

10. Safeguarding Committee

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Throughout the connexional year, the Safeguarding Committee has made significant progress in following the direction of travel agreed at the Conference in 2024 and addressing the issues facing the Methodist Church in this important area.

An independent review of governance and practice of safeguarding across the Connexion was undertaken as part of the internal audit programme. While there were some recommendations for improvement, the report was positive and shows that a great deal of strong safeguarding practice takes place across the Connexion. The suggestions for improvement were welcomed by the Committee and the Connexional Safeguarding Team (CST), particularly the need to focus more on online and digital safeguarding.

Ensuring that survivors' perspectives are integrated into the governance of safeguarding and are embedded in the Church's policies and practice continues to be a primary focus for the committee. We are grateful to the survivors and the survivors' group that contribute to our discussions, policy development and training.

The programme of safeguarding audits continues and is a valuable way of understanding how well safeguarding is embedded in practice. Lessons-learned reviews continue to highlight areas for development and improvement. Actions from the audit programme and from the lessons-learned reviews are tracked, monitored and are reported back to the committee in a suitably anonymised and summarised form.

As regards the broader context for safeguarding in Christian churches, the Conference will recall that the committee undertook a piece of work last year on independence in safeguarding and key points arising were captured in the Conference's resolutions. Significant progress has been made, as set out below. In addition, the Chair of the Safeguarding Committee is the Methodist representative on the Church of England National Safeguarding Panel, and both the Chair of the Safeguarding Committee and the Director of Safeguarding are part of other groups and bodies active in this space, so we ensure that any learning is considered in our own decision-making and processes.

In its oversight role, the committee is pleased to see the progress with the move to connexional employment of District Safeguarding Officers as this will play a significant role in ensuring greater independence, more consistency, and an increased "joined-up" accountable approach. The committee is, however, very aware of the concerns that several people have expressed about the decision and the approach to implementation. The committee is encouraged to hear how concerns are being addressed while at the same time remaining committed to the way forward. The Chair of the Safeguarding Committee is now meeting with the District Safeguarding Group chairs quarterly as an additional communications' channel through which issues can be raised which the CST can take forward as appropriate.

The work to streamline the risk assessment and safeguarding panel processes and to make the necessary changes to Standing Orders to ensure that the Safeguarding Committee is restructured to be more efficient and effective (as proposed to the Conference in 2024) is underway in conjunction with the Law and Polity Committees. Recruiting new committee members has been put on hold pending the outcome of this work.

The work on a conflict of interest, duty and loyalty policy, which is essential for a healthy safeguarding culture, has been delayed. This is due to illness within the Connexional Team.

To help to ensure a healthy safeguarding culture and also appropriate training for line managers, lay and ordained, the committee has confirmed with the Ministries and Learning team that the current training provided for line managers is an expectation and not optional. This is a concern that was identified in a recent external review and as such the committee recommends that this expectation is confirmed by the Conference and has brought forward a resolution to this end.

Case statistics are included as an appendix to this report. There are no trends or issues arising from the data that the committee wishes to bring to the Conference's attention. The situation with outdated DBS/PVG checks remains a concern, as has been flagged to the Conference over the last three years. A great deal of work has been undertaken but the backlog remains stubbornly high. At times, the committee is asked why it remains concerned about the situation because DBS/PVG checks and training are only one element of ensuring that our churches and our activities are safer places. While it is correct that ensuring churches are safer places requires a multi-faceted joined-up approach and things like safeguarding audits play a key role, training, disclosure, vetting and barring remain important indicators. The backlog of outstanding checks remains a risk to the Methodist Church.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

10/1. The Conference received the Report.

10/2. WITHDRAWN

10/3. NOT PUT

Appendix: Case statistics

Period	1/9/20 - 31/8/21	1/9/21-31/8/22	1/9/22-31/8/23	1/9/23-31/08/24	Connexional Year (1 st 6 months) 1/09/24-28/02/2025
DBS/PVG cases open	28	79	48	54	38
DBS/PVG cases closed	50	56	39	72	25

Non DBS/PVG cases open	27	17	44	254	209
Non DBS/PVG cases closed	17	2	8	125	207

Non DBS/PVG cases open in the period of the connexional year of 1 September 2023 until 31 August 2024 were considerably higher due to MyConcern a new record keeping platform that shared access has been given to the connexional safeguarding team and the District Safeguarding Officers (DSOs) for the ability for concerns that are raised within their districts.

An increase of Non DBS/PVG cases is also due to cases still in progress from previous years that have not been closed within their corresponding years.

Safeguarding Panels

	1/9/20 - 31/8/21	1/9/20 - 31/8/21	1/9/21- 31/8/22	1/9/21- 31/8/22	1/9/22- 31/8/23	1/9/22- 31/8/23	1/9/23- 31/08/24	1/9/23- 31/08/24	Connexional Year (1st 6 months) 1/9/24-28/02/25	Connexional Year (1st 6 months) 1/09/24- 28/02/25
Outcome	Number	Appeals	Number	Appeals	Number	Appeals	Number	Appeals	Number	Appeals
Not cleared	1	1	3	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
Restrictions on role and Safeguarding Contract	3	0	4	0	4	0	3	1	0	1
Restriction on role removed with conditions	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Safeguarding Contract put in place	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Cleared with conditions	0	0	5	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Cleared with no conditions	1	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
No changes to current Safeguarding Contract	1	0	2	0	2	0	1	0	0	0

Safeguarding Contract ended	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Safeguarding Contract ended with conditions	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Referred to complaints	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Thresholds for safeguarding measures not meet	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Resigned from Role	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
Total	10	1	16	1	9	0	9	3	4	3

Additional report from the Safeguarding Committee and the Law and Polity Committee

1. As explained in the report of the Safeguarding Committee at page 72 of the Agenda and in Section O of the second report of the Law and Polity Committee at page 497, work is continuing on the drafting of the Standing Orders for the restructuring of the Safeguarding Committee, in particular to strengthen its governance and independence. As an interim measure, the Conference is now invited to amend Standing Orders to reflect more clearly the functions now undertaken by the Safeguarding Committee and to enable the appointment of panels to make decisions in individual cases from a wider selection of persons with appropriate experience. It is expected that the interim Standing Orders will be revised when the work now being undertaken has been completed.
2. The amendments proposed below include amendments to the Standing Orders which will require amendment in connection with the creation of a unified safeguarding structure. In order to make it easier to follow the proposed changes, they are being brought to the Conference in this one report. This report therefore contains the amendments referred to in Section O of the Law and Polity Committee's report.
3. If the amendments relating to the unified safeguarding structure are agreed, consequential amendments will be required to Books VI and VII of *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*, as also shown below.
4. The proposed amendments are set out in the Appendix.
5. As explained in the Methodist Council's report to the Conference of 2024 (Agenda item 22), the existing District Safeguarding Officers jobs have much in common with the new Regional Safeguarding Officers jobs and most District Safeguarding Officers will become Regional Safeguarding Officers (now to be known as Regional Officers for Safeguarding) with effect from 1 August 2025 in accordance with employment legislation on the transfer of undertakings. In practice, although the majority of the transfers will occur by 1 August, a few may take place later. The Conference is invited to make provision by resolution for the effective date of the transfers.

APPENDIX

SECTION A: Amendments to Standing Orders

230 Safeguarding Committee.

(1) *[unchanged]*

(2) *[unchanged]*

(2A) *The strategic and oversight functions of the committee are:*

- (i) ***to be available for consultation by those members of the Connexional Team whose responsibilities include the Church's policy for safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults;***
- (ii) ***to promote effective safeguarding practice and safe recruitment across the Connexion;***
- (iii) ***in response to developments in safeguarding practice and to concerns raised by the committee in fulfilling its functions, to report and make recommendations to the Conference and, as required, to the Connexional Council to enable the council to fulfil its trustee responsibilities;***

- (iv) ***to ensure the sharing of information and close working relationships with statutory authorities and other denominations;***
- (v) ***to carry out such other functions as the Conference by Standing Order or otherwise may direct or request.***

[Note: these are the functions currently set out in S.O. 230(4)(x) to (xiv).]

(4)(2B) The *operational* functions of the Safeguarding Committee shall be *committee are*:

- (i) to give directions ...
- ...
- (ix) ... in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 235(5)÷.
- ~~(x) to be available for consultation by those members of the Connexional Team whose responsibilities include the Church's policy for safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults;~~
- ~~(xi) to promote effective safeguarding practice and safe recruitment across the connexion;~~
- ~~(xii) in response to developments in safeguarding practice and to concerns raised by the committee in fulfilling its functions, to report and make recommendations to the Conference and, as required, to the Connexional Council to enable the council to fulfil its trustee responsibilities;~~
- ~~(xiii) to ensure the sharing of information and close working relationships with statutory authorities and other denominations;~~
- ~~(xiv) to carry out such other functions as the Conference by Standing Order or otherwise may direct or request.~~

(2C) (a) *The committee may adopt such structures as it sees fit for the discharge of its strategy and oversight functions and may in particular work through an oversight group and one or more sub-groups with particular responsibilities for quality assurance, training, policy and procedures, risk assessment, survivor engagement and theology of safeguarding.*

(b) *The committee shall work through a sub-group in the discharge of its operational functions applying the following principles:*

- (i) ***any directions, guidance, determination or recommendation given or made in the discharge of those functions shall be given or made by a panel of not fewer than three persons;***
- (ii) ***a panel convened for the purpose of giving directions or guidance under sub-clause (i) of clause (2B) above shall be convened by the safeguarding officer as defined in sub-clause (ii) of clause (3) below;***
- (iii) ***a panel convened for the purpose of making any determination or recommendation under sub-clauses (ii) to (ix) of sub-clause (2B) above shall be convened by the chair of the committee and may include the chair;***
- (iv) ***the safeguarding officer acting under sub-clause (ii) above and the chair acting under sub-clause (iii) above shall as far as possible convene panels from the members of the committee, subject to sub-clause (v) below;***
- (v) ***the members of the panel shall among them have the expertise required for the particular case and there shall be no circumstances which might reasonably be supposed to give rise to a conflict of interest on the part of any member. Where this requirement cannot be met from the members of the committee, the chair and the safeguarding officer shall agree on the co-option of an independent person or independent persons, who need not be a member or members of the Methodist church, to enable the panel to be constituted.***

(3) For the purposes of this Standing Order:

- (i) a 'blemished disclosure' is a disclosure document, received from any body with official responsibility for providing information about the criminal records of individuals, which contains convictions, cautions or any other adverse entry;
- (ii) 'the safeguarding officer' means the person or one of the persons in the Connexional Team responsible for issues relating to the protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults;
- (iii) a 'relevant party' means any person who is the subject of a decision, determination or recommendation made by the committee in the exercise of its functions under clause (4) below or in relation to whom a risk assessment has been carried out for purposes connected with the exercise of those functions, and references to 'the Superintendent' and 'the District Chair' or 'the District **Regional Safeguarding Officer for Safeguarding**' in relation to a relevant party are references to the Superintendent of the Circuit in which the relevant party is stationed or is a member and to the Chair or the **Regional Officer for Safeguarding** ~~aligned with~~ the District of which that circuit forms part.

(4) *[This clause has been renumbered (2B) and relocated accordingly.]*

~~(5) The chair of the committee shall nominate such members of the committee (not being fewer than three in number and which may include the said chair) as the chair thinks fit to be the panel to make any determination or recommendation in discharge of the committee's functions set out in sub-clauses (ii) to (ix) of clause (4) above. For the purpose of giving directions of guidance under clause (4)(i) above, the safeguarding officer shall convene a panel of not fewer than three members of the committee having regard to the expertise required in the particular case.~~

~~(6) (a) When discharging the functions specified under clause (4)(i) and (i) to (ix) above, the panel nominated shall contain one person referred to in clause (1)(ii)(a) and two persons referred to in clause (1)(ii)(b).~~

~~(b) Requests for consultation by members of the Connexional Team under clause (4)(x) (2A)(i) above shall made to the chair in the first instance.~~

~~(7) (a) For the purpose of carrying out its functions under clause (4)(2B)(i) to (ix), a nominated panel ...~~

~~(8) ... A copy of the notice shall be sent to the District Chair, the District **Regional Safeguarding Officer for Safeguarding** ...~~

~~(9) ... each determination made under clause (4)(2B) above ...~~

230A Unified connexional safeguarding structure. (1) The Safeguarding Committee is responsible for advising the Connexional Council as to the organisation of a unified connexional safeguarding structure, subject to clause (2) below.

(2) The structure shall initially make provision for there to be connexional safeguarding managers and four Regional Safeguarding Areas, for each of which there shall be a Regional Safeguarding Manager, and for there to be employed in each Regional Safeguarding Area a number of Regional Officers for Safeguarding, each of whom shall be aligned with a particular District or Districts, with appropriate administrative support.

(3) Persons whose office forms part of the unified connexional safeguarding structure shall be employed by the Connexional Council and shall form part of the Connexional Team.

231 Grounds—Right of Appeal. (1) A relevant party, that party's District Chair or Superintendent or the safeguarding officer **as defined in Standing Order 230(3)(ii)** may appeal against a direction or determination under Standing Order 230(4)(2B)(i) or (iii) ...

233 Appeal Decision.

...

(2) ... If the appellant is the relevant party, a copy of the decision shall also be sent to the District Chair, ~~district~~**Regional** safeguarding officer **for Safeguarding** ...

234 Safeguarding Concerns and Procedures.

...

(4) ...

(iii) a 'safeguarding officer' means the safeguarding officer as defined in Standing Order 230(3)(ii) or the ~~District~~ **Regional** Safeguarding Officer **for Safeguarding aligned with** of the District of which the relevant Circuit forms part;

235 Assessment of Risk. (1) In this Standing Order:

...

(iii) "the ~~District~~ **Regional** Safeguarding Officer **for Safeguarding**" means the **Regional** safeguarding officer **for Safeguarding aligned with** of the District of which the relevant Circuit forms part.

...

(4) A connexional safeguarding officer **manager** acting on behalf of the Safeguarding Committee may require a connexional risk assessment following a request from a ~~District~~ **Regional** Safeguarding Officer **for Safeguarding** ...

(5) A connexional risk assessment shall be undertaken by a suitably qualified assessor upon the instruction of a connexional safeguarding officer **manager** ...

(6) When a connexional safeguarding officer **manager** determines that a connexional risk assessment is required, the officer **manager** shall consult ...

(7) A district risk assessment may be undertaken:

(i) ...

(ii) (in conjunction with a connexional safeguarding officer **manager**) ...

(iii) where the ~~District~~ **Regional** Safeguarding Officer **for Safeguarding** is informed of a blemished disclosure;

(iv) at the request of a connexional safeguarding officer **manager** made in accordance with ...

...

(11) The subject, the District Chair, the ~~District~~ **Regional** Safeguarding Officer **for Safeguarding** (if not conducting the assessment) and the Superintendent of the relevant Circuit ...

...

(14) ... The subject shall have 14 days to provide any comments on the report before it is considered by ... the ~~District~~ **Regional** Safeguarding Officer **for Safeguarding** ...

(15) A copy of the risk assessment ... shall be sent to the District ~~Regional~~ Safeguarding Officer **for Safeguarding** ... The District ~~Regional~~ Safeguarding Officer **for Safeguarding** may provide copies of the risk assessment ...

690 Arrangements for Involvement. (1) When a person ... worships in a Local Church or seeks to become involved in its life, ~~he or she~~ **the person concerned** ...

(2) (a) The ~~Regional~~ safeguarding Officer **for Safeguarding aligned with** for the relevant District must ...

...

(bA) ... will determine on what terms ~~he or she~~ **that person** ...

...

(c) ... signed and dated by ~~him or her~~ **that person** ...

...

(6) ... the group may nevertheless monitor ~~him or her~~ **that person** ...

690A Review of a Contract. ...

...

(4) The group shall provide an annual report ... to the District ~~Regional~~ Safeguarding Officer **for Safeguarding aligned with** of the District of which the relevant Circuit forms part.

(5) The District ~~Regional~~ Safeguarding Officer **for Safeguarding** ...

692 Transfer. (1) ... the presbyter in pastoral charge of that Local Church, in carrying out ~~his or her~~ **the** responsibilities under Standing Order 055, ...

SECTION B: Amendments to Books VI and VII

[The penultimate line of the editorial note to Book VI, Part 1, on p 810, will need correction to refer to Regional Officers for Safeguarding.]

(i) Book VI, Part 4

p 816, *amending* the start of the fourth paragraph as follows:

The ~~Regional~~ Safeguarding Officer **for Safeguarding aligned with** for the relevant District (the ~~DSO~~ **ROS**) will undertake the process ...

and substituting 'ROS' for 'DSO' wherever 'DSO' appears thereafter on pp 816-817

(ii) Book VII, Part 5A

p 834

2.4 The Connexional Support Officer shall report any safeguarding concerns to the District ~~Regional~~ Safeguarding Officer **for Safeguarding aligned with the relevant District** and...

(iii) Book VII, Part 16

p 874

3. vi. ... The District ~~Regional~~ Safeguarding Officer **for Safeguarding aligned with the relevant District (the Regional Officer for Safeguarding)** must be informed ...

3. vii Practitioners must consider whether there are any safeguarding concerns and inform the District ~~Regional~~ Safeguarding Officer **for Safeguarding** of any identified.

p 876

4.4 ... These may include the District ~~Regional~~ Safeguarding Officer **for Safeguarding**,
...

*****RESOLUTIONS**

10/4. The Conference amended Standing Orders as set out in Section A of the Appendix.

10/5. The Conference amended Books VI and VII as set out in Section B of the Appendix.

10/6. The Conference directed that, in relation to any person holding the office of District Safeguarding Officer at the date of this resolution whose office will become the office of Regional Officer for Safeguarding as a result of the amendments made by resolution 10/4, the amendments will not take effect until 1 August 2025 or such later date as the requirements of employment law governing the transfer of that person's employment are completed and the new contract of employment with the Connexional Council is agreed to take effect.