

29. Safeguarding Committee

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1. Overview

This report provides an overview of safeguarding across the church over the last 12 months. Detailed information relating to safeguarding activity across this period can be found in Appendix B.

The Safeguarding Committee recognises the strong work that is being undertaken on safeguarding across the Connexion – both in the connexional Safeguarding Team and in the Districts. The work can be tough, and the committee can see that work is being undertaken prayerfully, respectfully and transparently.

The committee can see real progress in safeguarding across this period and would particularly like to draw attention to the indicators that safeguarding is increasingly seen as an outworking of faith and an integral part of our work on justice. Survivor voices are being heard more clearly, more people are engaging with the theology of safeguarding, and more churches are holding “Safeguarding Sunday” services which encourage people to discuss openly how to ensure that the Church is a safer place.

Across the Connexion, action is being taken to address systemic issues and recommendations arising from lessons learned reviews are being actively managed and monitored to ensure timely and effective improvements are being made. A greater focus is now being placed on the culture of safeguarding and strengthening safeguarding leadership. The programme of safeguarding audits is an important way in which the committee can evidence whether cultural change is being embedded effectively.

The committee continues to see evidence that – in the main – safeguarding processes are working. Concerns are being raised and processes are being followed in a timely manner.

However, there is a great deal more work that as the Methodist Church we need to undertake to ensure that we are a safer place where everyone can flourish. The section below on Future Plans sets out more information about this. The committee would like the Conference to note that it remains concerned about the increasing backlog of ministerial DBS checks. While DBS checks and safer recruitment practices are only one part of what we need to do to ensure a

safer church, they are nevertheless very important in managing risk in line with our responsibilities, accountabilities and connexional policy. The committee therefore asks the Conference to aver that those who are required to have a DBS check (or equivalent in other jurisdictions) and are without an up-to-date disclosure should be suspended from the exercise of their office or ministry should such a disclosure has been obtained or it has been agreed that an exemption is appropriate. Only in this way, the committee believes, can the risk of damage be mitigated and the Church have confidence that precautions are taken seriously.

2. Independence of safeguarding

The Safeguarding Committee has done some important work this year in relation to establishing how to ensure independence in safeguarding in the Methodist Church and improving policy and practice accordingly. In light of this work, we have made some important changes to both policy and practice. The development of a connexional conflict of interest, duty and loyalty policy is a key recommendation arising from this review. The connexional employment of DSOs is also a key element in ensuring independence. Elsewhere in the Conference Agenda, the Council reports on progress made in response to M21 (2022).

See Appendix A below for the detailed paper on ensuring independence in safeguarding.

3. The Structure of the Safeguarding Committee

The Safeguarding Committee has reviewed its effectiveness in fulfilling its Terms of Reference as set out in the Standing Orders. In order to increase its efficiency and effectiveness in achieving its role, the Committee has decided that we need to separate the more operational responsibilities (such as holding Safeguarding Panels and Appeals) from the overview and scrutiny functions and ensuring an appropriate balance between lay and ordained committee members. There will also be a clearer distinction between those roles on the committee requiring relevant professional skills and experience from those roles requiring those same professional skills and experience in addition to the requirement to be a practising Methodist.

The changes required are set out in the appendix to the report concerning independence in safeguarding (which is Appendix A to this report). Work is underway to prepare the amendments to the Standing Orders that these changes will require.

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4. **Interaction between Safeguarding and Complaints and Discipline Processes**

The interaction between the Safeguarding and Complaints and Discipline Processes as currently operating can result in processes taking longer than should be the case which causes distress for all parties involved. The Connexional Safeguarding Team and the Safeguarding Committee have been part of the Part 11 Review and have contributed to the way forward as described in report on that review elsewhere in the Conference Agenda.

5. **Training**

We know that our training material and resources are well regarded both internally and by organisations outside the Methodist Church. These resources have been updated in line with feedback from attendees and to ensure that we stay current in terms of legislation and best practice, and are ready to be rolled out. Of particular note is the development of a Safeguarding Leadership Programme specifically developed for District Chairs and senior connexional officers and staff. The Church of England Leadership Development programme and pathway has been considered in the development of our training.

6. **Future plans for 2024/5**

In addition to the work described above which is necessary to implement more independence in safeguarding and to ensure that the committee is better structured so that it is more effective in exercising its scrutiny and oversight role, the committee has set the following priorities for the next year:

- Transparency – how to better balance openness with GDPR and confidentiality.
- Oversight of embedding of safeguarding culture and policy through the audit programme and ensuring recommendations from lessons learned reviews are implemented.
- Oversight of the take-up of and outcomes from the new safeguarding senior leadership training
- Survivor voice – ensuring that survivor perspectives are considered more deeply in decision making.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

29/1. The Conference receives the Report.

29/2. The Conference reaffirms the policy that certain office-holders should be in possession of up-to-date DBS/PVG checks and that such checks should be renewed every five years, and further directs that those not in possession

of the appropriate disclosure should be suspended from the exercise of their office or ministry until a disclosure has been obtained or an exemption granted.

Appendix A

Independence of Safeguarding in Faith Communities¹

1. Briefing for the Methodist Council

The Safeguarding Committee has done a piece of work over the last three months on independence in safeguarding as we wanted to establish our current position and identify actions that we should take as a Church to improve.

The top line message is that – although there is more we must do – we are on the “right lines” in relation to how we approach this in our environment and bearing in mind the Methodist Way of Life. The further work that needs to be done partly sits with the Connexional Safeguarding Team (CST) and the Safeguarding Committee (SGC), but there is a number of things to be addressed connexionally and systemically. The recommendation section at the end of this document sets out this further work and identifies what needs to be done connexionally and what needs to be done by CST/SGC.

The Council is requested to note the connexional actions required and to advise on how best we bring these things to the attention of the 2024 Conference so that the appropriate action can be taken.

2. Context

Independence in safeguarding in faith communities is a hotly debated topic at the present time. Many churches and religious institutions have fallen short of their responsibilities in relation to mission and ministry, have “looked the other way” and colluded in cover-ups. For a variety of reasons many have failed to acknowledge, accept, and apologise for what’s been happening for many years (and continues to happen).

As well as a focus on prevention, the imperative for safeguarding to be survivor-focused must be kept at the front of mind - those with lived experience must be at the heart of processes and decision-making. Just as Christ had a preferential option for the poor, many people see properly functioning safeguarding as

¹ This report was received by the Methodist Council in April 2024

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having a bias for survivors. Others express concerns about this, saying that independence means impartiality and therefore there cannot be a bias for survivors.

While the imperative to support everyone is clear, it is the past propensity to support abusers that has caused mistrust across Christian churches in the UK because many abusers have been (or are) in positions of power and have deployed that power to their own advantage.

The current clarion calls for independence in safeguarding have emerged from this context, along with calls for transparency and strengthened accountability.

The concept of independent safeguarding that is external to the church has also arisen in response to this. There are widely differing views on what this means and how it might work in practice. In some areas, the debate does not appear to understand the critical distinction between accountability and responsibility or between independent and/or external operational delivery of safeguarding.

Professor Alexis Jay has been commissioned by the Church of England to “develop proposals for a fully independent structure for safeguarding scrutiny”. She has started the work with a national consultation. Although this view is being primarily expressed in relation to the Church of England, it is important that the Methodist Church considers this perspective.

Calls for an independent regulator like the Care Quality Commission or Ofsted are being made as a response to this context. This was discussed at the recent discussion on “Reporting, Secrecy, and Silencing in Cases of Abuse in Religious Contexts” facilitated by the University of Kent in September 2023. The regulator would provide oversight across faith communities (not just Christian denominations), seek to ensure compliance, ensure that processes have been properly followed in a timely manner, and have the powers to sanction institutions as appropriate.

3. Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to explore good governance of safeguarding and the concepts of independence, transparency, and accountability. It has been discussed at the Methodist Connexional Safeguarding Committee and with the Methodist Survivor Advisory Group at their residential meeting in October.

Justin Humphreys, the CEO of Thirtyone:eight (the Christian safeguarding agency formerly called Churches Child Protection Agency), and Margaret Casely Hayford,

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eminent lawyer and governance expert, have provided input and critical challenge. Their contributions are gratefully acknowledged.

The Safeguarding Committee now shares the paper with the Methodist Council so that appropriate steps can be taken.

The purpose of this paper is not to chronicle the history of abuse in faith settings nor to comment on previous or current cases.

The paper is structured as follows:

- Section 3 reminds the reader of the theological basis for safeguarding.
- Section 4 summarises the principles of good governance.
- Section 5 describes the role of independence in safeguarding.
- Section 6 sets out the governance of safeguarding in the Methodist Church and identifies areas which could potentially be strengthened.
- Section 7 sets out opportunities for enhancing independence and suggests next steps

4. **Mission and Ministry**

The starting point for this exploration is the Methodist Church's mission and ministry and the theology of safeguarding as approved by the Methodist Conference. The scriptural basis for safeguarding is set out in the 2021 Conference Report 'The Theology of Safeguarding' and in the 'God Welcomes All' study material.

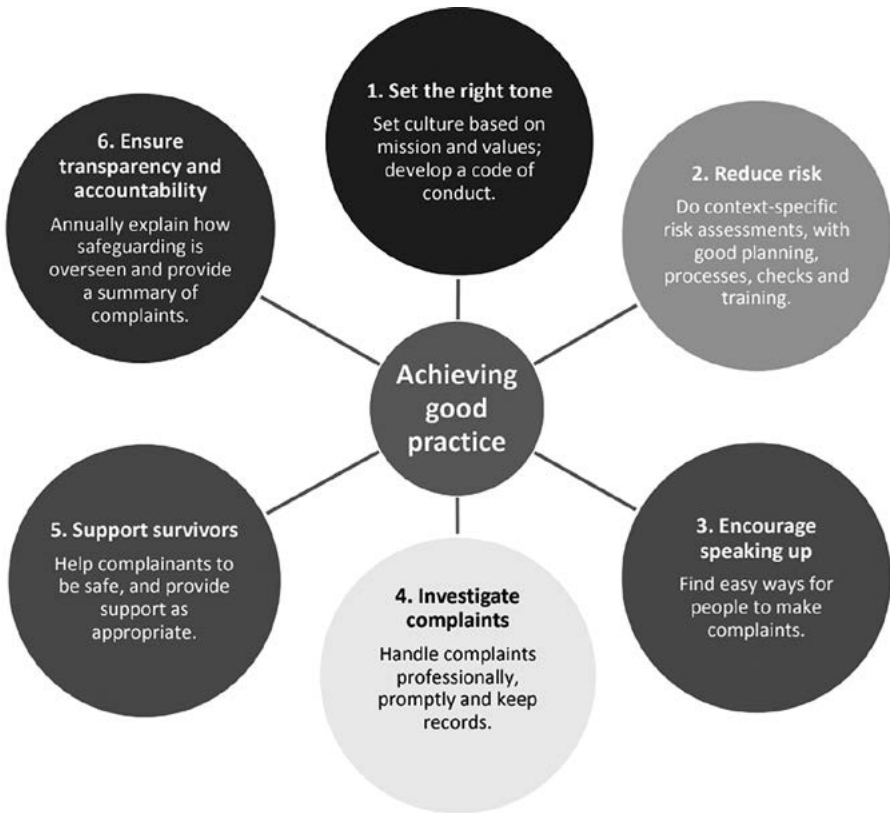
Spiritual abuse is recognised by the Church and is specifically addressed by the Methodist Church's safeguarding policy and the spiritual abuse training that is currently being rolled out.

As the Methodist Church welcomes and proactively encourages the inclusion of voices of those with lived experience in its decision-making, survivors have contributed extensively to this paper.

5. **Good Governance**

The governance of safeguarding must be seen in the context of good charity governance and the oversight and trusteeship structure of the Church. The Charity Commission's guidance on safeguarding applies in addition to the Connexional safeguarding policy.

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Good governance in Safeguarding diagram from Bond

Good governance includes focus on mission, fiduciary duties, strategy, oversight, compliance and stewardship of resources and finances.

Members of the governing body must be selected on merit according to pre-defined criteria and must be of good standing – fit and proper persons. Lived experience of abuse should be one of these criteria and there should be a proportionate number of members with this experience on the governing body.

Independence is an important criterion in selection of members - they should not have any conflicts of interest, duty and/or loyalty that could affect the

execution of their roles. Policies that set out how to manage conflict are fundamental building blocks. Term limits are also vital – balancing “fresh eyes” and fresh perspectives with institutional knowledge. They help to limit or prevent patronage.

Controls need to be in place to ensure compliance with critical policies or procedures. The governing body need to seek objective evidence that the controls are working in practice. This is called assurance. Assurance involves a systematic and structured process that includes various activities, such as auditing, verification, or validation, to ensure that a particular outcome is reliable and accurate. It includes clarity of delegation in so far as this explains what has been delegated and to whom; and this should be allied to a system of assessment, risk awareness/risk management, and reporting, in line with and in response to that delegation.

Assurance therefore enables effective scrutiny. Independent (or external) audit is required to demonstrate that the controls and assurance are working effectively.

Accountability, transparency, independence, and integrity are hallmarks of good governance.

A healthy culture that is open and prepared to challenge is a pre-requisite for good governance, as are policies covering complaints (internal and external) and whistleblowing².

6. Independence in governance of safeguarding

Governance of safeguarding is about preventing abuse from occurring, early identification of abuse when it does occur, and responding in a timely and effective manner. It is concerned with the timeliness and effectiveness of the system of controls and assurance. As Justin Humphreys from Thirtyone:eight says:

“Independence and accountability serve as fundamental pillars in safeguarding, ensuring that the decisions and actions we take are free from undue influence or bias and are open to appropriate scrutiny. An independent view of processes, practices, and culture helps to instill a sense of trust and confidence, enables a fair and unbiased evaluation of situations, and prevents conflicts of interest from compromising the process or the outcome.”

² Thirtyone:eight (named after Proverbs 31:8 and formerly called the Churches Child Protection Advisory Service) run a very helpful course called “Creating Healthy Christian Cultures and Understanding Spiritual Abuse”

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Independence acts as a safeguard against corruption and undue external pressure, guaranteeing that decisions and actions are driven solely by the pursuit of justice and the welfare of individuals. It allows all those involved to perform their duties with integrity, empowers individuals to act according to their expertise and professional judgment, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of safeguarding efforts”.

In terms of effective governance of safeguarding, it is essential to acknowledge that, although operational delivery of safeguarding can be externally delivered, the Church cannot outsource its duties, responsibilities and accountabilities for keeping people safe. Developments in safeguarding in the public sector (and particularly from the Working Together agenda) reveal that attempts to outsource responsibility lead to a situation where subcontractors (whether companies or charities) manage the delivery of their contract rather than “doing the right thing”, trying to prevent abuse from occurring and bringing about cultural change.

A potential unintended consequence of having complete independence is that the interfaces of accountability and responsibility become vague with the potential to shift accountability onto other bodies operating in the church safeguarding space. Complex governance overlaid onto the complex structures that exist in the church, whilst not a reason to avoid change, do require deep reflection and understanding of the practical consequences.

Prevention of abuse starts with suitable appointments – both in terms of the governance and scrutiny functions and also in employment of staff. Vetting procedures (like Disclosure and Barring Systems), careful scrutiny, and the importance of references need to be recognised as critical controls. Other controls in this context include safeguarding policies and procedures that are compliant with legislation, regulation and best practice. Information about what is happening in practice on the ground is a pre-requisite for assurance. Evidence to be scrutinised includes safeguarding audits, thematic reviews, lessons learned reviews, complaints and whistleblowing, in addition to the analysis of information about concerns being raised, clusters of issues, patterns, internal networks demonstrating nepotism or favouritism, safer recruitment processes and so forth.

Independence in reviews or investigations usually means that the senior responsible officer drafts and approves the terms of reference, and a senior person in a separate management line, who has no connection with the issue or with key stakeholders (either people named in the allegations or the people raising the allegations), undertakes the investigation and reports back to the senior responsible officer. If a senior independent manager is not available to lead the investigation, then an external independent investigator will be commissioned

and will report to the senior responsible officer. The senior responsible officer may decide to establish a small independent team to provide oversight of the process and to ensure that there is challenge and accountability.

Independent external scrutiny of safeguarding on a periodic basis by an appropriately qualified individual or organisation is good practice and is helpful to ensure objectivity. It also engenders trust and confidence in the rigour of objective or non-partisan safeguarding governance.

Independence also means that – while working to GDPR and confidentiality policies, the broad subject area of the investigation will be brought to the attention of the governing body or a subcommittee of the governing body (often a risk and audit committee). The governing body (or subcommittee) can then decide whether to seek additional assurance whether internally or externally and/or include the matter in their audit programme to ensure that recommendations are being fully implemented.

Transparency – while different from independence – has a major impact in building trust and confidence in safeguarding. Conversely, not publishing such documents as suitably redacted lessons learned reviews or suitably anonymised documents to protect the identities of survivors/victims (as an alternative to a redacted document) can give the appearance of a cover up. Note that the former is more personal. A redacted document is normally lots of blacked out text, which depersonalises the document. It is possible to be transparent while at the same time conforming to GDPR and confidentiality policies.

7. Governance of safeguarding in the Methodist Church

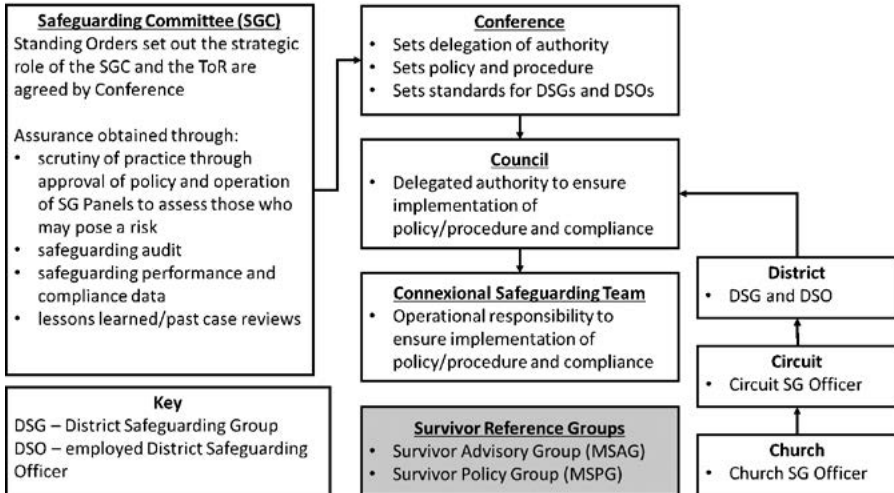
Methodist structure for safeguarding governance

District Safeguarding Groups (DSGs) are a crucial element in terms of governance of safeguarding as they have a key role in operationalising policy and modelling healthy cultures in their geographic areas. They are also responsible for oversight of compliance to safeguarding contracts where certain conditions have been placed on individuals in their engagement with church (or church related activities) following risk assessments.

Some DSGs are starting to collaborate across regions to share best practice and to make best use of resources. However, these are emerging developments and are not part of the formal safeguarding structure. This situation must be addressed to ensure consistency of approach across the Connexion which embodies best practice.

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METHODIST SAFEGUARDING GOVERNANCE



Culture

It is important to note that in the governance arrangements for safeguarding which set out clear expectations in terms of practice, culture is a critical factor which can influence the extent to which policies are embedded in practice. The programme of safeguarding audits has revealed that there are different cultures in the different parts of the Church. The connexional centre has its own culture, and many of the districts, circuits and churches do too. Some parts of the Church regard safeguarding as part of mission and ministry, while other parts do not appear to regard it in this way. The various “micro-cultures” in the Church means that strong local leadership is required to ensure that safeguarding policies and procedures are followed diligently and appropriately.

Safeguarding Committee terms of reference, structure, and membership

In contrast to safeguarding structures in some other Christian denominations, the Connexional Safeguarding Committee has formal terms of reference. The Committee reports to the Conference each year. The committee can (and does) bring items of concern to the attention of the Council. There are terms of reference for the chair of the committee.

In recent years, vacancies for the chair and members of the committee have been advertised formally in the safeguarding newsletter and on the connexional

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website. Safer recruitment processes are followed. The independent Chair is not employed or remunerated by the Church. Currently all members of the Safeguarding Committee are Methodist. Thirtyone:eight recommends that this requirement be removed so that there might be a mixture of Methodists and safeguarding specialists from other denominations, as this would enhance independence. It is worth noting that the Church of England has Methodist and Catholic representatives on its National Safeguarding Panel.

There is a balance of lay and ordained members on the committee. Only one of the lay members is employed and remunerated by the Church – a District Safeguarding Officer. There are some members who identify as survivors, in addition to the specific Survivor Representative nominated by the Methodist Survivors' Advisory Group.

The Secretary of the Conference attends the Committee but is not a member of the Committee. In contrast to the Church of England's National Safeguarding Panel (NSP) where bishops attend the meeting but are not voting members of the NSP, ordained people can be full voting members of the Committee. Again, in contrast to the NSP, all members of the committee are required to be Methodist. As mentioned above, this has caused some people to question the extent of the committee's independence.

Members of the committee with the appropriate skills act as chairs of panels where a determination needs to be made about the outcome of an investigation and the conditions under which the subject can continue (or not) their involvement in the life of the Church as appropriate. This is analogous to the role that some non-execs of NHS bodies such as Foundation Trusts undertake. While care is taken to ensure that ordained panel chairs do not have supervisory or other relationships or responsibilities in areas or with people involved in safeguarding processes and panels, this is an area that needs to be kept under close review and the number of lay panel members must be increased.

Other structural considerations

Church and circuit safeguarding officers are voluntary roles. The District Safeguarding Officers (DSOs) are currently employed by the Districts, and do not have a direct reporting line to the Connexional Safeguarding Team. This gives rise to inconsistencies in practice and presents a potential conflict of interest given that they are employed in the area and by the people about whom concerns could be reported. A proposal to make all DSOs connexional employees is the subject of another paper to the Council.

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Further to recent reviews, there is now a much greater understanding about independence in the allocation of pastoral support and how to ensure that arrangements that are put in place do not create actual or perceived conflicts.

As mentioned above, DSGs are key in terms of governance of safeguarding as they have a key role in operationalising policy and modelling healthy cultures in their geographic areas. The Church of England appoints independent chairs for Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panels (the equivalent of the DSG). The Safeguarding Committee and the Connexional Safeguarding Team are not sighted on how DSG chairs have been appointed previously and whether they are independent. However, this is an area that is included in the district audit programme and expectation is that all DSGs are moving towards the appointment of independent chairs. The requirement for an independent chair will be explicitly included in the next iteration of the DSG standards.

Through the Jay Review, the Church of England is considering removing all safeguarding operations from the church and setting up an independent charity to undertake all aspects of safeguarding instead. A further charity may be established to scrutinise the charity undertaking safeguarding. The Safeguarding Committee is not in favour of this approach for a number of reasons but primarily because it blurs lines of accountability and responsibility. For this reason, the Methodist Survivors' Group are very opposed to this as an approach.

Independent external experts

There is routine use of independent external risk assessors within the Methodist Church. Independent external investigators are also used when there is no suitable person available within the Church.

Safeguarding Standards

Safeguarding standards have been developed for use by DSGs. The function of the Standards and their associated model criteria is to facilitate DSGs in:

- providing an overview of the profile of safeguarding in the district,
- enabling evaluation of safeguarding
- assisting in determination of priorities
- supporting the development of a strategic plan.
- enabling review of progress against the plan

Standards have been developed to inform and guide the work of the DSOs although these have not fully been rolled out. The structural change mentioned above will enable effective embedding of the standards.

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Oversight and scrutiny

The Safeguarding Committee has open access to information and evidence to inform its scrutiny and oversight functions, including data on concerns raised, substantiated concerns, blemished DBS checks (or failure to undertake DBS checking), stats on training and so forth. Although there's more that can be done in terms of presentation of this information, no information is withheld or is otherwise not available.

The Methodist Conference approved a 5-year programme of safeguarding audits. The Safeguarding Committee currently leads the process of independent safeguarding audits which looks at embedding of safeguarding processes and a healthy culture throughout the Connexion. The committee decides which circuit, district or theme will be audited and when. However, in line with the Conference resolution, an external agency will be contracted by the Safeguarding Committee to undertake the audits after the 2024 audit programme has been completed. The Safeguarding Committee will then review the evidence from the audits as part of its scrutiny role.

Future developments

When the current Chair was appointed in January 2022, she undertook a review of the Committee and spoke to all members. The review highlighted areas for improvement which will improve governance and Committee effectiveness including:

- tightening up on term limits
- a greater focus on scrutiny
- a greater focus on quality assurance of things like risk assessments
- restructuring the Committee and introducing sub committees with delegated responsibilities for certain areas
- clarifying and revising the categories of Committee membership as some categories are seen as unhelpful.

The committee's terms of reference are likely to be amended in the light of these changes.

In June 2023, the Chair of the Safeguarding Committee, with the Secretary of Conference and the Chair of the Council's Risk & Audit Committee, agreed that the committee will establish its own risk register (using the connexional format) which will feed into the overall risk register. Establishing this process

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is underway and the first safeguarding risk register was discussed by the Committee in October 2023.

The review of the complaints and discipline processes is also under way currently (see MC/24/51). One of the reasons for the review is that the complaints and discipline process and the safeguarding process can currently interact in an unhelpful manner which causes processes to take longer than is necessary and increases upset and distress for all concerned. The Chair of the Safeguarding Committee is a member of the task group undertaking this work. The timetable for completion of this work is that the report with recommendations will be presented to the Conference in 2024.

8. **Opportunities and next steps**

While much is in place in relation to governance of safeguarding and independence, as set out above there are some immediate opportunities to deepen this. Particularly key to strengthening independence, accountability and transparency are:

- Connexional employment of DSOs
- Developing a connexional policy on conflicts of interest, duty and loyalty
- Strengthening the whistleblowing policy by stating clearly that whistle blows should be sent to a senior independent person not line managers and others as stated in the current policy.
- Publicising the whistleblowing policy (which is currently quite hard to find on the website)
- Clarifying the requirement that DSG chairs are independent in the DSG standards
- Recruitment of more lay panel chairs given that ordained chairs are much more likely to know each other and to have close connections in the circuit or district.
- Recruitment of new panel chairs - a bigger pool of chairs gives more options and flexibility in terms of avoiding conflicts of interest.
- Restructuring the Safeguarding Committee as described above and in appendix 1
- Strengthening and broadening the Standing Orders in relation to declarations of interest and management of conflict of interest.
- Publishing without fear or favour appropriately redacted results of reviews and lessons learned exercises (while at the same time ensuring the privacy of all concerned in line with GDPR and with confidentiality policies).

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- Appointing an external agency to undertake the safeguarding audits from Connexional year 2025-26 onwards.
- Changing the requirement for Committee members from being a Methodist to being a practising Christian.

Given recent changes and ongoing developments, the time is not right at the moment for an external independent review of the Methodist Church's governance of safeguarding. However, an external review will be arranged for the start of the 2025-26 connexional year in September 2024.

***RESOLUTIONS

54/1. The Council received the report.

54/2. The Council agreed the approach to independence outlined in this report and commended the steps in paragraph 8 not already proposed to the Conference in other reports to the Conference for implementation.

54/3. The Council supported the restructuring of the Safeguarding Committee as set out in appendix 1 and commended it to the Conference.

Appendix 1

Methodist Safeguarding Committee Structure

1. Briefing for the Methodist Council

The Safeguarding Committee (SGC) has been reviewing its effectiveness over the last three months and have decided that the structure and membership of the Committee needs to change to increase its effectiveness and better deliver on all the elements set out in their Terms of Reference. The timing of these changes is critical because currently aspects of the SGC's responsibilities (e.g. timely safeguarding panels) is a challenge.

There are still some details that need to be clarified and some practicalities that need to be worked out, but this paper sets out the agreed direction of travel that the SGC wants to take. Given that this will require a change to Standing Orders which would need to be approved by the Conference, the SGC wanted to share the direction of travel with Council at the earliest opportunity so that Council can advise the SGC on the best way forward given the imperative to achieve approval by Conference in 2024.

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2. Introduction

The Methodist Safeguarding Committee seeks to ensure that the Church is a safe place for all – children, young people, and adults.

Under Standing Order 232, the Committee provides oversight and scrutiny of safeguarding across the Church. It also provides advice and guidance on policies and practice. Panels comprising Committee Members review risk assessments and assess the cases of individuals who may pose a safeguarding risk and identify suitable measures to manage such situations.

Committee members (whether lay or ordained) are all volunteers. They work quietly and effectively, making a significant contribution in helping to ensure that the Church is a safer place.

The Committee has reviewed its terms of reference to strengthen governance and to be even more effective in fulfilling all its duties and functions. In parallel with this, the Committee has also undertaken a review of independence in safeguarding and several improvements have been identified.

This paper sets out the changes that the Committee wants to make and seeks approval from the Council and Conference for these changes.

3. The Case for Change

SO 232 prescribes that the Committee should have a chair and up to 18 members (five who in the judgment of the Council command respect (called senior members) and ten others with relevant experience).

The distinction between seniors and other members of the Committee is unhelpful. In recent years, members of some of the Methodist charities have been members of the Committee but in practice rarely attend. A survivor nominated by the Methodist Survivors' Group attends committee meetings but is not a full voting member. The Secretary of Conference and the Director of Safeguarding attend the meeting but are not voting members.

The size of the committee makes it unwieldy to organise meetings and manage meetings in the allotted time. Meetings encompass strategic direction and governance in addition to providing advice and guidance on more operational matters, like training or the operation of panels. It is difficult to give proper focus to the breadth and depth of the terms of reference, and some Committee members' experience is more relevant to some elements of the terms of

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reference rather than others. A smaller number of members' experience spans all areas covered within by the committee.

The committee wishes to change the membership criteria so that the survivor representative is a full voting member of the committee rather than just attending. In addition, it recommends that the distinction between senior members and other members of the Committee be removed.

Engagement with senior leadership and safeguarding professionals in the Methodist charities can be achieved by working through the existing CEOs group, convened by the Secretary of Conference. This will enable integrated approaches to sharing good practice and managing risk without those organisations having a dedicated seat on the Safeguarding Committee with full voting rights.

The work by the committee on independence makes other recommendations in relation to the terms of reference for the committee including:

- Clarifying and tightening up on term limits (two terms of three years with a maximum of six years).
- Recruitment of more lay panel chairs given that ordained chairs are much more likely to know each other and to have close connections in the circuit or district.
- Recruitment of new panel members and chairs - a bigger pool gives more options and flexibility in terms of avoiding conflicts of interest.

4. Other Considerations

The committee's work on strengthening the governance of safeguarding and independence has highlighted that there are other aspects of good governance that need to be put in place connexionally in order to support and enable effective safeguarding across the church including:

- Clarifying the requirement that District Safeguarding Group (DSG) chairs are independent in the DSG standards.
- Developing a connexional policy on conflicts of interest, duty and loyalty
- Strengthening the whistleblowing policy by stating clearly that whistle blows should be sent to a senior independent person and not line managers and others, as stated in the current policy.
- Publicising the whistleblowing policy (which is currently quite hard to find on the website)

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- Strengthening and broadening the Standing Orders in relation to declarations of interest and the management of conflicts of interest.
- Publishing, without fear or favour, appropriately redacted results of reviews and lessons learned exercises (while at the same time ensuring the privacy of all concerned in line with GDPR and with confidentiality policies).
- Streamlining the interface between the safeguarding and the complaints and discipline process.

The committee notes the pertinence of the review of Part 11 to this section of its recommendations.

5. **Proposed Structure of the Safeguarding Committee**

The proposed structure for the safeguarding committee is for a strategy and oversight group, with several subgroups and a group that holds safeguarding panels. It will comprise:

- An Oversight group which sets strategy and provides oversight and scrutiny of safeguarding across the Church.
- Sub-groups that provide advice and guidance on policies, procedures and practice, training and quality assurance.
- A Safeguarding Panel group which reviews risk assessments and assess the cases of individuals who may pose a safeguarding risk and identify suitable measures to manage such situations.

5.1 Oversight group

Under the proposed structure the Secretary of Conference and Director of Safeguarding would attend the meetings of the Oversight Group but would not be full voting members.

As mentioned above, the oversight group will set strategy and provides oversight and scrutiny of safeguarding across the Church. This includes monitoring rollout of training, progress in implementing safer recruitment processes (e.g. overdue DBS checks), monitoring the implementation of recommendations from lessons learned reports, and considering how well safeguarding is embedded in practice by reviewing the findings of safeguarding audits.

Members of the Oversight Group would meet with DSG chairs at least once a year to share best practice and discuss trends and issues.

The chairs of the subgroups would report to the oversight group on the work of the subgroup and issues arising. This would take the form of submitting a short, written report. If the report raises substantive issues, the chair of the subgroup may be invited to attend the relevant agenda item at a meeting of the oversight group.

5.2 Subgroups

Members of the subgroups would not normally sit on the oversight group (unless there's a compelling reason which would make this helpful). Subgroups would include the following areas:

- Quality assurance
- Training
- Policy and procedures
- Risk assessment
- Survivor engagement
- Theology of safeguarding

The terms of reference for the committee should allow the establishment of new subgroups or "task and finish" groups, and the closing down of existing subgroups depending on the context in which the committee operates and the progress being made.

The subgroups would be responsible for ensuring that best practice is adopted and disseminated across the church.

5.3 Safeguarding Panels Group

Within the overall Committee structure, this group would comprise panel members (and panel chairs). The chair of the group would work with members of the group to ensure that the approach to panels conforms to best practice and that panels are run consistently and equitably.

The chair of the Safeguarding Panels Group would report to the oversight group on the work of the group and issues arising. This would take the form of submitting a short, written report. If the report raises substantive issues, the chair of the group may be invited to attend the relevant agenda item at a meeting of the oversight group.

29. Safeguarding Committee

6. Committee Member Roles

There are three types of roles available under this proposed structure:

Members of Oversight Group	Sub-group Members	Panel Members
<p>Essential criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passion for excellence in safeguarding • Member of the Methodist Church (whether lay or ordained) and in good standing. • Understanding of the theology of safeguarding • Understanding of issues associated with abuse of power. • Experience of governance, oversight and scrutiny • In-depth strategic experience of safeguarding <p>Desirable criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understanding of survivor's perspectives. <p>Time commitment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 days a year • Active participation in 4 meetings a year (two virtual and two in person). 	<p>Essential criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passion for excellence in safeguarding • In-depth strategic and operational experience of safeguarding • Understanding of issues associated with abuse of power. • In-depth strategic and operational experience of one or more of the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Quality assurance ◦ Training ◦ Policy and procedures ◦ Risk assessment ◦ Survivor engagement ◦ Theology of safeguarding <p>Desirable criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understanding of survivor's perspectives. <p>Time commitment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 days a year • Active participation in 4 meetings a year (two virtual and two in person). 	<p>Essential criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passion for excellence in safeguarding • In-depth strategic and operational experience of safeguarding • Understanding of risk assessment processes and approaches to risk mitigation <p>Desirable criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understanding of survivor's perspectives. <p>Time commitment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 days a year • Active participation in 4 meetings a year (two virtual and two in person).

29. Safeguarding Committee

All roles would be non-remunerated, but expenses would be paid for travel to meetings. Additional to the time commitments set out above, training and support would be provided as required.

The committee is keen to increase its diversity and to welcome applications from all sections of the communities that it serves.

Appointments would be for a three-year period, renewable for a further three years with a maximum term of office of six years.

The committee does not recommend that District Safeguarding Officers should be eligible for appointment to the committee.

Appendix B

Safeguarding Casework and Development work

Case Statistics

Period	1/9/19-31/8/20	1/9/20 - 31/8/21	1/9/21-31/8/22	1/9/22-31/8/23	1/9/23-29/2/24
DBS/PVG cases open	89	28	79	48	31
DBS/PVG cases closed	186	50	56	39	49
Non DBS/PVG cases open	57	27	17	44	178
Non DBS/PVG cases closed	13	17	2	8	78

29. Safeguarding Committee

Safeguarding Panels

	1/9/19-31/8/20	1/9/19-31/8/20	1/9/20-31/8/21	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	1/9/23-29/2/24	1/9/22-29/2/24	
Outcome	Number	Appeals	Number	Appeals	Number	Appeals	Number	Appeals	Number	Appeals	Number	Appeals
Not cleared	1	0	1	1	3	1	1	0	1	0	1	0
Restrictions on role and Safeguarding Contract	2	0	3	0	4	0	4	0	1	0	1	1
Cleared with conditions	8	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Cleared with no conditions	1	0	1	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
No changes to current Safeguarding Contract	2	0	1	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	1	0
Safeguarding Contract ended	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Safeguarding Contract ended with conditions	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Resigned from Role	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	19	0	10	1	16	1	9	0	5	0	5	1