



Promoting Safeguarding

Preventing Abuse

Protecting the Vulnerable

Wessex Synod & Synod Trust

***Safeguarding Policy:
Children and Adults***

November 2023

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1. Introduction

The Wessex Synod and Synod Trust policy should be read in line with the URCs Good Practice Guidance and resources which can be found [here](#) Wessex Synod agrees that children, young people and adults have a right to live in a way that does not cause them harm or impede their human rights and we support the URC's denominational Safeguarding Statement which can be found [here](#). We therefore acknowledge their right to protection from abuse regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality or beliefs. We consider that, in accordance with legislation, the welfare of children is paramount. We will follow legislation, statutory guidance and recognised good practice. We believe that domestic abuse in all its forms is unacceptable and inconsistent with a Christian way of living.

Safeguarding is taken seriously by Wessex Synod & Trust.

- We will encourage good practice in safeguarding in local churches within the Synod.
- We will seek to establish a caring environment in which there is an informed vigilance about the dangers of abuse.
- We will appoint a Safeguarding Officer to advise churches and Synod, whilst recognising that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.
- We will organise Synod activities in such a way as to promote a safe environment and minimise the risk of harm to children and adults.
- We will follow a safer recruitment process for the selection and appointment of people to work with children or adults at risk, whether voluntary or paid, lay or ordained.
- We are committed to providing support and supervision, resources and training, to those who work with children and adults.
- We will use rigorous and careful supervision to protect people from the risks associated with known offenders within the Synod.

All concerns and allegations of abuse will be responded to appropriately, including referring to the Police and Social Care if necessary, either Adult or Children's.

We will co-operate with the Police, Children's and Adult's Services in any investigation, will follow multi agency decisions and will maintain confidentiality of any investigations to those directly involved.

All concerns or allegations concerning Wessex Synod activities, staff or volunteers should be addressed to one of the Synod Safeguarding personnel:

Safeguarding Officer:

Name: Sharon Barr
Contact phone number: 07776178246
Email address: safeguarding@urcwessex.org.uk

2. Aims and purpose of this Policy

The aim of this policy is to promote safeguarding, prevent abuse and protect the vulnerable (both children and adults) in both Synod activities and in local churches within the Synod. This includes clear procedures for taking appropriate action following the raising of safeguarding concerns involving children or adults within our Synod, or those who attend our activities and events.

3. Who this policy applies to

This policy applies to Wessex Synod Trust trustees, paid staff, volunteers and those who supervise them (collectively referred to as 'workers' throughout this policy). It is approved and endorsed by the Synod Executive and the Wessex Synod Trust. It should be interpreted in the light of the most recent United Reformed Church Good Practice Guidance (GP6).

4. Duty of care and confidentiality

We have a duty of care to beneficiaries of the Synod, either adults or children. We will maintain confidentiality except in circumstances where to do so would place the individual or another individual at risk of harm.

5. Promoting safeguarding in local churches

General Assembly 2021 passed Resolutions to make additions to the structure this included:

Functions of synod:

a) To appoint a Synod Safeguarding Officer or equivalent. b) To have oversight of, and to support, monitor and report safeguarding related activities and issues within local churches, and amongst ministers, officers and staff of the synod. c) To take all necessary powers and actions positively to promote implementation of good Paper T2 United Reformed Church - General Assembly, July 2021 practice in accordance with the safeguarding policy statement adopted by the General Assembly. d) To adopt best safeguarding practice for all its own activities and events.

Addition to rules of procedure for Synod:

a) To appoint a Synod Safeguarding Officer with the necessary experience, qualifications and current knowledge. b) To arrange for safeguarding training as appropriate. c) To collate church safeguarding returns and forward them to the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

The Synods Safeguarding Officer (SSO) and Children and Youth Development Officers (CYDO's) who deputies during the SSO's leave will be available to offer advice and support to local churches on safeguarding matters, particularly in dealing with specific protection issues within the Synod, Synod Areas or local churches (See appendix 10 for role descriptions.) The Synod will also have a Safeguarding Reference Group made up of the SSO, CYDO's, Synod Moderator and an independent from Synod member.

Where known offenders are identified within local churches, the Synod Safeguarding Officer will work with the church to draw up an appropriate agreement with all relevant parties, following Good Practice Guidance.

Wessex Synod will encourage all local churches to adopt and implement good practice policies for safeguarding children and adults, in line with the latest edition of the United Reformed Church's good practice guidelines (GP6). The rationale for encouraging all churches to do this is as follows:

- Churches actively working with children or adults should do this in order to safeguard the vulnerable, reassure parents / carers and partner organisations, and protect leaders from false allegations.
- Churches not currently working with children should still be prepared with a policy so that they are ready as and when children get involved in the church.
- In order to keep up the reputation of Wessex Synod and United Reformed Church as a whole, and therefore its member churches, is a body which takes safeguarding seriously and is seen to do so.
- To implement the General Assembly resolution 1997 & 2021

Wessex Synod will offer and publicise safeguarding training opportunities to those in local churches who work with children or adults around the Synod, encouraging them to undertake safeguarding training every 3 years. Local Church Safeguarding Coordinators will be offered training annually and encouraged to attend at least every 2 years. Ministers will complete safeguarding training at least every 3 years to Intermediate level. All training will be in line with as a minimum that agreed at General Assembly 2021, which can be found [here](#)

Safeguarding good practice in local churches and the Synod will be monitored. This will be overseen by the Synod Safeguarding Officer and reported to the Synod Executive and Synod Trust meetings. Churches will be asked to complete an Annual Church Safeguarding. Once the returns have been collated, an annual safeguarding review meeting will take place with members of the Safeguarding Reference group to consider the findings and agree what action needs to be taken.

6. Preventing abuse and harm in Wessex Synod events and activities

Activities will be organised in accordance with URC good practice guidelines (GP6) so as promote a safe environment and healthy relationships whilst minimising opportunities for harm and misunderstanding or false accusation. For each event, risk assessment will be carried out, appropriate consent forms will be used for activities with children and young people, appropriate records will be kept (see URC Record Keeping policy for further details, available from Synod office), and adequate insurance will be in place for each event.

We are committed to safer recruitment and appointment of all paid staff and volunteers and will ensure that these procedures are followed, which include

- Asking applicants to complete an application form
- Providing workers with role/job descriptions and person specifications
- Obtaining Disclosure and barring checks where legally entitled to do so
- Taking up two references (not family) and
- Interviewing candidates

Training in safeguarding will be provided and volunteers and paid staff will be given support related to safeguarding, in their role by the Synod Safeguarding Officer. All trustees, paid staff and volunteers will agree to work within a Code of Conduct (see GP6) and understand that there may be action taken if this code is not followed, possibly involving suspension or termination of working/volunteering with us. Synod staff and volunteers using Facebook or other social networking websites to communicate with young people as part of Synod initiatives (such as Synod Youth Exec) should comply with the guidelines set out in Good Practice 6..

7. Recognising and responding to concerns of abuse arising

What are we protecting from?

The definitions of abuse differ between children and adults. A copy of the definitions relating to children and adults can be found in GP6.is attached to this policy at Appendix 4. The definitions of abuse in relation to adults is attached as Appendix 5

How to recognise abuse

It is important to be aware of possible signs and symptoms of abuse. A list of such possible signs and symptoms in relation to children and in adults can be found in GP6. Some signs could be indicators of a number of different categories.

It is essential to note that these are only indicators of possible abuse. There may be other, innocent, reasons for any of these signs and / or behaviour. They will, however, be a guide to assist in assessing whether abuse of one form or another is a possible explanation for a child or adult's behaviour or appearance.

What to do if a worker notices indicators of possible abuse?

If indicators of possible abuse give cause for concern, then the worker should inform the person responsible for safeguarding at the event as soon as possible. This is often the leader in charge of an event. Alternatively inform the Synod Safeguarding Officer directly. **Do not discuss with anybody else.**

Make a **written** record of the allegation, disclosure or incident and **sign and date** this record and pass this onto the person responsible for safeguarding at the event, who will liaise with the Synod Safeguarding personnel to decide what action needs to be taken. There is a proforma in the resources of GP6. Any such records will be stored securely on the URCs case management system.

If any of the Synod safeguarding personnel are implicated in the allegation, refer to the Synod Moderator. In the case of the Synod Moderator being implicated, refer to the General Secretary of the URC at Church House.

What to do if there is a disclosure or allegation of abuse

If a child or an adult makes a disclosure that they are being abused and / or an allegation of abuse against someone, it is important that the person being told:

- Stays calm and listens carefully.
- Reassures them that they have done the right thing in telling you.
- Does not investigate or ask leading questions.
- Does not promise to keep secret what they have been told.
- Explains that they will need to tell someone else.

Inform the person responsible for safeguarding at the event as soon as possible. This is often the leader in charge of an event. Alternatively inform the Synod Safeguarding Officer directly. **Do not discuss with anybody else.**

Make a **written** record of the allegation, disclosure or incident and **sign and date** this record and pass this onto the person responsible for safeguarding at the event, who will liaise with the Synod Safeguarding personnel to decide what action needs to be taken. Any such records will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet at the Synod Office.

If any of the Synod safeguarding personnel are implicated in the allegation, refer to the Synod Moderator. In the case of the Synod Moderator being implicated, refer to the General Secretary of the URC at Church House.

Procedure in the event of a concern

If there is an immediate threat of harm the Police should be contacted.

Where it is judged that there is no immediate threat of harm the following will occur:

- The concern will be discussed with the Synod Safeguarding Officer and a decision made as to whether the concern warrants a referral to statutory agencies.
- A confidential record will be made of the observations and / or conversation and the surrounding circumstances. This record will be kept securely in a locked filing cabinet at the Synod Office. A copy will be passed to statutory agencies if a referral is made.

- The person about whom the allegation has been made must not be informed by anyone in the Synod if it is judged that to do so would place a child or adult at increased risk of further abuse.

Who to contact in the case of a Child or Adult concern

Synod safeguarding Officer

Name: Sharon Barr
Contact phone number: 07776178246
Email address: safeguarding@urcwessex.org.uk

The Synod Safeguarding Officer would refer concerns to the Adult and/or Children's Social Care Department of the relevant local authority depending on the particulars of each case.

If someone working on behalf of the Synod (paid or volunteer) is alleged or known to have harmed children or adults

One of the Synod Safeguarding Officer will contact the Designated Officer in the Local Authority (formerly know as LADO). A decision will be taken about when to inform the member of staff or volunteer. The timing and method will be discussed and agreed with the LADO and the Synod should follow this decision.

The Synod Safeguarding Officer will inform the Moderator, relevant Synod staff and the safeguarding coordinator of the local church to which that person belongs and advise on the implications for that person's involvement with children or adults in the local church and in Synod activities, both during any investigation and following the outcome of any investigation. Information will be shared on a strictly 'need to know' basis.

In accordance with the law, a referral will be made to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) if the church withdraws permission for an individual to engage in work with children OR would have done so had that individual not resigned, retired, been made redundant or been transferred to a position which is not working with children because the employer believes that the individual has engaged in relevant conduct or satisfied the harm test or has committed an offence that would lead to automatic inclusion on a barred list.

Sources of advice, guidance, and support to Synod

United Reformed Church Safeguarding Team:
Tel. 0207 520 2729 Email safeguarding@urc.org.uk

8. Complaints

Should anyone have any concerns or complaints about safeguarding in Wessex Synod please contact the Synod Moderator:

Vacant,
Synod Office, 120 Alma Road, Southampton
Telephone: 01256 350524 & 023 8067 8570
Email moderator@urcwessex.org.uk

It would be preferable to have complaints in writing as this avoids any possible misunderstanding about what the issue is. However, whether verbal or in writing complaints will be acted upon.

9. Review

This policy should be reviewed by Synod Executive and Synod Trust annually, amending and updating it as required in the light of such changes as: Synod safeguarding personnel and contact details; changes to URC Good Practice guidance; changes to statutory safeguarding requirements; changes to procedure arising from review of safeguarding cases;
It should also be re-adopted by Synod annually.

Date of most recent review:10th November 2023.....

Date of next review:October 2023.....

Signed:SBARR.....(on behalf of Synod)