

Paper R2

URC's safeguarding strategic plan 2019 to 2023

Safeguarding advisory group

Basic information

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Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Having already welcomed the recommendations of the Past Case Review Learning Group, Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, recognises the URC's safeguarding strategic plan as a proper realization of these recommendations.2. Mission Council directs the Safeguarding Advisory Group:<ol style="list-style-type: none">(a) to oversee the implementation of the plan in the next five years, so far as is possible within present resources and capacity(b) to bring to the next meeting of Mission Council a budget for the full implementation of the plan and proposals for resourcing this work(c) to continue to oversee implementation beyond 2019.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The past case review indicated the need for the Church to undertake systemic changes. This strategy with its clear six objectives aims at effecting cultural change and improvements in the current safeguarding policies, practices and procedures of the Church in the next five years.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	Paper R2 at Mission Council, November 2018.
Consultation has taken place with...	Members of the SAG. URC General Secretary. Synod Moderators and Synod Safeguarding Officers.

Summary of impact

Financial	Proposed resolutions have financial implications that require effective planning and management of available resources. The costs of safeguarding training and work with adult survivors of abuse will be additional to existing budgets and structures of the Church in the five-year period of the plan.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	High potential of partnership working with ecumenical partners and looking at the best use of available resources.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The past case review (May 2015 to June 2017) concluded its work with the publication of a major and independently authored report last year. The report captures the learning generated through the two phases of the past case review, provides a range of recommendations and identifies areas for improvement in safeguarding in the United Reformed Church. These include safer recruitment, direct work with adult survivors of abuse, the need to clarify the definition of safeguarding, a call to standardize safeguarding training and record keeping, changes to disciplinary processes, etc.
- 1.2 Undertaking the review was for many a painful and courageous journey, especially for survivors, shedding light on uncomfortable truths of the past and causing strong feelings and emotions. On November 2018, Mission Council expressed heartfelt apology to those who approached the Church to voice their stories and experiences and thanked all those who were involved for their time and contribution to completing the past case review.
- 1.3 Responding to the instruction given by Mission Council in November 2018, the safeguarding advisory group reviewed all the PCR learning report's recommendations and consulted with relevant groups and people, finally producing a comprehensive strategic safeguarding plan for the Church to take effect in the next five years (2019 to 2023). The plan proposes six strategic priorities and objectives for the safeguarding policy and practice of the United Reformed Church. According to the URC's mission, the aim of the Church is to proclaim the love of God in Jesus Christ in word and deed. A main strategy to achieve that overall aim is to ensure that anyone who engages with our congregations, synods, institutions, and offices across the three nations of England, Scotland and Wales is committed to protecting children and adults who are or might be experiencing abuse or neglect.

2. Working and learning together

- 2.1 Safeguarding people is a journey and part of the URC's mission. We journey alongside those who have been abused, we safeguard the integrity of creation, and we all go together as one body. The strategy for safeguarding at the URC places people and collaborative action at the forefront of delivering the tasks and

actions of this strategy in ways that align with the conciliar traditions and policies of the Church as well as with safeguarding statutory requirements and regulations. Central to this is the view of safeguarding as being everyone's responsibility, to support the welfare and wellbeing of people across the denomination, along with a commitment to a common policy – *Good Practice 4 - Safeguarding for Children and Adults at Risk* – as the only safeguarding policy of the Church. As our overarching safeguarding principles indicate in the main safeguarding policy of the Church, the people of the United Reformed Church have been committed to:

- a) the care and nurture of all children, young people and adults
- b) the safeguarding and protection of all children, young people and adults at risk
- c) the nurturing of a loving church environment which is safe and caring for all people
- d) an informed vigilance about the dangers of all forms of abuse within all aspects of the Church
- e) ensuring that everyone who engages with the life of church is responsible for keeping people safe
- f) working together with voluntary, statutory and non-statutory agencies, and other denominations and faith-based organisations

2.2 The URC will work collectively to pursue all the principles above and create safer and more viable environments for all local congregations, synods, institutions and offices through the working out of the following strategic priorities and objectives. The different parts of the church: Assembly and its staff, synods and local churches are interrelated and co-dependent. The URC is a small denomination, where it is common to find people who are related to one another, and for individuals to hold more than one responsibility within the Church. Therefore, the risks and likelihood of conflicts of interest throughout the congregations, synods and offices of the Church are extremely high and the need for clarity of responsibilities is essential. Although the Church is characterised by limited resources and the growing demand for safeguarding arrangements might be restricted by our capacity to implement the tasks of this strategy, the relations and networks of people of the United Reformed Church working and learning together can be the catalyst for positive changes and improvements. The strategy instigates a learning process for all in our journey to safeguard people at the URC as well as to build trust and consistency.

3. Delivering a five-year strategy

3.1 Many factors have helped to shape and influence our six strategic priorities, including:

- a) *Good Practice 4 – Policy Guidance in Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk* for General Assembly and synods.

- b) The safeguarding strategic plan (2017 to 2018) which was agreed at the safeguarding advisory group (SAG) in October 2017 and reviewed by the same group in June 2018.
 - c) New policy and regulatory requirements that outlined the need to embed a whole church approach and make people aware of these changes throughout the URC. Recent guidance and a safeguarding alert raised by the Charity Commission (December 2017) indicated that safeguarding must be a key priority for all churches and synods, and protect all, not just those groups traditionally considered as being at risk.
 - d) A consultation survey of designated safeguarding professionals in the synods (SSOs and CYDO's) who shared anonymously their views about the existing plan and the key areas of safeguarding practice in the Church that require standardisation (January to February 2018).
 - e) The past case review (PCR), which allowed the Church to learn from its past. Conducted by a learning group of URC and external experts, the PCR report resulted in key lessons and recommendations on specific policies and practices requiring further development and change.
 - f) The annual safeguarding reports compiled by Synod Safeguarding Officers in March 2018. The purpose of the annual safeguarding report is to enable the URC as one Church with its various trustee bodies to review its commitment to safeguarding children and adults at risk and provide suitable support and guidance to synods and local churches. For the first time, all thirteen synods sent in their annual reports and provided an overview of current policies and practices within synods.
 - g) The launch of a reference group of adult survivors of abuse in November 2018. Creating a space for survivors at the URC contributed to identifying priorities and integrating their voice in the development of the safeguarding strategic plan.
- 3.2 In the next five years, people and committees of the United Reformed Church will work together on the following six strategic objectives in alignment with URC's safeguarding principles:
- 1. Instil a safeguarding ethos of care and service within all congregations, synods and bodies of the URC.
 - 2. Ensure initial and ongoing pastoral care and support to those who were impacted by safeguarding incidents and concerns.
 - 3. Set up secure and appropriate systems and processes of data and information handling and reporting safeguarding.
 - 4. Ensure that the safeguarding policies and procedures are updated, reviewed and implemented in practice throughout the URC.
 - 5. Provide appropriate and accessible safeguarding training for all those who are accountable for and working with children, young people and adults.
 - 6. Encourage and build constructive partnerships with statutory, non statutory bodies, other denominations and faith-based communities.

- 3.3 Delivery of the strategic plan will occur in two phases: years one, two, three and four, will focus on planning, delivery and evaluation, and finally in year five, the safeguarding advisory group (SAG) will review its progress against its published objectives and will undertake planning and consultation to develop a new strategic plan for 2024 onwards. The safeguarding advisory group will be responsible and accountable for maintaining oversight of the priorities and activities in the plan and reporting to Mission Council through its secretary (the safeguarding adviser of the Church). The synods will make their own strategic arrangements related to the whole-Church strategy depending on the available resources and existing safeguarding practices. The synods will also report progress annually through their safeguarding reports.

4. Resourcing a five-year strategy

- 4.1 To make our safeguarding more thorough and careful is bound to involve some fresh investment of resource. We seek a uniformly high standard among synods but may not simply impose this as a demand upon them, when they have varied starting points – in funds, in volunteer strength and in patterns of paid staffing.
- 4.2 It is important for SAG to consult carefully with each synod in the coming months, to discuss what resources would be needed to deliver the strategy effectively in the period to 2023, what level of resource the synod would wish to find itself, and what ought to be provided from the wider Church. It may also be necessary for SAG to consult with the finance committee, in order to bring informed budget proposals to Mission Council in November and in the future.
- 4.3 That budgeting process need not stop the plan unfolding immediately. Some of its recommendations are already actioned and others could be implemented from current resource. But full implementation will depend on resources beyond those currently deployed. Nonetheless, if Mission Council is able to recognise this plan as a right aspiration for the Church, and a proper response to the learning group report, then serious consideration about how to implement it can be put in hand.

Outline of six strategic objectives

URC Strategic Objective	Key Tasks	Rationale	Success Indicators	Deadlines	Key Staff	Wider implications
1. Instil a safeguarding ethos of care and service within all local congregations, synods and bodies of the URC.	1.1. Ensure that each local church and community has one safeguarding coordinator responsible for responding to child and adult protection concerns.	All URC churches have a single point of contact to protect places of worship and all those who are working for and affiliated with them.	All our churches have a single point of contact to report safeguarding	March 2021	SSOs CSC Data/Admin staff	Unbiased and transparent approach to local safeguarding arrangements The added value and active role of deputies safeguarding coordinators, elders and volunteers be acknowledged The need to review and update current advise on safeguarding designated persons in Good Practice 4 The different expertise required for children or adults at risk
	1.2. Contact details are added and updated on church posters, noticeboards, URC databases, <i>Yearbook</i> and synod directories and websites	Ensure that details of designated safeguarding professionals (Church/ Synod Safeguarding Officers) are public and easily accessible to raise safeguarding concerns or other general enquiries throughout the Church	Numbers of churches providing data on church returns	On time of annual returns (normally January)	Church Secretaries CSC Admin staff SSOs S/G Adviser Publications staff	The risk of low rate in church returns Correlate data of synod safeguarding returns and church annual returns to inform and regularly update a centralised database Annual <i>Yearbook</i>

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1. Instil a safeguarding ethos of care and service within all congregations, synods and bodies of the URC.	1.3 Raise awareness of safeguarding with guidance, resources and material within the worship, care and life of the URC	Keep every minister, elder, staff member and volunteer regularly updated and well supported to place safeguarding at the heart of church life, not to apply a secular tick box-add on	Materials downloaded from websites, distributed and used More requests for training made by churches Training for SSO and CSC	Ongoing	S/G Adviser Comms team Assembly and Synod staff and leaders Church Ministers and Elders SSOs CSCs	Changes in public policy and legislation Ask help from experts and academics in the field Pay attention to understanding spiritual abuse at the URC The use of the website, new technologies, social media and free resources packs
	1.4 Develop shared awareness of safeguarding and protection, and what counts as a safeguarding concern across the denomination	Build on common understanding of safeguarding and support for ministers, frontline staff, elders and other volunteers in assessing safeguarding incidents and concerns	Training material and resources	June 2023	SAG S/G Adviser SSOs	The opportunity of updating Good Practice 4 and recognise it as the main safeguarding policy for the whole church The vital role of synods and SSOs

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	1.5. Improve safeguarding communications between Church House, synods and URC safeguarding designated persons.	Enable better information cascade, sharing of expertise and good practice in handling safeguarding incidents and concerns internally and externally	Agreed flow chart for sharing information within the URC Number of synods using the main database	January 2022	S/G Adviser SSOs CSCs	Three national meetings with all SSOs Periodic 121 conversations of SSO with SA Events and conferences
2. Ensure initial and ongoing pastoral care and support to those who were impacted by safeguarding incidents and concerns	2.1 Establish ways of support that contribute to a lasting healing process for survivors and those affected by abuse, harm or neglect	This allows individuals who disclose abuse or neglect to feel they are listened to and that the Church is ready to be involved in meeting their pastoral care and support needs from the time of disclosure	Positive feedback and evaluation by survivors Fewer complaints and reports about pastoral care and support	January 2020	S/G Adviser SSO & CSC Active Ministers Synod Pastoral Committees	The ongoing impact of abuse on survivors Avoiding re-traumatisation of processes, which compounds the original abuse
	2.2. Co-produce with synods an appropriate case management system that provides prompt and proportionate care and support to those children, young people and adults in greatest need	This helps assess and prevent safeguarding risks with pastoral care plans established as early as possible and followed up	Number of pastoral care plans in place for each case that come to URC's attention	January 2021	S/G Adviser SSOs Synod staff	Access for all synods to a centralised recording system controlled by CH Expectations and challenges of managing workload. Level of care varies as well as the stage of offering support

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2. Ensure initial and ongoing pastoral care and support to those who were impacted by safeguarding incidents and concerns	2.3. Consult and engage with survivors and relevant groups and organisations	This ensures that the URC co-produces with survivors and relevant groups and adopts appropriate approaches to supporting survivors and perpetrators of abuse	Number of consultations and reviews with survivors and relevant groups New services of care and support	Ongoing	S/G Adviser SSOs SAG	Principles of confidentiality and integrity Approach the right people and organisations Voices should be heard in meaningful and non-tokenistic ways
	2.4 Provide support for local congregations and communities affected by serious incidents of abuse	A whole-congregation approach will support all people at the local church to recover from trauma and crisis	Lessons drawn and impacted on local safeguarding practice	Ongoing	CSCs SSOs	The interrelated work and role of pastoral committees and ministers
3. Set up secure and appropriate systems and processes of data and information handling and reporting safeguarding	3.1 Develop and implement a centralised, standardised electronic system to record and follow up safeguarding cases and concerns from the beginning of the process	This protects the rights of individuals and relationships across the URC and ensures individual cases, and ministerial and personal files are integrated, monitored and securely stored in one unified system	Evidence of good practice Evidence of using system effectively User-friendly	June 2020	Ministries office S/G Adviser SSOs	The use of CH database by all synods if possible Vital to have all synods accessing the main database This presupposes a review of data sharing between other teams (such as ministry) and safeguarding Access and permissions to appropriate staff

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3. Set up secure and appropriate systems and processes of data and information handling and reporting safeguarding	3.2 Ensure there are clear lines of accountability by use of consistent forms, protocols and reporting procedures	This helps everyone be aware of protocols and forms to responsibly raise concerns, seek unbiased advice and share information responsibly to protect individuals and the wider church	Evidence of good practice Evidence of system use	June 2020	S/G Adviser SSOs CSCs	Production and use of GP5 as the main and one manual of safeguarding policy and practice across the URC New policies (whistleblowing, bullying/harassment, lone working, across the URC (SAG, HRAG or CHMG) Adoption of Church House's reporting concerns forms Cross-over with HR and Comms / Reputation management
	3.3. Encourage and expect each URC synod to annually provide safeguarding data and information in a consistent format	This ensures consistency of what information is required as well as regular reports and reviews of internal safeguarding policy and practice	Evidence of review and changes on policy and practice Use of standardised forms across synods and churches	Each May in all years	SSOs CSCs	Collating information and producing the annual S/G report for SAG and the whole church
	3.4 Facilitate minimum standards through compliance with procedures and obtain benchmark progress for each synod	This will embed a culture of co-design on the journey of safeguarding in open and transparent ways	Synod positive feedback of co-production	Each May in all years	S/G Adviser SSOs	Use of the review of GP4 and production of GP5 (what is compulsory?) Avoid a hierarchical model Working closely with synods

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	3.5. Establish tools to measure change and review adequacy and robustness of procedures and policies	Support a culture of continuous learning and improvement in the church and identify systemic barriers	Standardised and consistent use of audit tools Number of independent reviews and audits	April 2021	S/G Adviser SSOs CSCs Elders	Fear of an independent oversight at the denomination, synods and local churches Co-produce audits with survivors of abuse in the design and delivery Avoid long-lasting reviews and excessive paperwork
4. Ensure the safeguarding policies and procedures are updated, reviewed and implemented in practice throughout the URC	4.1 Update URC's safeguarding policy every two years following the publication of Good Practice 5	This ensures good practice guidance is regularly reviewed and updated in line with new legislation and policy changes	Up-to-date publications and e-resources intake	October 2019	S/G Adviser SSOs	Whole review or update or rewrite identified policy areas that require improvements Resources (writing group, publications, etc)
	4.2 Review current safer recruitment practice of the URC and develop a Good Practice Guidance	Provide specific and clear advice that (i) ensures appropriate recruitment, induction and retention of trustees, and of paid and voluntary workers (ii) arranges lawful criminal record checks (DBS/PVG) for all who need this.	Reduced number of complaints to CH, Synods and DDC DDC Satisfaction survey	October 2019	S/G Adviser SSOs Ministries Office DBS Verifiers	Avoid over-checking criminal records Clarify when it is not appropriate to check Understanding checks as part of a wider recruitment process Scotland's different policy
	4.3 Develop clear guidance on conducting thorough safeguarding risk assessments and supporting offenders and alleged offenders across the URC	This ensures prevention of abuse and better support for those who are accountable to manage risk and monitor any who may pose a risk	Number of safeguarding contracts/agreements Publications and resources	March 2020	S/G Adviser SSOs CSCs	Review existing sections of GP4 Risk assessment and covenants of care forms and templates DBS/PVG referrals

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	4.4 Embed safeguarding knowledge and skills in the disciplinary processes and procedures for ministers/CRCWs	This helps establish good practice and expertise among all mandated group members to support those involved in safeguarding cases	Evidence of good practice	June 2020	S/G Adviser MIND SSOs	Clear and transparent processes and investigations
	4.5 Ensure people in positions of leadership and accountability are aware of any changes to safeguarding policy and practice	New policy changes are discussed within supervision and training development and shared within teams or working groups	Evidence of good practice	January 2020 and Ongoing	S/G Adviser SSOs	The central role of elders, ministers, synod moderators and General secretaries in understanding safeguarding and being aware of URC's policies
5. Provide appropriate and accessible safeguarding training for all those who are accountable for and working with children, young people and adults	5.1. Co-produce with synods URC's standardised safeguarding training package for all roles and positions throughout the URC expected to undertake regular and mandatory safeguarding training	Benchmark and develop URC's appropriate safeguarding training guidance and programme aligned with synod practices and public policy requirements (including material and tools, bespoke, free-access and on-line courses)	Training used consistently in each synod	October 2019	S/G Adviser Education and Learning SSOs Synod Training officers Individual safeguarding trainers CSCs	Recording attendance and renewal of URC or other denominations' training On-line access limits interaction and collaboration Accrediting URC safeguarding training Defining training packages tailored to specific roles and positions (e.g. Elders<->SSO) Accessibility

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<p>5. Provide appropriate and accessible safeguarding training for all those who are accountable for and working with children, young people and adults</p>						
	<p>5.2. Ensure robust guidance on mandatory training in both areas of safeguarding (children and adults at risk) for all identified groups involved in regulated activities</p>	<p>Mandatory training will ensure monitoring the delivery of standardised and refreshing safeguarding training for identified roles of accountability and leadership</p>	<p>Numerical evidence of training attendance Number of certificates per role</p>	<p>June 2020</p>	<p>S/G Adviser SAG SSOs</p>	<p>Database of recording attendance Mandatory safeguarding training for active ministers</p>
	<p>5.3. Develop and maintain quality standards of regular safeguarding training and professional development across the URC</p>	<p>This ensures that consistency and quality at different levels of development and delivery of safeguarding training are reviewed regularly</p>	<p>Positive reviews of training provision</p>	<p>June 2021</p>	<p>SAG SSOs Ministries</p>	<p>Connection with accreditation Working with learning resource centres</p>
	<p>5.4 Develop and update a comprehensive guidance and package of support resources to equip serving elders and trustees (URC and synod) and make them aware of their safeguarding responsibilities</p>	<p>The aim is that elders/trustees feel confident in safeguarding and preventing abuse, as well as protecting the assets of churches and trusts and the reputation of the church</p>	<p>Training booked and attended</p>	<p>June 2020 and ongoing</p>	<p>S/G Adviser SSOs</p>	<p>Raise awareness using traditional and visual methodologies (induction material, Reform, video, etc) Keep elders up to date regarding changes to regulations and policies Training can be an option as</p>

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						well as regular briefings and attendance of safeguarding designated persons in Elders or Trustees Meetings
	5.5 Value the expertise and skills of Synod Safeguarding Officers to effectively oversee the safeguarding practice across the denomination	Ensure professionals and/or volunteers who take up the role of synod designated person are equipped and remain resourceful to lead the safeguarding practice of their local churches local in all aspects	Numbers of co-working groups and surveys with SSOs Feedback from SSOs	Ongoing	SSOs S/G Adviser Line managers of SSOs	Common understanding of safeguarding between SSOs Joint posts with CYDO roles National context (Wales/Scotland)
	5.6 Ensure safeguarding is part of the induction of any newly appointed persons to URC roles (particularly trustees, children workers and those in regulated activities) alongside the specific role induction	This allows each new role holder to understand the personal and corporate liability should a safeguarding incident happen, while building a culture of prevention at every church setting, committee, venue.	Number of job and role descriptions where safeguarding is listed as duty	June 2022	HR Ministries Synods	Need to communicate with HR team at CH in order to update existing recruitment and induction policies Safer recruitment guidance is paramount to support these who recruit, induct and line-manage workers and volunteers
6. Encourage and build constructive partnerships with statutory,	6.1 Produce guidance about when churches and synods should call the statutory authorities	This allows the setting up of information sharing protocols and the referral of cases crossing statutory thresholds to statutory agencies without delay	Download of on-line resource Increased number of referrals	March 2020	S/G Adviser SSOs	GP5 CoE recent guidance on reporting and sharing information

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non-statutory bodies, other denomination and faith-based communities	6.2 Improve public awareness of URC's good practice in safeguarding across denominational, cross-denominational and ecumenical settings	Encourage personal drive and actions of URC people (particularly volunteers) to improve the safeguarding ethos at the local church and public acknowledgement of personal commitment and collective efforts	Increased number of local initiatives and campaigns Opportunities to share expertise externally	March 2022	Synods S/G Adviser SSOs CSCs SAG	Initiatives and events Links with other developments 'Walking the way safely' Links with the Methodists
6. Encourage and build constructive partnerships with statutory, non-statutory bodies, other denomination and faith-based communities	6.3 Develop guidance on safeguarding and eldership with clear steps and legal responsibilities of serving elders/trustees to work with others to help deter and prevent safeguarding issues from occurring	This will help elders and synod trustees to protect the assets and reputation of the church and to share information and report serious incidents promptly and properly to Charity Commission or other regulatory bodies	Increased use of the guidance Feedback from elders meeting	October 2020	S/G Adviser SSOs	Number of elders Referrals to CC
	6.4 Endorse close partnership and knowledge exchange of best practice with other denominations to support LEP's and church communities	Promote ecumenical dialogue and co-produce partnerships for the benefit of public worship, protection of the vulnerable and pastoral care of communities	Publication of material and resources Number of joint events and seminars	Ongoing	S/G Adviser SSOs CSCs CFS	Shared resources and common events Ecumenical and international settings

Glossary

CC Charity Commission

CFS Churches Forum for Safeguarding

CH Church House

CRCW Church-related Community Workers

CSC Church Safeguarding Coordinator

DBS Disclosure and Barring Service

DDC Due Diligence Check Ltd

GP4 Good Practice 4

GP5 Good Practice 5

LEP Local Ecumenical Partnership

LADO Local Authority Designated Officer

MC Mission Council

MIND Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline Advisory Group

PVG Protecting Vulnerable Groups (Scotland Scheme)

SAG Safeguarding Advisory Group

S/G Safeguarding

SSO Synod Safeguarding Officer

GA General Assembly

GP Good Practice

URC The United Reformed Church