

Paper I1

Annual Report

Safeguarding Committee

Basic information

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

Subject and aim(s)	Overview of safeguarding in the URC
Main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highlights• Risk Areas• Areas of development• Summary of Annual Church Safeguarding Returns for 2025
Previous relevant documents	T1 Safeguarding Annual Report from General Assembly 2025
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Safeguarding Officers

Summary of impact

Financial	None
External (eg ecumenical)	N/A

Background

The Safeguarding Committee meets quarterly, with one of these meetings held as a full-day, in-person session at the Office of the General Assembly in London. This schedule aligns with the workflow of both the Assembly Executive and the General Assembly.

The committee comprises 17 members representing a range of roles within the URC, alongside external representatives. There is currently one vacancy for an individual with lived experience. If you feel you may be suited to this role and would like to be considered, please contact the committee convenor or secretary.

Revd. Roger Jones has now completed his term as committee convenor, and the process to appoint his successor is underway. Further information is available on the URC website.

Highlights

The Church House Safeguarding Team has remained unchanged since General Assembly 2025. The following staff members continue in their roles:

- Sharon Barr – Head of Safeguarding (Part-time)
- Carrie Kaunda – Training and Development Officer (Part-time)
- Kerry Baker – Policy Development Officer (Part-time)
- Matt Knowles – Casework Supervisor (Part-time)
- Emma Pearce – Administration Coordinator (Full-time, supporting both the Safeguarding and Ministries teams)

The team is available to support safeguarding work across the denomination and collaborates closely with Synod Safeguarding Officers. Please feel free to contact any member of the team for assistance.

Safeguarding Team Residential

Last year's annual safeguarding residential brought together the General Assembly Safeguarding Team and Synod Safeguarding Officers. As SSOs are often the sole safeguarding professionals within their synods, the opportunity to gather, learn, and network is essential. Coming together helps reduce the isolation that can accompany their roles, providing space to share both challenges and successes, hear one another's experiences, and build confidence as a wider safeguarding community.

The programme included a range of speakers who led sessions on Cultural Sensitivities in the Church, Trauma-Informed Practice, and Deliverance Ministry within the Church of England.

Safeguarding Symposium

In 2025, the Safeguarding Team organised and facilitated a safeguarding symposium. During the event, we presented the training matrix approved by General Assembly earlier in the year and updated attendees on key changes to safeguarding policy and guidance over the previous 12 months. Our keynote speaker was from Restored UK, a Christian domestic abuse charity.

The symposium was attended by approximately 170 participants, and the feedback received was overwhelmingly positive. A selection of comments included:

"I just felt that I had to drop you a line to say how good this afternoon's session was. Part 1 was packed with useful information and Part 2 (Domestic Abuse) was brilliantly delivered, thought-provoking and very relevant. Thanks for arranging it and to the people who took part."

"I have very much enjoyed the URC Safeguarding Symposium! It was very well organised and presented, and the programme included just the right amount of useful information from the safeguarding staff. The talk from Restore UK on domestic abuse was insightful and thought-provoking."

Given the strong engagement and positive response, we plan to continue hosting the symposium on a biannual basis.

Training

Since General Assembly 2025, the wider Safeguarding Team has continued to raise awareness of the changes to the training matrix. It was recognised that the most significant impact would be the increased demand for Advanced training. To support

synods, Carrie has delivered numerous Advanced courses for ministers, alongside the bespoke training sessions available to individuals across the denomination. These have been very well received, with 535 participants attending the online courses—an increase in uptake compared with the previous year.

The Foundation eLearning course also continues to see strong engagement, with 1,220 completions recorded over the past year.

Synods remain committed to delivering the Combined, Intermediate, and Advanced safeguarding training in person. The Church of Scotland provides equivalent training for churches within the Synod of Scotland, while the Synod of Wales offers adapted courses that align with the training framework required by Social Care Wales.

Policy

The URC's Good Practice documentation underwent a full review in 2023. Further amendments are scheduled for 2026. This work has been slightly delayed from the original 2025 timeline due to anticipated legislative changes. Mandated reporting, as recommended by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA), is expected to be introduced through the Crime and Policing Bill, and the Good Practice document will need to be updated accordingly once the legislation is finalised.

Kerry has also completed and published updates to the following documents:

- Self-Declaration for Elders
- Interim Guidance on the Update Service

In addition, she continues to lead work on the Synod Safeguarding Reviews and the development of the Safeguarding Committee's Strategic Plan, as outlined further below.

Risk Areas

Recording and reporting

The URC's Safeguarding and Ministries team rely on accurate, up-to-date information about training completion in order to support compliance across the denomination. To achieve this, the URC's database must reach a point where it can generate reliable reports that clearly identify who has completed the required safeguarding training and where gaps remain. This would enable the Safeguarding and Ministries teams to provide timely support to synods, local churches, and office holders, ensuring that training expectations are met and that individuals in key roles remain compliant with denominational policy.

Without this capability, the denomination faces increased operational and safeguarding risk. Incomplete or inaccurate data makes it difficult to identify individuals who may be serving without the appropriate level of training, potentially leaving churches and synods unaware of gaps in compliance. This not only undermines the URC's ability to demonstrate due diligence but also increases the likelihood of inconsistent safeguarding practice and heightened vulnerability in the event of an incident or external scrutiny. Strengthening the database's reporting functions is therefore essential to maintaining robust safeguarding standards across the URC and this is a dialogue that we are keeping open between various teams at the Offices of General Assembly.

Areas of development

Synod Safeguarding Reviews

Over the past year, the team has piloted two Synod Safeguarding Reviews, with the wider rollout outlined in a separate paper. This has been a substantial piece of work, and the committee is particularly grateful to the staff who conducted the reviews and to the two synods that volunteered to participate in the pilot.

File Review

As outlined in the Annual Safeguarding Report (Paper T1) presented to General Assembly 2025, the Safeguarding Committee recommended commissioning an external review of ministers', CRCWs', and local leaders' files. The purpose of this review is to identify any outstanding safeguarding concerns that may not have been fully addressed, enabling the denomination to resolve any issues and ensure confidence that all known concerns have been managed appropriately and consistently.

Over the past year, a dedicated working group has developed a detailed Scope of Work, engaged with potential providers, and completed a full selection process. An organisation has now been appointed to undertake the review, which is expected to commence in summer 2026, with a final report anticipated for presentation at General Assembly 2027.

This review forms an important part of the URC's ongoing commitment to best practice, consistency, and transparency in safeguarding. Further communication will be shared across the denomination, including with those whose files will be included in the review.

Strategic Plan of the Safeguarding Committee

Following extensive discussion and reflection on the previous strategic plan—both within the Safeguarding Committee and the Synod Safeguarding Practice Group—it was agreed that a single Safeguarding Strategic Plan covering all councils of the Church was no longer the most effective approach. Instead, it was determined that a more focused plan should be developed specifically for the work of the Safeguarding Committee and the Safeguarding Team within the Offices of the General Assembly.

A working group was convened to draft this revised plan. After initial development, the draft was shared with synod personnel for consultation, and further revisions were made to ensure clarity of purpose. The final version makes explicit that it is not a strategic plan for synods or local churches; however, synod safeguarding groups may choose to use it as a framework or reference point when developing their own safeguarding plans.

A copy of the agreed plan can be found at <https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Safeguarding-Committee-Strategic-Plan.pdf>

Working Guide for SSOs – Risk Management assurance

We are proud of the work completed on the Good Practice document and its accompanying resources. Feedback has highlighted that the guidance is clear, well-structured, and effective in outlining lines of accountability, required processes, and the resources to be used across the denomination.

It has also become evident that there are variations in how Synod Safeguarding Officers record, report, and escalate safeguarding cases. To support greater consistency and strengthen risk management, it has been proposed that a dedicated Good Practice guide and resources for SSOs would be beneficial. This will be developed in collaboration with SSOs over the coming year, with the aim of providing a unified framework that enhances safeguarding practice across the denomination.

ANNUAL SAFEGUARDING REPORT 2026

This report is created from data captured from the Annual Church Safeguarding Returns for 2025, but does not include analysis from Synod Safeguarding Officers (SSOs). Further in-depth analysis will be reported to the September 2026 Safeguarding Committee for analysis.

INTRODUCTION

87.7% of churches completed safeguarding annual returns

2.4.% of churches have no safeguarding coordinator

Comments: The number of churches completing their annual return has remained consistent with last year. Encouragingly, the proportion of churches without a safeguarding coordinator has decreased from 4.5%, representing a positive step toward strengthened safeguarding practice. Synod Safeguarding Officers continue to engage proactively with churches that have not submitted returns or do not currently have a safeguarding coordinator in place, offering support and encouragement to help them meet their responsibilities.



SAFEGUARDING CONCERNS



Number of concerns related to children: 52, the main categories of abuse are sexual abuse and then emotional abuse/physical/neglect

Number of concerns related to adults: 157, the main two categories of abuse are emotional abuse and physical neglect

(These figures are likely to be higher when final data is collected by SSO's and do not include high numbers of low-level concerns supported by SSO's)

Comments: The number of safeguarding concerns reported and supported by safeguarding personnel has remained consistent with last year's figures.

Safeguarding training continues to be reviewed, updated, and developed to ensure that all safeguarding personnel across the denomination are equipped with both core safeguarding knowledge and an understanding of emerging and topical issues. This ongoing development supports the denomination's commitment to maintaining high standards of safeguarding practice.

PASTORAL CARE & SUPPORT

Comments: Local churches and synods continue to arrange appropriate pastoral care and support for individuals and groups who require it, drawing on Place for Hope services where additional specialist support is needed.



MANAGING RISK

60 known people who pose a risk to children or adults are attending URC churches



Comments: Individuals subject to safeguarding agreements within local churches continue to be supported by Church Safeguarding Coordinators and Synod Safeguarding Officers. This collaborative approach ensures that appropriate oversight and monitoring remain in place.

The guidance documents relating to the management of individuals who may pose a risk have undergone revision during this period and template resources are now available. These updated resources aim to provide greater clarity and consistency in how such situations are managed, strengthening the denomination's ability to maintain safe environments for all.

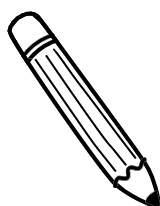
SAFER RECRUITMENT

Comments: With the continued cultural shift in safeguarding, there is an increasing recognition of the importance of safer recruitment, and this is being reflected in practice across the denomination. As a result, the number of DBS/PVG checks completed has risen, with 2,299 processed in 2025 as part of the Safer Recruitment and Safer Election of Elders procedures.

Of the 2,299 DBS/PVG checks completed, 1% resulted in a blemished certificate requiring a risk assessment to determine the individual's suitability for the role. These assessments were undertaken by the Synod Safeguarding Officer in collaboration with the applicant, local church, ensuring that decisions were made carefully, consistently, and in line with safeguarding best practice.



ADDITIONAL COMMENTS



The Safeguarding Committee extends its sincere thanks to all local churches and Church Safeguarding Coordinators for taking the time to complete the Annual Return. This information is vital in supporting the work of Synod Safeguarding Officers and the General Assembly Safeguarding Team, enabling us to maintain Strong safeguarding practice across the denomination. If you have any feedback on the Annual Safeguarding Return, please contact safeguarding@urc.org.uk.