

CONFIDENTIAL: DSO employment and future safeguarding structures plan

MC/24/53

Date of meeting	13-15 April 2024
Contact name and details	Tim Carter, Director of Safeguarding CarterT@methodistchurch.org.uk
Action required	The Council to approve proposed new integrated safeguarding service
Resolutions	53/1. The Council receives the report. 53/2. The Council commends to the Conference the creation of a unified Safeguarding structure as outlined in this report.

Summary of content

Subject of aims	To provide the Council with proposals for an integrated structure for safeguarding services.
Main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council received a report at its October 2023 meeting detailing the work that has been undertaken in response to the memorial brought to the Conference which Conference memorial asking for District Safeguarding Officers to be made connexional employees. A reasoned business case was made that it would be advantageous, for a variety of reasons, for DSOs to become connexional employees and a single integrated safeguarding service introduced to manage and support safeguarding work across the church. The Council endorsed this approach and referred the work to the Strategy and Resources Committee to undertake further work on how this should be resourced. The February meeting of the SRC accepted the proposed service and asked for further financial modelling to be undertaken in order to justify the proposed increased expenditure. Further work has been undertaken in drafting job descriptions, job evaluation and costings.
Background context and relevant documents (with function)	MC/23/69
Consultations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> District Chairs DSOs and DSG chairs at the annual Safeguarding conference

Summary of impact

Financial	To be confirmed
Legal including impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposed new service will necessitate the removal of current district safeguarding posts and consideration of what legal

on other jurisdictions	<p>personnel procedures will apply when establishing the new service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A specialist project manager to be employed on a fixed term basis to lead on this transition for existing affected staff.
Wider connexional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The overall impact on the wider connexion will be to offer a more integrated safeguarding service in order to improve the consistency and quality of how the church is supported in fulfilling its responsibilities in this area. • This supports the Church's 'Our Calling' aspirations.
External, including ecumenical	<p>The proposed new service will enable those employed to offer a more consistent and integrated contribution to ecumenical safeguarding colleagues.</p>
Risk	<p>The new service will also enable the Church to mitigate against future claims that it has not ensured it has done all it can to reduce safeguarding risks as well as address reputational and potential financial risk by not doing so.</p>

1. **The memorial** (Conference 2022)

The Plymouth and Exeter District Synod (Present: 77; Voting 68 for, 0 against) draws the attention of the Conference to the current arrangements for the employment of District Safeguarding Officers. Each one is employed/deployed by the District they serve with all the usual requirements for good employment practices in place. However, each District Safeguarding Officer is also assigned a Connexional Casework Supervisor and is required to work to a reporting timetable set by the Connexional Safeguarding Team. In addition, a District Safeguarding Officer can be required to undertake responsibilities beyond the remit of the District. There are occasions when the work of a District Safeguarding Officer is determined without reference to the employer. There are also occasions when a District Safeguarding Officer is placed in a difficult position because of these arrangements.

We believe that the time has come for all District Safeguarding Officers to become employees of the Methodist Council so that there is clarity in the arrangements and consistency of practice across the Connexion.

The Plymouth and Exeter District Synod asks the Conference to direct the Methodist Council to consider this matter and bring proposals to the Conference of 2023.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Plymouth and Exeter District for its memorial.

The role of the Connexional Safeguarding Casework Supervisor was created in 2018 and was designed to ensure that there was sufficient support for the development of policy and procedures, adequate provision of training, work with survivors and DBS management, whilst at the same time ensuring that Districts were able to manage their own Safeguarding. It has been clear that the implementation of the scheme has met with mixed responses and the Conference welcomes the District's suggestion that the current arrangement be reviewed.

The Conference has before it the Oversight and Trusteeship proposals which, if adopted by the Conference, will result in a reconfigured Districts structure. Those who prepared that report were aware that the ways in which District work regionally are different for stationing from those of the Learning Network and that neither corresponds to the Safeguarding quadrants. For these reasons, resolution 44/14 requests 'a plan for a single support structure for the new Districts incorporating stationing, safeguarding and learning with a corresponding alignment of the dispersed members of the Connexional Team.'

The Conference therefore refers this memorial to the Council, directing that it be considered as part of the work required by 44/14 if adopted or in its own right if not.

The 2022 Conference did not adopt resolution 44/14 and the issues raised in this memorial have therefore been considered in their own right.

2. **Introduction**

The work of safeguarding in the church has always been one of continual learning and development and we are now at a crossroads in terms of further professionalising our approach in order to ensure that the church is able to fulfil its core mission of love and service to the whole community. Key principles of how we ensure that a 'church for all' is a safe and nurturing church have already been adopted in the 2022 Conference Theology of Safeguarding report.

The 2022 Conference referred to the Council a Memorial from the Plymouth and Exeter district, asking that the case for making all District Safeguarding Officers connexional employees be evaluated. In order to address this fully, the opportunity has been taken to set this in the context of a wider review of effective connexional and district safeguarding structures.

Whilst the thrust of this report addresses safeguarding across the Connexion, it needs to be recognised that in some places, such as the Isle of Man, the arrangements for safeguarding provision can be different (the Isle of Man has an ecumenically employed DSO) and such differences will need to be taken fully into account if and when any changes are agreed.

It is also recognised that, with the development in some areas of new district boundaries, there may be some sequencing in terms of implementation that may be required as and when changes to safeguarding structures are introduced.

3. Background

The 2015 report, *Courage, Cost and Hope* (the Past Cases Review) demonstrated the Church's commitment to learn from the past and it has responded to the England and Wales report into child sexual abuse (Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse) by reviewing the safeguarding procedures and training currently being offered. The next logical step is to look at the structure of staffing and accountability. Learning from investigations into senior leaders within the church has further provided lessons in new measures that need to be taken in order to ensure that our structures and procedures are as fit for purpose as we can make them. The rolling programme of District Safeguarding audits being undertaken by the Safeguarding Committee has also highlighted areas of best practice as well as shortcomings in the current structures and implementation of existing policy.

All districts have a District Safeguarding Officer (DSO) who is employed to offer advice, guidance and support to churches in their areas. (In a small number of Districts, DSO services are shared, including one ecumenical model.) This includes following up blemished DBS checks, undertaking district risk assessments, and leading training. In most cases the DSO is line managed by the district chair who holds ultimate responsibility for safeguarding policy in the district. The District Safeguarding Group (DSG) acts as a critical friend to oversee safeguarding and support the DSO in their work and DSGs now have agreed minimum standards.

In 2018 the Conference adopted a model to support safeguarding across the Connexion better with the creation of a new connexional safeguarding team. This involved the establishment of casework supervisors to offer professional supervision to each DSO and support to districts. This essentially created a twin track approach to supporting DSO work with line management/ employment at district level and professional case work supervision functions offered from the Connexional Team. The Conference memorial essentially asks that this model be revised to create a single line management/ case work supervision approach which would bring all DSOs into connexional employment.

This is also an opportune time to review the connexional safeguarding arrangements more generally as the current model of casework supervision is over five years old. During this time, the profile of safeguarding work in the church has continued to grow and the workload has expanded. When the current model was devised the church was in a very different place. The government's independent inquiry into child sexual abuse (IICSA) had only just begun. It has revealed widespread and shocking accounts of child abuse across all sectors in statutory and voluntary services. Because of the numbers of victims and survivors reporting to the Truth Commission who had experienced abuse within a faith setting the inquiry added a further investigation into a wider group of religious organisations (including the Methodist Church) in addition to the inquiries it had already undertaken into the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church. Whilst the Methodist Church was able to evidence the extent of work that has been undertaken to look at our own history (eg the Past Cases Review 2015) it has become apparent that with the growing pace of expectation within society of greater transparency in relation to abuse claims and challenging behaviours related to areas including misogyny, racism, discrimination and bullying, the church cannot stand still. The Methodist Church has been a leader in developing awareness and practice, seeking to embed a safeguarding approach in all of its work. This is not the end of the journey and we have to be continually reviewing and assessing how our approach needs development. As we embed cultural change, become more responsible to survivors and develop our theological approach to safeguarding, the demands on connexional safeguarding resources become greater and we need to be able to respond to these.

Most recently the Church of England has received recommendations from the Jay Review into its provision, operation and scrutiny of safeguarding services with firm recommendations that safeguarding work should be provided by a new body completely independently of the Church. The Methodist Safeguarding Committee has been looking at how to make governance more effective and ensure there is some independent scrutiny of safeguarding work in the Methodist church (as reported to the Council in MC/24/53) but maintains that in order to continue to change the culture within the church (as identified in *Courage, Cost and Hope*) the Church should continue to operate its safeguarding work with staff employed within the Church. This report therefore addresses how this can be best delivered in light of current requirements and expectations to be a safer church for everyone.

4. Work undertaken

Such a potentially significant change to the church's safeguarding structures should not be undertaken lightly and so extending the study period has given good opportunity to consult widely and gather the necessary personnel and finance information from which to undertake future modelling.

An interim report was presented to the 2023 Conference detailing consultations undertaken with plans to bring a final report to the 2024 Conference.

The following actions have been undertaken:

- 1) Consultation with DSOs** – DSOs have shared in conversations at the connexional DSO meetings and annual SG conferences about how future proposals might work and gathering their perspectives. Updates have been shared via the DSO monthly Bulletin and by casework supervisors in case work supervision and quadrant meetings with fellow DSOs.
- 2) Consultation with line managers** – the Director of Safeguarding has engaged in one to one meetings with 25 District Chairs to discuss the effectiveness of current connexional safeguarding arrangements to ascertaining their views (and those within their districts) about possible future changes. There have also been meetings with the District Chairs' group and the District Chairs' safeguarding group.
- 3) Collation of current district data** – all districts were asked for details of their DSO job descriptions and work arrangements along with current budgets. Various parts of the Connexional Team have begun to analyse appropriate information to help develop the thinking around both roles/structure and costs.
- 4) Monitoring of current connexional safeguarding team ways of working** – addressing this memorial has enabled a review of current workloads in the safeguarding team and what changes would be necessitated by adopting different employment arrangements for DSOs. During the last five years many districts have increased the number of hours DSOs are working (or employed additional staff) in order to respond to the increasing safeguarding workload. This, in turn, has increased the workload for the connexional safeguarding team. At the same time, the team has taken on a more extensive portfolio of safeguarding development to support the church including expanding the training programme, introducing a webinar series, reviewing and developing policy guidance, supporting the Global Relationships team and establishment of a Mission Partner with a dedicated safeguarding post, and, embedding a more responsive service to victims and survivors.
- 5) The wider context of safeguarding within the Church** – there is a number of related developments within the church which have a direct, or related, impact on future church safeguarding structures. The review of the complaints and discipline procedures, proposed changes to the structure of the Safeguarding Committee, and the roll out of study materials related to the theology of safeguarding will all affect any changes that the Conference decides to make to safeguarding structures moving forward.

Drawing on all of these data and discussions enabled a number of possible future models and ways of working to be assessed and have led to the proposed new Connexional Safeguarding Service outlined below.

5. The business case for change

The Council meeting of October 2023 further directed the Strategy and Resources Committee, in consultation with the Safeguarding Committee, to produce a draft scheme to replace the current model of DSO employment with a unified Connexional Safeguarding function as part of the Connexional Team and to report to the Council in April 2024 with firm proposals.

From discussion with all parties there is clear agreement about the overall objective for the church's safeguarding work. There is a wish for:

- agreed standards
- consistency in practice
- transparency in decision making
- a clear accountability structure
- confidence in how our procedures operate
- effective integration with the complaints and discipline process
- an assurance that victims and survivors can be better supported throughout the church
- common terms and conditions of employment for DSOs (including provision of IT equipment etc)
- a standardised approach to ongoing training and professional development for DSOs

Currently across approximately 30 different employing arrangements (ie districts) these things are not happening consistently. However, this does not mean that all Chairs and DSOs see the answer being the creation of one cohesive structure. In some districts they would argue that they have worked hard and consistently in achieving clear and high standards of practice by adopting a team work approach with other district officers. They see no need to change this as it is contextually relevant and 'owned' by the district. In

other districts this is not the case and the view is that it will not be possible to achieve consistency without a single shared connexional system. They believe that it is possible to reflect local contexts with DSOs continuing to be based in districts with the advantage of a larger Connexional Team that can offer wider support and input as and when required.

The key question is how well achieving our objectives will be served by centralising line management and supervision with a revised connexional safeguarding team and creation of a single service?

Mindful of the more recent changes in the Learning Network and of the close cooperation in many areas between LN colleagues and DSOs, particularly in the delivery of safeguarding training, a unified connexional structure could sit alongside other dispersed staff offering flexibility across groups of districts whilst maintaining (unless local circumstances suggest another approach) the clear identification of a named safeguarding officer within each district or groups of districts. The creation of one connexional safeguarding service and structure will improve consistency in implementation of policy and procedures, ensure common employment practice and demonstrate the Church's commitment to continuing to learn and respond to review and feedback on striving for the highest standards with our safeguarding work.

This has advantages in removing a level of management for safeguarding decision-making where line managers don't feel suitably qualified or confident. It will offer increased flexibility by employing DSOs in one team so that resources can be deployed more effectively and cover for holiday and sickness or periods when more input is required in certain localities - 'centrally employed, locally deployed' as one Chair put it. One employing structure will be a more efficient and manageable approach than requiring each district to undertake this separately.

Under these proposals the DSOs would be home based and therefore likely to continue to be located in districts; therefore the new model can build in an ongoing requirement to maintain the current level of contact and coordination with district chair and colleagues to maintain this. The interaction with the District Safeguarding Group will remain central to this.

A single accountable safeguarding service will enable the church to demonstrate to outside agencies and government that it is seeking to strengthen its management and governance of a key area of work following on from the criticisms of inquiries such as the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) which found critical failings in many religious organisations. DSO/District chair relationships can be too close, making legitimate challenge harder to ensure. Line management from outside the district will give more scope for DSOs to scrutinise district practice.

The Methodist Church has been a leader in the way it has sought to develop its approach to good safeguarding practice from the Past Cases Review, to the introduction of pastoral supervision of ministers and the Theology of Safeguarding report. We need to maintain this momentum in order to respond fully to Our Calling. Likewise it is felt by many safeguarding practitioners that credibility with statutory professionals and agencies will be enhanced by a clearer relationship with one safeguarding church service and structure which can be easily referenced.

Therefore it is proposed that a single church safeguarding service and structure is created which will offer a unified *Connexional Safeguarding function* as part of the Connexional Team. This will operate in regionally based teams which will align with the Learning Network areas and which also closely follow the stationing areas.

6. Safeguarding Service structure proposals

The current 'hybrid' management model of safeguarding work in the church (line management of DSOs as district employees and professional case work supervision and support from the connexional safeguarding team) has served the church well for the past five years as the church has moved towards all DSOs being employed and a clearer set of safeguarding policies and updated training requirements.

With the increase in safeguarding work from all quarters, increasing expectations from within wider society and the learning of lessons from listening to victims and survivors about what needs to further improve, we now need a comprehensive and integrated service that can respond to both increasing workloads and expectations. Consistency and capacity are key to achieving this which is why we are proposing one single accountable structure for safeguarding across the church.

It is proposed to create four regional safeguarding teams which will serve a number of districts together and be able to maximise a skills' mix of safeguarding officers who can support one another and offer more effective cover to those districts. Members of each team will link with the districts in each region to ensure

that local knowledge and working relationships with district chairs, DSGs and other key district/ circuit personnel are maintained.

Within each regional team the safeguarding officers will share lead areas for work with survivors, training and quality assurance. These lead areas will all relate to the lead officers in the safeguarding management team.

The new *Regional Safeguarding Officer* posts will operate under the line management of a *Regional Safeguarding Manager* with a *team administrator*.

The Regional Safeguarding Manger will be part of the safeguarding management team.

It is anticipated that, with current DSOs reporting being at capacity with workloads, the new regional teams will reflect at least the same number of hours currently being worked across the district areas the region will cover from DSOs, Assistant and Deputy DSOs. Once the new teams are embedded and working to a similar set of service standards it will be possible better to assess capacity and future service planning.

Regional Safeguarding Officers (RSO)

A new RSO job description has been created having reviewed all current DSO job responsibilities. The new role includes clear responsibility for assessing DBS blemishes, undertaking local risk assessments, quality assurance of church/ circuit compliance and leading training.

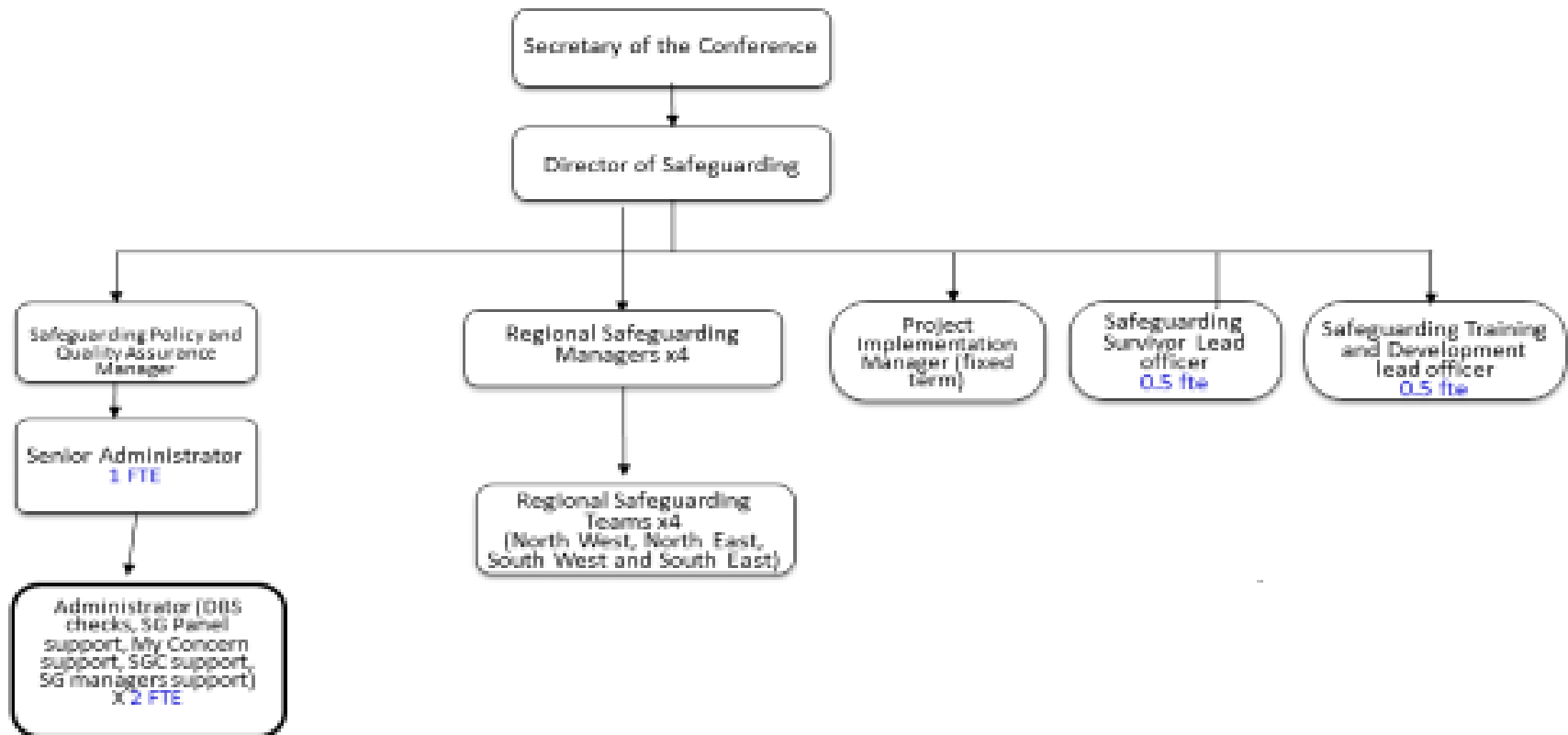
The new Regional Safeguarding Officer role has a lot of similarities with most existing DSO jobs. This process will be subject to standard employment law processes with negotiations between the connexional HR team and district employers.

In order to undertake the process of reviewing existing employment arrangements with each district and their safeguarding staff and to lead on setting up the new regional teams, a fixed term project management post with specialised human resources experience is proposed for six months. This will be followed by a fixed term project lead for the first twelve months of the new structure's operation whilst workloads and workflows are clarified so that after its first year of operation the new integrated service structure can be reviewed to ensure it is sufficiently resourced or whether it needs to be re-focused to meet the church's needs.

Safeguarding management team

1. A new post of Regional Safeguarding Manger will be created for each of the four Regional Safeguarding Teams and they will line manage the Regional Safeguarding Officers and an Administrator in each of the four regional areas. This post will replace the current Casework Supervisor roles and reflect the new responsibilities that line management will bring.
2. The existing Policy Manager post will have added responsibilities in relation to ensuring minimum standards are being achieved and so this post will become a Policy and Quality Assurance Manager. This post will line manage the admin posts in the team.
3. There will be two new posts (0.5) to lead on the areas of Survivor Support and Advocacy and Training and Development work. Currently these are undertaken by existing members of the safeguarding team and demand more dedicated time.
4. The existing Admin staff (1.5 posts) will be increased to 3 fte posts to cover:
 - DBS blemish work
 - Supporting safeguarding panels
 - Admin support to RSMs and maintaining the casework management and recording system
 - Admin support to Director, Project Implementation Manager and Policy/QA manager

Connexional Safeguarding Service



7. Regional areas

The current Learning Network areas have been split into six and we wish to align the Regional Safeguarding teams to fit into this structure as closely as possible.

The current SG areas are split into four (Quadrants) and it is proposed to maintain this split with Scotland, Wales, and the Isle of Man each added into one of the four regional areas.

It is important to be clear that within this split, the specific differences between legislatures in England, Scotland, Wales, the Isle of Man, Channel Islands, Malta and Gibraltar need to be reflected.

In the case of the Isle of Man there will be a service level agreement setting out the specific safeguarding relationship due to the ecumenical nature of the safeguarding work and the different employment arrangements that currently exist.

North East, Scotland and Shetland

- Scotland
- Shetland
- Newcastle
- Darlington
- Sheffield
- Yorkshire North and East
- Yorkshire West

North West

- North West England
- Chester and Stoke
- Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury
- Birmingham
- Isle of Man

South East

- London
- Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire
- East Anglia
- Lincolnshire
- Northampton
- Nottingham and Derby
- South East

South West and Cymru Wales

- Wales Synod Cymru
- South West Peninsula
- Bristol
- Southampton
- Channel Islands

8. Implementation timetable

June – final report to Conference

September – December

Further consultation with District Chairs and DSOs

Appointment of HR specialist to project manage and plan recruitment to new structure.

January- September 2025

Part one – establishment of new safeguarding management team

Part two – establishment of regional teams

*****RESOLUTIONS**

53/1. The Council receives the report.

53/2. The Council commends to the Conference the creation of a unified Safeguarding structure as outlined in this report.