

Paper R2

Safeguarding advisory group

Learning from the Past Case Review

United Church 2018
Church 2018
Reformed Church 2018
Church 2018

Paper R2

Safeguarding advisory group

Learning from the Past Case Review

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Ioannis Athanasiou safeguarding@urc.org.uk Richard Church richard.church@urc.org.uk
Action required	Receive the published report produced by the learning group. Commit to implementing its recommendations. Instruct SAG accordingly.
Draft resolution(s)	Mission Council receives the learning group report with thanks to its authors and to all those who contributed to the Past Case review, and instructs the safeguarding advisory group to implement the recommendations of the learning group, consult with relevant groups, and advise Mission Council on progress at subsequent meetings.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The report captures the learning generated through the two phases of the Past Case Review (May 2015 to June 2017) and supports the URC on the next steps that need to be taken in order to effect cultural change in the safeguarding policies and practices throughout the church.
Main points	<p>The PCR Learning Group report recognises that the Church needs to be more systematic and attentive to matters of safeguarding and protection.</p> <p>The report points at a range of areas of operation to review and improve, including relationships with survivors of abuse, the need to clarify the definition of safeguarding, standardizing policy, training and record keeping.</p> <p>Consideration needs to be given to a new disciplinary process with safeguarding training of panels.</p> <p>Recruitment processes also need to be informed by safeguarding processes.</p>
Previous relevant documents	<p>Mission Council reports from March 2015 onwards. Most recent ones include:</p> <p>Paper R1 November Mission Council 2017</p> <p>Paper R2 March Mission Council 2018</p> <p>Mission Council report to General Assembly 2018, Appendix seven, <i>Book of Reports</i> p38.</p>
Consultation has	MIND, ministries committee, URC General Secretariat.

taken place with...	
----------------------------	--

Summary of impact

Financial	There will be additional cost; at present this is difficult to quantify.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Methodist Church CAFCAS Independent Specialists.

Learning group report on URC's Past Case Review

1. On behalf of the United Reformed Church, Mission Council is asked to receive the final report, findings and recommendations produced by the Past Case Review learning group. In May 2015, the Mission Council authorised a Historic Case Review of previous ministerial practice over the life of the denomination. In response to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) enquiry, the United Reformed Church conducted a review of 1556 ministers' files from 1972 onwards to ensure that any historic issues and concerns were dealt with appropriately. The Historic Case Review (known also as the past case review phase one) was completed in January 2016.
2. In October 2016, phase two of the past case review was launched and opened for anyone to make complaints or raise concerns about past actions or behaviour of people affiliated with the URC since its formation in 1972. Twenty-seven persons were listened to, and further actions were taken to resolve their complaints and concerns. Although the process was planned to conclude in March 2017, phase two was extended and continued until May 2017, when the open call to anyone to report and share concerns was closed. During this phase, in line with individual consents and direct work with survivors, a final number of 18 people were identified, assessed and supported through the past case review process.
3. In spring 2017, the URC sought the support of a learning group to capture the lessons learned through both phases of the past case review. The learning group was comprised of members internal and external to URC: a church historian, a Bible scholar, a sister denomination's safeguarding lead with a background in social work, and an academic scholar of abuse in faith-based settings. The group studied the past case review process, independent reviews and individual cases, analysed the findings and made a good number of recommendations. The report of the PCR learning group was compiled and produced by Dr Lisa Oakley, senior lecturer at University of Chester and Chair of the National working research group for child abuse linked to faith and belief.
4. Undertaking the review process was for many a painful and courageous journey, especially for survivors and victims, shedding light on uncomfortable truths of the past and causing strong feelings and emotions. Mission Council may express heartfelt gratitude to those who approached the United Reformed Church to voice their stories and experiences. Mission Council should also thank those who were involved in both phases of the past case review and the members of the learning group for their time and contribution to completing this learning process.
5. The report makes clear that it is a matter of respect to survivors to acknowledge and apologise for past failures and calls anyone who serve our churches, synods, institutions and offices to take significant steps from now onwards to protect and support survivors and victims from all forms of abuse. Safeguarding is a responsibility for everyone and for all. This includes councils of the Church (at local, synod and Assembly level), resource centres for learning, church members, adherents, trustees, paid and volunteer staff as well as lay and ordained ministers.

6. Mission Council is asked to instruct the safeguarding advisory group to take forward the PCR learning report's recommendations and implement a comprehensive strategic safeguarding plan for the whole Church in the next five years (2018 to 2023). The synods will make their own arrangements to standardise practices and report progress annually in alignment with the requirements of Good Practice 4 Safeguarding Guidance. The safeguarding advisory group will be responsible and accountable for maintaining an oversight of systematic changes in safeguarding policies, practices and procedures of the United Reformed Church, and for reporting to Mission Council periodically.
7. A key principle for URC's tradition is conciliarity, that is, that we reach our decisions as representatives meeting together in council, guided by the Holy Spirit. Similarly our Church expects everyone who serves the United Reformed Church to work collectively to improve our safeguarding policies and practices and ensure safer public worship and services in all congregations and synods across England, Scotland and Wales. Survivors and relevant groups should be consulted on proposed changes and developments as well as these being discussed within relevant committees, trustee bodies, reference groups and local ecumenical partnerships.