

Paper R1

Safeguarding Advisory Group

Past Case Review Update

United Church 2017
Church 2017
Reformed Church 2017
Church 2017

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Safeguarding Advisory Group

Past Case Review Update

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Richard Church richard.church@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information
Draft resolution(s)	None

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	Update on phases 1 and 2 of the Past Case Review
Main points	Closure of open advertising, case progress, learning
Previous relevant documents	Paper R2 March Mission Council 2016 Paper R2 May Mission Council 2017
Consultation has taken place with...	Elizabeth Gray-King, PCR Project Manager Safeguarding Advisory Group

Summary of Impact

Financial	None
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Julie Ashby Ellis, external Safeguarding Consultant

Past Case Review Update

Phase 1 Update

1. The Phase 1 review and recommendation process is still underway, now finishing the work of reading files which have been held in Church House. The move out and back into Church House exacerbated the difficulty of file tracing and reading, but since the move, work is back on track, with final analysis due by 30 September 2017.
2. The two key areas of work identified in the Mission Council report, May 2017, are becoming embedded:
 - 1) *Consolidate and update the way ministers' records are kept, including ensuring consistent information and single file records for each minister*
A special meeting to address consistent record keeping was held in July 2017, with actions created for consultation and eventual implementation.
 - 2) *Ensure that the URC's good practice policies are updated and consistent, then that they are actively, effectively and consistently carried out.* The Safeguarding Advisory group's summer meeting received a draft safeguarding strategy which includes significant work on policy development, consistency, and training. The working group to continue the process of policy updates will undertake work in the autumn of 2017.

Phase 2 Update

3. **Open advertising stage**
Phase Two ceased as an open advertising initiative at the end of June 2017. The PCR button has been removed from the URC website home page and the PCR web page explains the present position. However, the PCR sub pages (pastoral care, prayers, worship resources) remain; many people may still want such resources for local church use.
4. **Cases**
27 people contacted the PCR team, arriving from most synods, with 8 cases withdrawn. One case, after the listening process, proceeded immediately to statutory agencies, with close working from the relevant synod safeguarding officer. At the time of writing, six cases are considered closed. Cases progressed at varying speeds through the process, depending on arrangements with listeners, appointment of panels and timing of the complainant. A surprise to the PCR team, and to some synods, was that a few complainants approached the PCR team with cases which had been previously addressed through councils of the church and had been considered closed. As this could not have been known until a listener produced the report from the complainant, this unduly raised expectations of complainants who wished cases to be reopened. The PCR team exercised as much empathy as possible; however it was not in a position to undermine previous work from URC appointed bodies.
5. **Process**
Feedback showed that some found the language of the process steps to have suggested a judicial process, when at the outset it was clear that the PCR could be no more than a pastoral care process. This caused some confusion of expectation from both complainants and synods. To clarify that the process was to be fair listening, an addition was made to the process in May 2017. A form for the synod in which the

complainant was resident was added, so the synod could add comment about their prior knowledge of the case brought to the PCR.

6. The types of cases which came to the PCR were:

- sexual/abuse of power
- bullying/ harassment/ defamation of character
- bullying/ harassment/ failure to execute procedure or process
- financial/ abuse of power
- sexual/ failure to execute procedure or process

7. **Learning**

7.1 Internal Learning Reviews

In reviewing files, the external safeguarding expert strongly recommended that the URC carry out internal learning reviews, a single organisational review akin to cross-organisation serious case reviews. Three cases were recommended, with the review group comprising the URC Secretary for Ministries, the URC Safeguarding Officer, and a Safeguarding expert from the CCPAS. The group met a number of times in June 2017, with the final reports forming part of the evidence for the Learning Group.

7.2 Learning Group

This group, comprised of a church historian, a Bible scholar, a colleague denomination's safeguarding lead with a background in social work, and a professor of abuse studies, has now reviewed much data and has met in a 24 hour residential. They have confidential access to the raw data and the findings of:

- Phase 1
- the complaints made in Phase 2
- historic Section O cases
- Church House complaints and reputation management files which have had safeguarding issues
- three Internal Learning Reviews

We expect a draft report at the next Mission Council. We anticipate that systemic improvements that can be identified will be made as part of our attempts to prevent further distress/abuse.

8. **Comments**

8.1 The PCR has been a learning curve on many levels. Not as many cases came forward as anticipated and it will be difficult to know the reasons for this. It was impossible to imagine where to advertise to cover and afford the reach of all media, geographic and internet locations. We are saddened by the serious cases that have come to light but encouraged that people have had the courage to come forward to be heard. An immediate organisational benefit is closer working across safeguarding officers in synods and strong evidence for the Safeguarding Advisory Group's work.

8.2 Throughout, we are thankful indeed to the support from synods and officers. Much cannot have been easy. The support from the PCR team has been immense. We were sad to lose Cassi Wright to other employment in July and are grateful for the continuing administrative support of Helen Corbett. No process has been straightforward. Particular and deep thanks go to the many volunteers who make up our teams of listeners, allegations panels and the allegations reference group. None of them has an easy task and the URC is indebted to them for their commitment to this review.