

Safeguarding Policy

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NB: The role of The West Midlands District Safeguarding Officer (DSO) has changed to that of a Regional Officer for Safeguarding (ROS) from 1st August 2025. Any reference to DSO anymore in any policies and procedures should simply be exchanged for ROS. This does not detract from the requirements to which it refers.

Statement of Safeguarding Principles

Every person has a value and dignity, which comes directly from the creation of humans in God's own image and likeness. Christians see this potential as fulfilled by God's re-creation of us in Christ. Among other things this implies a duty to value all people as bearing the image of God and therefore to protect them from harm.

Principles

The West Midlands District is committed to the safeguarding and protection of all children, young people, and adults who are or may be vulnerable and/or need care and support. It affirms that the needs of children and of people when they are vulnerable are paramount. It acknowledges that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, and no one is exempt from fulfilling that responsibility.

The West Midlands District commits itself to responding well and without delay to any allegation or cause for concern that a child or adult may have been harmed, whether in the church or any other context. It commits itself to challenge the abuse of power of anyone in a position of trust. It especially supports the learning from the Methodist Past Cases review in its report "Cost, Courage and Hope 2015" and will continually use this to inform its practice to offer the most sensitive and appropriate response and care to all.

The West Midland District commits itself to ensuring the implementation of Safeguarding Policy, Procedures and Guidance for the Methodist Church (2024 - updated), national government legislation and guidance and local policies and protocols, especially in relation to safe practice in circuits and churches.

The West Midlands District commits itself to the provision of support, advice and training for lay and ordained people to ensure they are clear and confident about their roles and responsibilities in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and adults who may be vulnerable.

It affirms the role of The West Midlands District Safeguarding Group (DSG), the Regional Officer for Safeguarding (RSO) and those others who hold safeguarding roles in circuits and churches.

In summary commits itself to: -

- Safely recruiting and supporting all those with any responsibility for children and adults within the church.
- Responding promptly and appropriately to every safeguarding concern or allegation.
- Caring as a priority pastorally for victims and survivors of abuse and other people affected.
- Caring pastorally for those who are the subject of concerns of allegations of abuse and others affected.
- Promoting good safeguarding practice

- Carrying out risk assessments and putting safeguarding measures in place where individuals pose a presenting risk to children, young people or vulnerable adults
- Working to make safe cultures within our churches, which positively promote safeguarding as the core of its life, care and ministry.
- We will seek to challenge any abuse of power, especially by anyone in a position of trust.

The West Midlands District recognises that none of us is invulnerable but that there is a particular care for those whose vulnerability is increased by situations, by disabilities or by reduction in capacities. It is recognised that this increased vulnerability may be temporary or permanent and may be visible or invisible, but that it does not diminish our humanity and seeks to affirm the gifts and graces of all God's people.

The West Midlands District recognises the serious issue of the abuse of children and vulnerable adults and recognises that this may take the form of physical, emotional, sexual, financial, spiritual, discriminatory, domestic or institutional abuse or neglect, abuse using social media or human trafficking (slavery). It acknowledges the effects these may have on people and their development, including spiritual and religious development. It accepts its responsibility for ensuring that all people are safe in its care and that their dignity and right to be heard is maintained. It accepts its responsibility to support, listen to and work for healing with survivors, offenders, communities and those who care about them. It takes seriously the issues of promotion of welfare so that each of us can reach our full potential in God's grace.

Governance

The District Policy Committee will take the overall responsibility for the work of safeguarding, with The West Midlands District Safeguarding Group (DSG) as the vehicle to drive forward the development and implementation of all requirements as laid down nationally and locally across The West Midlands District.

The Methodist Church employs, manages and supervises Regional Officers for Safeguarding. This is a change of title and management for this post and should be reflected on all displayed information about safeguarding.

At a Circuit level, the Circuit Leadership Team will oversee the work of safeguarding across the Circuit and ensure that it complies with safeguarding requirements. In particular, it will appoint and support the work of the Circuit Safeguarding Officer(s).

At a local level, each Church Council will oversee the work of safeguarding in the church and understand their role as trustees to ensure compliance with policies and procedures. It will oversee adherence to letting agreements by outside groups, safer recruitment into church roles and appointing and supporting the work of the Church Safeguarding Officer(s).

The Charity Commission

The West Midlands District recognises the importance of working in partnership with the Charity Commission to fulfil its duty to inform it of serious safeguarding matters as advised by the Regional Officer for Safeguarding. The West Midlands District policy appertaining to making a referral to the Charity Commission 2025 outlines the pathway and responsibilities for making such a referral.

Procedures for dealing with safeguarding concerns – “Responding Well”

The West Midlands District continues to adopt the phrase “Responding Well” as the overarching term for its work, safeguarding policies and procedures especially when dealing with a concern. This term reflects the commitment to responding to concerns appropriately, sensitively and in line with requirements whilst maintaining a sense of dignity for those being helped and supported.

In certain situations, usually when there is a need to draw together information quickly, the ROS will initiate what is referred to in The West Midlands District as a “rapid response meeting” with key people. i.e. a Zoom/Face to Face meeting to plan at an early stage the intervention and support needed.

Each church and circuit must have in place a safeguarding policy for both children and adults. In the Connexional year 25/26, the first church council of the year (for church policy) and the first CLT meeting (for Circuit policy) will approve these.

It is the policy of The West Midlands District that any concerns will be:

- listened to and taken seriously
- responded to within appropriate timescales and in consultation with others
- kept “live” until they are agreed as dealt with and everyone is safe
- victim and ‘survivor focused to ensure sensitive care and respect is given
- dealt with, where appropriate, in collaboration with other agencies

Support to those hurt by someone in the church and/or outside of it

The West Midlands District recognises the impact of harm of any kind. Harm done in the context of the church brings with it additional trauma, given that church settings are expected to be safe places and its officers especially committed to safeguarding and protecting, not abusing their power. Given this, particular support will be given to those who are hurt in the context of the church, whether past or present.

If harm or abuse is experienced outside of the context of the church but becomes known to the people in the life of the local churches, The West Midlands District will respond in the usual way to offer support and get the right help especially, if necessary, from external agencies. It is hoped people feel safe enough to tell people in churches of their abuse or concerns wherever or whenever they arose or occurred.

Provision of safeguarding training

- Creating Safer Space Foundation face to face/on line training and Advanced on line/face to face training

The West Midlands District will implement and deliver essential and appropriate training as required by the Methodist Church and national governmental standards. Training is critical to The West Midlands District’s ability to safeguard and protect. Refusal to attend training will be taken seriously and, if necessary, invoke Methodist disciplinary arrangements, including suspension from posts until such training has been completed.

In particular, the West Midlands District will deliver the Methodist Creating Safer Spaces training at Foundation Level On line/Face to Face version (2024) and the Advanced On Line/Face to Face Module 2024.

All those in appropriate roles, whether voluntary or paid, will attend as appropriate every 4 years, including Local Preachers and Worship Leaders.

In working with the ROS, The West Midlands District will identify training and development to build on 'continuing learning needs, especially for those in safeguarding roles.

Church and Circuit Safeguarding Officers will play a key role in highlighting numbers for training, keeping systems for recording who has undertaken which training and keeping people informed of their training requirements. Circuit Administrators, if in place, will be very useful in helping to co-ordinate such information and store it centrally.

The DSG will oversee the development of training within The West Midlands District as a whole and ensure that all necessary requirements are being fulfilled.

Monitoring and Support Group (MSG) training. It is now mandatory for all members of a MSG group to undertake the Methodist training before, or during, they take up that membership.

Safer Recruitment

The West Midlands District will ensure roles are safer recruited to through a robust recruitment process as laid down in The Methodist Church's Safer Recruitment Policy updated January 2024.

Letting arrangements

The Church Council as Trustees is responsible for overseeing the use of the church premises by outside groups, making sure they are compliant with requirements and reviewing at least annually the groups using the premises and how they are conducting themselves.

All outside groups using church premises will be subject to a letting agreement and will be required to produce evidence of their own safeguarding policies and appropriate DBS checks. Where no policy is in place, the church letting the building will require the group to use that particular church's safeguarding policy.

Any lettings should be agreed only when considered against any other lettings taking place in the same building/vicinity in the church at the same time. It may be that the presence of a particular group occurring at the same time as another may mean increased risk to those groups and make a particular letting not possible.

Risk assessments

- Buildings, events and special occasions

It is essential that all buildings, activities and special events are risk assessed to ensure compliance with policy, procedure and insurance requirements. This is especially important for Youth and Children's Workers as they engage with the type of activities that will require robust assessment.

- Safeguarding concerns

From time to time, it will be necessary for certain situations to be risk assessed to ensure people are safe and free from harm. This may be due to concerns about others behaviour and conduct or possible risks an individual may pose in general. These assessments will always be completed by the ROS in partnership with appropriate others and as appropriate

the Chair of District. There will be a range of situations where such a risk assessment will be needed, and The West Midlands District will be committed to undertaking these without delay and as advised.

In addition, certain situations may need a more independent risk assessment by another ROS colleague from another District as commissioned by the Connexional Safeguarding Team at Methodist Church House. For these assessments, The West Midlands District will always co-operate, making information available as required to the person undertaking the risk assessment.

The West Midlands District will work to support those who are offenders within the church and who desire to worship and maintain contact with the church by ensuring safeguarding contracts are in place and monitoring and supports groups to oversee them. These replace Covenants of Care as agreed by Methodist Conference 2017.

Accessibility in offering help

The West Midlands District will ensure that churches, Circuits and The West Midlands District itself have available on all its websites and visible notice boards contact numbers, especially emergency ones, of those who are in safeguarding roles and who are best placed to offer safeguarding help and advice. This will include emergency agency numbers. These will be easily accessed to avoid people having to ask for them should they wish to remain anonymous.

Further, there will be appropriate links on church and Circuit websites to allow people to easily connect to District and Connexional safeguarding Policies and related documents to ensure people who need help in this way can make use of information easily.

Criminal record checks (DBS – Disclosure and Barring Service)

All those in an appropriate role will be subject to a DBS check that is relevant to that role and updated every 5 years. All those without valid DBS clearance will not continue or begin in that role until one has been obtained.

DBS checks and clearance are mandatory for Ministers/Deacons, including Supernumerary Ministers, paid Lay Workers, Worship Leaders and Local preachers.

Compliance with safeguarding requirements.

It is District Policy that if anyone refuses to comply with any aspect of safeguarding requirements, the matter be referred to the ROS for further help and if necessary to arrange a face-to-face meeting with an individual or group. If matters are still not able to be resolved, the ROS will refer the matter to the Chair of District who will consider the appropriate formal responses. This could, and has, included people being suspended from their role until they are safeguarding complaint.

Offering transport as part of church care and responsibilities

The West Midlands District will ensure that all those who offer transport/lifts on behalf of the church have the appropriate insurance in place. This must be obtained before any arrangement is agreed. This insurance is easily accessed through most insurance companies and is added in the context of volunteers who are offering transport or as part of church business. There is usually no cost at all for this addition. In addition, the church must exercise its duty of care in ensuring any driver who is transporting on behalf of the church is

fully able to do so in relation to their health and general capacity. If any concerns arise, it is essential that they are raised as appropriate to ensure the safety of all and the public at large.

Offering transport as friends, whilst not falling under the requirements of this policy, would require the usual care in ensuring the safety of all out of respect for that friendship.

Policy review

This policy will be reviewed each year in order to ensure it is up to date, relevant and in line with national and local initiatives and requirements.

Signed.....District Chair(s)

Date.....

Appendix (i)

Key Safeguarding Roles and responsibilities.

Local churches

The responsibility to ensure safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and followed belongs to the Church Council. It is important that all Church Council members, whether or not a completely church congregation, understands their legal duties and therefore ensures:

- policies and procedures are in place;
- policies and procedures are displayed as directed by the District/Circuit Safeguarding Officer;
- policies are reviewed pro-actively every 12 months by the Church Council with a report being offered by the Church Safeguarding Officer as to how they are working and any concerns about them
- that the local church has a Church Safeguarding Officer who is not the Minister. If one is not able to be found, the Church Council secretary will caretake that role until the vacancy is filled;
- that the Church Council meeting will have safeguarding as a standing item on each meeting agenda;
- that the Church Safeguarding Officer be is a member of the Church Council;

Circuits

The Circuit Leadership Team is responsible for the oversight of safeguarding within its churches to help, support and ensure compliance. The Circuit Leadership Team will ensure that;

- the Circuit has at least one Circuit Safeguarding Officer in place;
- the Circuit Administrator is clear about his/her role in relation to holding records for safeguarding;
- each CLT and Circuit meeting has Safeguarding as a standing item on the agenda;
- the Circuit Safeguarding Officer is a member of CLT in their safeguarding role or at least attends the Circuit Meeting to report on safeguarding matters.

District

The District Policy Committee is responsible for the oversight of Safeguarding across the District at a strategic level and must ensure:

- there is a Regional Officer assigned to it;
- there is a District Safeguarding Group (DSG) in place;
- Safeguarding is a standing item on its meeting agenda each time;
- Safeguarding is a standing item on its Synods;
- the ROS is a member of the District Policy Committee or able to attend to give appropriate reports as required;

District Safeguarding Group

The District Safeguarding Group (DSG) will oversee the work and promotion of safeguarding across the District. It will meet at least three times a year and have an Independent Chair. Its role is to:

- ensure support to all circuits and churches in implementing District and Connexional policy;
- oversee the promotion of safeguarding children and adults across the District and ensure that all necessary information is disseminated at a local level to support this;
 - ensure that the Chair of District, superintendents, ministers, paid workers and all lay staff and relevant committee/group members are updated on any changes to safeguarding policy, practice and guidance. (The Chair of DSG, supported by the Regional Officer for Safeguarding, will report to the District Leadership Team as required with such changes);
 - ensure that the work of safeguarding across the District is up to date and in line with National Policy and Guidance;
 - initiate programmes of awareness and good practice;
 - work collaboratively with other relevant groups (e.g. Connexional, regional and ecumenical partners and professional colleagues) on safeguarding issues.
- Cascade relevant information from the DSG to Circuit meetings.

Regional Officer for Safeguarding

The District must have a ROS assigned to it by the Methodist church:

- ensure DSG is kept up to date with relevant national and local developments;
- advise DSG on safeguarding issues, practice and procedures;
- offer advice, and consultation to ordained and lay staff in the District on any individual case, situations and / or emergencies;
- be available to assist with implementation of policy and procedure;
- undertake risk assessments as appropriate;
- be a critical link between all relevant Committees to ensure safeguarding is relevant and connected to groups within the District;
- support Superintendent Ministers in their implementation of safeguarding policies; • ensure that Superintendent Ministers are aware of their responsibilities and enable training opportunities to be made available;
 - use the expertise and advice of the District Safeguarding Group and, as appropriate, Connexional personnel;
 - ensure that all circuits and churches create and implement policies and assist them in doing so;
- be a pro-active link between the District and external agencies, especially statutory organisations, in ensuring the best support for those who need help.

Church Safeguarding Officer

Each church must have a church safeguarding officer. In the absence of one, the Church Council should choose who should cover this role temporarily. A Minister should not take on this role. The responsibilities of the Church Safeguarding Officer are to:

- provide support and advice to the minister and the stewards in fulfilling their roles with regard to safeguarding.
- ensure that a suitable, signed church safeguarding policy is displayed at all times in the church on a safeguarding noticeboard, along with names of current safeguarding officers, national helplines and other suitable information. This must be renewed annually.
- record all safeguarding issues that are reported to the church safeguarding officer, according to Methodist policy and procedure.
- promote appropriate routes for reporting of concerns
- identify and inform those who are required to attend safeguarding training and maintain records of attendance. Work with the circuit safeguarding officer and ROS to arrange training.
- attend training and meetings relating to the role
- work in partnership with the lettings officer, stewards and user groups to promote good safeguarding practice on church premises. This will include gaining written confirmation that hirers of church premises are aware of the church safeguarding policy or are using an appropriate policy of their own.
- check that safeguarding is included as an agenda item at all Church Council meetings and report to the Church Council annually.
- inform all those with responsibility for recruitment, whether paid or voluntary, of their obligation to follow safer recruitment procedures.
- advise the circuit safeguarding officer and/or ROS of any issues with compliance with safeguarding training, policy or safer recruitment requirements and respond promptly to any request from them about audit of safeguarding activities.

Circuit Safeguarding Officers

Each Circuit within the District must have at least one Circuit Safeguarding Officer who is not a Minister. In the absence of one, arrangements should be made with an adjoining Circuit to agree mutual support until the vacancy is filled. Given the importance of this role, any new appointment must be formalised and follow the Connexional Safer Recruitment policy updated 2024. The Circuit will formally commission all those who take up this post by way of a simple commissioning service at the appropriate Circuit service. This will serve to help identify the person in the role to others in the Circuit, raise the profile of the work that this role will undertake and give a public profile to the post holder:

- Support and advice to the circuit superintendent and the circuit stewards regarding safeguarding matters.
- With the support of the circuit superintendent, prompt recording and reporting of any safeguarding concerns that they are made aware of. This will include appropriate referral to statutory agencies and ROSs, as required by Methodist Church Safeguarding Policy, Procedures and Guidance.
- Making appropriate arrangements for the secure storage, retention and appropriate sharing of safeguarding information held by the circuit.
- Promoting the safety and well-being of all children and vulnerable adults within the circuit.

- Presenting a report to each circuit meeting about safeguarding events (noting the need for confidentiality regarding specific cases) and reminding relevant parties (where necessary) that safeguarding should be a standing item on the Circuit Meeting agenda
- Receipt of church risk assessments, policy and training schedules for sharing with the circuit meeting annually.
- Attending the circuit staff meeting as necessary to discuss concerns brought to their attention.
- Liaising with individual church safeguarding officers to offer guidance and check they are complying with Methodist Church Safeguarding Policies, Procedures and Guidance. This should include at least one annual meeting.
- Working with the superintendent minister, ministers and the ROS regarding safeguarding concerns.
- Attending and active participation at safeguarding training, district safeguarding events and meetings.
- Work with local ecumenical partners and their safeguarding representatives.
- Reviewing safeguarding policies for each church in the circuit prior to presentation to the Circuit Meeting.
- Supporting the circuit superintendent with the annual review of the circuit safeguarding policy and sending a copy to the ROS.
- Maintaining a record of all people within the circuit who have received Foundation Module and Foundation Refresher (prior to 2020) training together with dates of attendance
- Ensuring that training is offered to those working with children and vulnerable adults, holding an office of responsibility, or are in other applicable roles as defined in Appendix III of the Methodist Church Safeguarding Policy, Procedures and Guidance 2020.
- Overseeing timely delivery of appropriate training, in liaison with the Church Safeguarding Officers and accredited Circuit Trainers.
- Advising all churches in the circuit of the requirement to adopt a safer recruitment policy and to carry out required procedures when appointing staff or volunteers.
- DBS verification on behalf of the circuit.
- Retaining records of names of those at circuit level who have DBS checks.
- Providing reminders to church safeguarding officers about the need to apply or reapply for checks in accordance with the Methodist Church policy (for updates, the period is currently every five years).
- Assisting the ROS with setting up Monitoring and Support Groups for those subject to safeguarding contracts and reminding the chairs of groups when reviews are due.
- Maintaining a directory of useful names and contact details. Where a circuit safeguarding officer carries out the above activities, there is a requirement for supervisory oversight from the superintendent minister or nominated substitute, with signed and agreed records of meetings. All Circuit Safeguarding Officers are invited to attend DSG to both receive up to date information and represent their Circuit in any safeguarding matters related to it. Attendance is not mandatory.

Superintendent Minister

- Ensure all churches have appropriate and up-to-date safeguarding policies in place.
- Ensure all churches have appropriate and up-to-date safeguarding policies in place.
- Support those in pastoral charge in exercising responsibility for the implementation of safeguarding policy and practice.
- Ensure the provision of pastoral support for those involved in issues of abuse and in management of sex offenders.

- Ensure training opportunities are in place for all workers with children, vulnerable adults, for staff of the circuit and for members of the local churches in the circuit.
- Ensure the Circuit Meeting appoints a circuit safeguarding officer/s and that the details of each person are passed to the district office.
- Ensure the Circuit Meeting reviews this policy annually.
- Support the circuit safeguarding officer (Adults) and the circuit safeguarding officer (Children) in their work, providing access to resources to enable them to fulfil their functions.