspondence about confidentiality and some requests for file disclosure. These ministers were advised to contact their synod moderators. Moderators have received advice on the process for responding to such requests.
4. Following the first reading, most files will simply be put back. However files requiring further scrutiny will be sent electronically to Church House for reading by our external safeguarding consultant. If further action is needed following this second reading the matter will be remitted to synod moderators to operate the usual measures required by the MIND process or to set in train an appropriate pastoral response.
5. All readers will be DBS-checked and will have entered into a formal confidentiality agreement. In addition, readers will operate to standard terms of reference and will report on a standard *pro forma*. Both of these have been produced by Elizabeth Gray-King, who is project-managing this process.
6. Following conversations with colleagues in the Methodist Church, we have informed the Police (Operation Hydrant) of this action and also the Charity Commission. Our insurers have also been informed.
7. The Safeguarding Advisory Group has been consulted and is overseeing this process.
8. Phase Two will invite any individual connected now or in the past to the United Reformed Church to report any recollection or concern that they could have been a victim of abuse. We shall be concerned for allegations involving any lay, ordained or commissioned member of the URC which could suggest that someone:
 - behaved in an abusive or inappropriate manner with a child or adult
 - may have committed a criminal offence against, or related to, a child or adult
 - behaved towards a child or children or adult(s) in a way that indicates s/he is unsuitable to work with children or adults
9. Phase Two has the potential to raise issues that may need to remain unresolved due to lack of evidence. Nonetheless, we wish the URC Historic Safeguarding Cases Review to be known for the quality of its listening. Even when resolution may not be possible, the quality of our listening may have the potential to lead to some kind of healing. Key to the process will be good, secure rubrics for raising and handling allegations, and careful and proper attention to pastoral care.

10. **Processes to raise allegations**
Phase Two is expected to be launched after the March 2016 meeting of Mission Council. Communications will be sent to all synods and to all local churches, inviting people to raise any historic or present issue where there may have been a victim. Reporting forms will be designed so as allow complainants full opportunity to describe the situations as they saw (and see) these. It may be possible to offer an interview, in which the interviewer will fill in a form; this will take considerable resource if it is needed, but it cannot be excluded as part of our process. A secure email address will be set up, to the General Assembly Safeguarding Office. We hope to place a secure reporting form on the URC website. All allegations will be collated and transferred to readers under clear data protection guidelines. At every stage of Phase Two, the Police and the Charity Commission will be informed as appropriate.
11. **Process to handle allegations**
Phase One will have tested the present protocols for reading records and reporting concerns. These existing protocols will be extended to allow for new allegations. It is suggested that a special group be set up to receive allegations forwarded from the Safeguarding Office. This group may work similarly to the present synod Expert Readers and may include readers from Phase One. Decisions will need to be made about whether this group is Assembly-wide or whether there are groups within each synod. There will be clear protocols on information handling, data storage, and communications with alleged victims. There will be clear protocols about any serious present allegations. Secure storage of electronic and paper files has already been agreed within Church House.
12. **Process to provide pastoral care**
Research is presently underway to understand our existing Pastoral Response Teams, synod Safeguarding Advisers and synod Safe Church Advisors. Though it is understood that Moderators are frequently expected to carry out much synod pastoral care, sometimes in partnership with identified synod Pastoral Carers, it is anticipated that there could be so many allegations that the Moderator's role would become unmanageable. Other synod officers such as CYDOs and TDOs often carry out pastoral care, yet it seems important to create a new format for pastoral care around this kind of allegation.
- We intend to ensure that there is good care for alleged victims as well as for alleged perpetrators and for the families of alleged perpetrators. It is anticipated that some liturgies may be commissioned to help support pastoral care including worship for the healing of memories as well as worship for lament and confession.
13. **Timetable**
This paper seeks the in-principle agreement of Mission Council to the detailed preparation of Phase Two, details of which will be brought to the March Mission Council. This way, more detailed design of process and the necessary gathering of human resource can be carried out in January, February and March of 2016. Most importantly, the design of Phase Two cannot be complete until the learning from Phase One has been understood. The March meeting of Mission Council will receive the detailed Phase Two plans and, subject to approval of these, Phase Two will begin immediately afterwards. It is anticipated that Phase Two will formally close at the end of October 2016, but if further allegations come forward, they will be handled appropriately.