

Paper T1

Annual Report

Safeguarding Committee

Basic information

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| Contact name and email address | Roger Jones – Convenor rjones@urcsouthern.org.uk Sharon Barr – Secretary sharon.barr@urc.org.uk |
| Action required | To note. |
| Draft resolution(s) | None. |

Summary of content

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| Subject and aim(s) | Overview of safeguarding in the URC. |
| Main points | Highlights Risk areas Areas of development Summary of Annual Church Safeguarding Returns for 2021. |
| Previous relevant documents | Annual Safeguarding Report from the Safeguarding Advisory Group to General Assembly 2021. |
| Consultation has taken place with... | Synod Safeguarding Officers. |

Summary of impact

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| Financial | None. |
| External (e.g. ecumenical) | N/A. |

Background

The Safeguarding Committee began to meet following General Assembly 2022. At the time of writing, the committee has met three times and is made up of 15 people with various roles both within the URC and external representatives. The Revd Roger Jones is the Chair and Sharon Barr is the Staff Secretary.

Historically, this report has come from the Safeguarding Advisory Group and has been a deep dive into the data from the Annual Church Safeguarding Returns. However, following feedback from the last year's report that went to Assembly Executive 2022, a more concise report is welcomed at General Assembly and the in-depth analysis and actions should be considered at the Safeguarding Committee meetings.

Highlights

Church House staff team

For over a year, the safeguarding team at Church House has not been running at full capacity due to vacancies.

From February 2023, there is now a full team in place with the following people in role. Please feel free to contact them as needed:

- Sharon Barr – Designated Safeguarding Lead
- Carrie Kaunda – Training and Development Coordinator
- Kerry Baker – Policy Development Coordinator
- Emma Pearce – Administrative Assistant.

Safeguarding team away days

Last year, the Synod Safeguarding Officers and the Church House Safeguarding Team met for a two-day event. It was the first of its kind with the team learning more about how to support local churches to safeguard those in their congregations. The team completed sessions on domestic abuse in the church, supporting refugees and asylum seekers, and safeguarding in a church context. The days were a great success, and they will be coming together this year for a similar event.

Case management system

The URC's Past Case Review and subsequently the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse highlighted the importance of effective recorded systems for safeguarding. As a result, all Synod Safeguarding Officers are starting to use a case management system for managing safeguarding concerns. The system will ensure consistency of recording across the denomination and allow for better auditing and compliance management of cases. The system is bespoke to the URC, with thanks to Gillian Jones, Matt Knowles and Belinda Herbert, who have worked on the development of the system to suit the needs of the denomination.

Training

During the past year, Carrie Kaunda has created a suite of training courses for use by Synod Safeguarding Officers. These go through rigorous scrutiny by all Synod Safeguarding Officers and the Training Reference Group before they are rolled out across the URC. As part of her role, Carrie has been able to offer some of these courses online and accessible to all Synods, which have proved popular, and she delivered to 500 individuals over the last year. For more detail on available courses, please see the URC Safeguarding page of the website (www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding/) or the safeguarding page of your Synod's website.

Safeguarding strategic plan

The Safeguarding Committee has reviewed the strategic plan during the last year. The wider safeguarding team, including Synod and local church staff and volunteers, continue to achieve and work towards achieving the objectives of the plan. Synods engage with it differently, from some who have used it as a basis for their Synod Strategic Safeguarding Plan to others who, although working towards the key tasks, are not using the plan as a framework for their safeguarding work as it is not the easiest to use document.

The key tasks that still need significant work to achieve are those linked to the engagement and collaboration with survivors and victims of abuse. The feeling from the

Synod Safeguarding Officers and members of the Safeguarding Committee is that this work should grow organically with real focus and benefit to those who engage, rather than be a tick box exercise to achieve the objective of the strategic plan; therefore, discussion has started about how this would be best achieved. If you are aware of anyone who would be suited to either supporting the formation of survivors work for the URC or who might be a survivor wanting to engage in this work, then please contact Sharon Barr.

Guidance on work in private dwellings

During last year the Safeguarding team and Children and Youth team worked on guidance for work in private dwellings, which can be found here:

www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding/guidance-for-urc-local-church-activities-in-private-dwellings/

This will be updated as needed.

Risk areas

Synod Safeguarding Officer workload

All Synods (bar one that is in vacancy), now have safeguarding professionals in roles as Synod Safeguarding Officers (SSOs). The hours allocated to each person vary across Synods, as does the level of administration support offered to SSOs. This can cause some issue with capacity to undertake safeguarding tasks in the Synods and engagements denominationally. Half-time for each Synod with administration support is, therefore, the norm and we can see that less than that would create significant capacity issues.

As the workload and expectations of the safeguarding role in Synods increases with tasks, such as historical concerns being shared, more training courses being delivered, SSOs increasingly seeking advice due to confidence in churches about SSOs' ability to support, Synods should be aware of the need to review the workload and hours given to safeguarding staff within Synods.

Areas of development

Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse working group

Following the conclusion of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) and its final report being published, a working group has been set up with key safeguarding personnel from the URC to review the reports related to faith organisations, looking particularly as the recommendations from these reports and drawing upon any learning and action points that should be implemented by the URC. The group's findings will be presented to the Safeguarding Committee in early 2024, with any significant actions being presented in its report to General Assembly 2024.

Good Practice 5 review

Kerry Baker is leading on the review of Good Practice 5, the denomination's safeguarding guidance documentation. The aim is to have it ready to launch at an online safeguarding symposium on 12 October 2023, further details of which will be circulated in due course.

As part of the review of the document, Synod Moderators, Church Safeguarding Coordinators and Synod Safeguarding Officers were all given the opportunity to give

feedback, and this has guided the focus of the review. The hope for Good Practice 6 is that it will make clearer who takes on what role when managing safeguarding within the Church, will explain the theology of safeguarding and the document will be more succinct with better use of appendices.