

## Annual safeguarding report 2024

This report is created from data captured from the Annual Church Safeguarding Returns for 2023, but does not include analysis from Synod Safeguarding Officers through their reporting due to time frame for submission. Further in-depth analysis will be reported to the September 2024 Safeguarding Committee for reflection and action.

### Introduction

81.8% of churches completed safeguarding annual returns.  
5.3% of churches have no Safeguarding Co-ordinator.

**Comments:** There has been an increase in the percentage of churches completing their annual safeguarding return this year, which is positive, and also the number of churches without Safeguarding Co-ordinators had reduced, which is encouraging.

As a wider safeguarding team, we continue to raise the awareness of local churches to the additions to the URC Structure which were made following General Assembly 2021. They set the expectation for churches to submit their annual return, have a Safeguarding Co-ordinator in role and review their policy annually. As a safeguarding team, our hope is that as a denomination there is a shift in the safeguarding culture with all involved in the life of the URC, acknowledging that safeguarding is a Christian calling and core to all we do, and not a tick box governance and compliance issue.



### Safeguarding concerns

Number of concerns related to children: 63, the main two categories of abuse that these reports fall under are physical abuse and neglect.

Number of concerns related to adults: 145, the three highest categories of abuse being supported by local churches are self-harm, domestic abuse and emotional abuse.

**Comments:** The number of safeguarding concerns is in line with 2022 figures, and safeguarding concerns related to adults is higher than children.



There is a shift in the areas of concerns being reported by local churches on previous years related to children which have historically been self-harm and mental health, whereas this year it is physical abuse and neglect. As a safeguarding team, we need to consider how we can support local churches in this area with training, resources and signposting.

There had been calls generally for more specific training for adult safeguarding, which the safeguarding team have responded to with training sessions being run denominationally on areas such as domestic abuse, adult safeguarding, modern slavery – further details can be found here: [www.urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/National-safeguarding-2024-4.pdf](http://www.urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/National-safeguarding-2024-4.pdf)

## Pastoral care and support

**Comments:** Local churches and Synods continue to source pastoral care and support for individual and groups in need of this, and although it has been discussed more widely, it is not currently the plan to have one provider of this support across the denomination.

## Managing risk

62 known offenders and / or those who pose a risk to children or adults are attending URC churches.

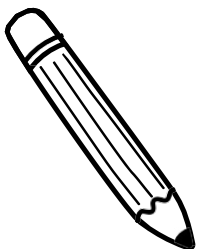
**Comments:** Those on safeguarding agreements in local churches continue to be supported by Synod Safeguarding Officers. The URC's guidance for the management of those who pose a risk is currently being revised by the Policy Development Co-ordinator, and specific training for those that support those on agreement is being developed by the Training Development Co-ordinator.



## Safer recruitment

**Comments:** Safer recruitment training has been delivered across the denomination and is always well attended. There seems to be an understanding of the importance of this in the Church, and that safer recruitment is more than just a DBS check. 1997 DBS/PVGs were carried out for roles across the denomination in 2023, with 5% of those having a blemish that required a risk assessment on the suitability for that individual to carry out the role.

Following feedback from the 2022 annual returns seeking clarity on what should be the safer recruitment process to follow for those that lead worship in local churches that don't fit into any of the recognised categories, a paper is being brought by Ministries to this year's General Assembly to offer guidance on this.



## Additional comments

The Safeguarding Committee would like to thank all local churches and church safeguarding coordinators for taking the time to complete the annual return, it really does support the work of the Synod Safeguarding Officer and that of the Church House safeguarding team.