

Audit Report East Anglia District - December 2022

Part A

Background

1. Context for Audit

For many years the Methodist Church has been at the forefront of developing good safeguarding practice in a religious organisation, producing reports and developing policies and training that are acknowledged as some of the best in the field. However, the experience of the Past Cases Review demonstrated that we have an ongoing responsibility to ensure that all the changes introduced actually make a positive difference to practice across the Connexion. The voices of survivors demand nothing less. Five years on from the Methodist Conference agreeing the implementation report of the PCR recommendations (2017) it has been accepted by Methodist Council that we should now formally start auditing our progress.

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) produced a report on religious organisations in September 2021 that highlighted the need for strong oversight arrangements to safeguard children (and in our case also vulnerable adults). The work we do now will put us in a good position to respond, as the framework proposed for this audit has flexibility and a learning cycle learning built in.

East Anglia District volunteered to be one of the first two districts to be audited which was much appreciated.

2. Purpose of the Audit

2.1 To assess the effectiveness of safeguarding leadership in the district at church/circuit and district level.

2.2 To provide information on how well the Safeguarding Policy, Procedures and Guidance are being implemented in each district

2.3 To extract learning from each audit so that best practice can be shared across the Connexion (including how to overcome obstacles to good practice).

3. Audit Process

The method used by the audit team was a mix of interviews and looking at relevant documents. It also sought the views of circuit and church safeguarding officers by circulating an optional survey for them to complete.

3.1 Interviews conducted

Two distinct categories of interviews were conducted:

i) Interviews with those who hold formal leadership roles in safeguarding at a district level, the District Chair, the District Safeguarding Officer and members of the District Safeguarding Group. In the East Anglia district 7 members of the DSG were able to take part in the audit. The Chair of District and DSO chose not to take part in order to give freedom of expression to the Group. One member had Covid but offered to meet separately.

ii) A small number of anonymised and randomly selected superintendents, presbyters and deacons. In the East Anglia District 3 superintendents, 3 presbyters and 2 deacons were interviewed

3.2 Documents reviewed

The following documents were submitted and reviewed by the audit team

- DBS stats for Presbyters and Deacons
- Training stats for district submitted to the central team
- List of safeguarding contracts
- DSG – minutes of meetings for previous 3 years plus this current year including a current action plan

Responses to the survey were submitted by 7 circuit safeguarding officers and 21 church safeguarding officers.

3.3 Audit team

The audit team conducting interviews was composed of three senior members of the Connexional Safeguarding Committee, John Hellyer, Gwyneth Owen and Jane Stacey. Helen White, consultant to the Methodist Survivors Advisory Group with a social work background, joined the team to discuss the interview notes and draft report.

Part B

Audit Findings

The findings are presented under the headings of the audit purposes

4. To assess the effectiveness of safeguarding leadership in the district at church/circuit and district level.

Although it is difficult to always draw clear dividing lines it is helpful to look at leadership under two different headings, ordained leadership and lay/professional leadership. The report also looks at two key documents which were focussed on in the interviews namely, the Theology of Safeguarding Conference report and the Reflect and Respond survivor's material. The reason for the focus on these two areas is because of their critical relevance to safeguarding culture.

4.1 Ordained leadership

The Chair describes his role in safeguarding across the district as having grown exponentially over the 8 years he has been in post. In order to exercise leadership and oversight of the district in relation to safeguarding he has prioritised a number of things:

- invested considerable time in the DSG and attends on a regular basis, helping to shape the agenda and supporting the group to be more robust in its work.
- nurtured his relationship with Superintendents, whom he sees to be key in implementing safeguarding policy across the district. He gives the DSO regular access to superintendent meetings and this has been appreciated by them.
- actioned insights from the DSG to support more robust practice. For example, his superintendents have responded positively to his request for them to be on a rota to attend DSG meetings for one year. This offers them a wider perspective of safeguarding as well as giving opportunity for them to feed into the DSG discussions.
- prioritised developing a good working relationship with his DSO whom he treats as a peer. He feels able to ask her if a particular situation is one they might tackle together.
- operationally, though the district is geographically large, he has modelled a pattern of working whereby district staff are understood by churches and circuits to be working as a team rather than as individual officers each with their own specialism. This integrated approach, underpinned by a strong “theology of presence” across the district, minimises the risk of staff working in silos and offers best possibility for joined-up outcomes.

The Chair is a keen advocate of supervision and appreciates being able to take safeguarding issues to his own (external) supervision, though doesn't see much evidence of his own supervisees making use of supervision to discuss safeguarding matters.

The Chair clearly understands the many and nuanced aspects of safeguarding and is working hard to embed a culture of safe practice in the district. He appreciates having a survivor on the DSG and acknowledges the profound impact her perspectives have had on him and the development of his leadership role in this area. He is working closely with others in order to offer synod members more of the survivor's perspective and voice -how best to promote Reflect and Respond material is pertinent here.

The two Deacons we interviewed were hugely insightful into the world of safeguarding for a variety of reasons. They emphasised their leadership on safeguarding in community

projects, often outside the remit of church members. They gave examples of the rigour with which they apply safeguarding policy within and outside the church. Both said how important the role of the presbyter is in supporting a change of safeguarding culture in churches.

Presbyters had various experiences of being involved with safeguarding issues, and various levels of insight as to how to deal with issues. We heard again and again that the leadership of the Chair and DSO was invaluable.

The superintendents we interviewed all took their responsibilities seriously in relation to safeguarding. One superintendent, especially, saw a safeguarding dimension in every aspect of church life: the use of language; attitude to those who are differently abled; transgender and gay issues. He gave examples of spiritual abuse he had witnessed and how he had challenged colleagues. We noted that not all superintendents have this level of engagement.

4.2 Lay/professional leadership

District Safeguarding Officer

Most people we interviewed referred to the excellent work done by the DSO. Her focus includes:

- a leadership of “presence” around the district so that she has become a supportive, friendly safeguarding face
- working to develop better communication across the district – she trains a lot of people on line as well as F-F; sends out a monthly newsletter; has developed safeguarding pages on the district website
- initiating Safeguarding Forums open to anyone and agenda driven e.g. monitoring and support group training; survivors resources study guide; passing on information; guided by what people want and responsive to their needs.
- delivering high quality training herself and recruiting a team of trainers, including a survivor. Ensuring quality assurance by attending sessions where she’s not the trainer.
- providing training for MSGs and making them more robust. Contracts are better managed as a result
- persuading professional lay people to take up key roles e.g. on DSG

- leading collaboratively with Chair, chair of DSG and others. Modelling what is needed to provide robust safeguarding practice.
- Being keenly attuned to the voice of the survivor: “For the perpetrator it was 15 years ago. For the survivor it was yesterday” is her mantra, and survivors are at the centre of her work.

District Safeguarding Group

The DSG is critical to the professional leadership of safeguarding in the district. To support and enable the work of DSGs standards have been agreed as part of the Connexional Safeguarding Policy. An initial prompt for these standards came from East Anglia district’s DSG Terms of Reference.

This section of the audit report will focus on the four standards that most clearly align with culture change and the evidence presented to the audit team to demonstrate leadership. Standards that relate to oversight of policy compliance will be covered in section 5 of this report.

4.2.1 Standard 4: The DSG through the District Chair requires churches to consider the needs of, and their response to, survivors.

The DSG membership includes a survivor whose voice is valued and respected. The survivor is pro-actively involved in raising awareness of the survivor’s voice through webinars and other resources. The DSO has presented training on survivor resources, presented survivor resource material to synod and included a survivor in online advanced module training. The DSG monitors training and survivor events.

4.2.2 Standard 5: Good practice in the Safeguarding of children, young people and vulnerable adults across the District is consistently promoted. All necessary information is disseminated at a local level to support this work.

A safeguarding administrator maintains a central database of training required and DBS renewal dates. Local SOs receive a monthly request from DSO for updates on safeguarding concerns. Training opportunities are well publicised including a DSO monthly newsletter. DSG reviews all training events. There is targeted communication with churches through circuit safeguarding officers with whom the DSO is in touch on a regular basis. The DSO is pro-active. For example, she realised she had not received risk assessments for various “Warm Spaces” projects around the District and so chased this up locally.

4.2.3 Standard 9: The DSG promotes programmes of awareness and good practice are initiated and delivered.

There is evidence of webinars and other training events being well publicised.

4.2.4 Standard 11: The DSG promotes partnership work with other relevant groups (e.g. Connexional, regional and ecumenical partners and professional agencies) on Safeguarding issues:

The DSG chair had a key role in meeting with other DSG chairs to resource the connexional team in the drawing up of DSG standards. The DSO attends quadrant meetings that provide a good mechanism for communicating with the connexional team. The DSG is, impressively, a multi-agency team: probation and police are members of the DSG and a LADO has recently become an associate member – ready to give input but cannot attend the meetings. The chair of the DSG is a former probation Chief. Members of statutory agencies were given opportunity to present strategic input at the district safeguarding development day. The DSO continues to try and gain fuller representation of statutory agencies and, intentionally, makes links with ecumenical colleagues. Norfolk and Suffolk Safeguarding Services organised a faith event attended by all faiths and provided an excellent opportunity for networking and highlighting specific needs in particular areas.

4.3 The Theology of Safeguarding Report

The questions asked in the audit of all the ordained interviewees was whether they had read the report, if they had what impact it had made on them and then whether they had initiated or been part of discussion on the report.

Of the 8 ordained interviewees 7 had read the report, 1 said they had never heard of it. Those who had read the report highlighted the following:

- The importance of the theology of the cross and survivor impact
- The world created to be good and holy
- The valuing of human life and the references to the creation stories in Genesis
- Affirmation from scripture of our mutual responsibility for one another
- The importance of understanding power dynamics

One interviewee had attended a LPWL meeting where the report was discussed and one referred to it having been discussed at a district safeguarding day.

Most saw the value of the report being used more widely in their local churches and at circuit level. Only one referenced the report being used at local church level.

One questioned if the report referenced substance abuse

The one person who had not read the report does not read any online documents

4.4 Reflect and Respond survivors' material

Of the 8 ordained interviewees 4 had read the material including one who was brave enough to say they had read it on the day of our interview.

Of the four that had read the report, one found it personally helpful but felt it would be hard to engage churches. Two are planning to make use of the report in church/circuit groups. One felt its content shouldn't be necessary within a Gospel of Grace, but recognised the negative impact of abuse of power.

One person who works extensively with survivors had not come across the report. Another was not sure they had the confidence or qualifications to facilitate its use, even had they read it.

5. To provide information on how well the Safeguarding Policy, Procedures and Guidance are being implemented in each district

Effective oversight by the DSG is critical to ensuring policies, procedures and guidance are being implemented.

The new standards for DSGs have made their role very specific in relation to implementation of policy, procedures and guidance. This section of the audit report considers the evidence provided for each of the standards (not covered in section 4 of the report).

5.1 Standard 1: The DSG understands the context of the district and monitors the Safeguarding issues with which the Methodist Church is involved within the District

Both in interviews and in the Minutes of DSG meetings there is extensive evidence that the DSG understands the context of its district and monitors safeguarding issues, including making referrals to outside agencies where necessary.

5.2 Standard 2: The quality of Safeguarding practice across the District is consistent with both Connexional Safeguarding Policy and Practice and relevant government guidance and legislation.

The district safeguarding policy is reviewed annually against the connexional safeguarding policy and relevant government legislation. Professional representatives on the DSG highlight legislation changes and this is key in keeping the DSG updated and enabling it to keep the District updated.

5.3 Standard 3: Support is provided to all Circuits in implementing District and Connexional Safeguarding policies and procedures;

Responses to Circuit and Church safeguarding officers' survey consistently speak of the excellent support received from district and circuit safeguarding officers to support SOs in their work. Other notable comments: good communication around training dates; the accessibility and support of the DSO; regular safeguarding forum; easy to access website information.

5.4 Standard 6: The DSG, through the work of the DSO ensures that safeguarding contracts are in place for those in the church community who could pose a risk of harm to others or who have caused harm in either church or other settings.

There are currently 23 contracts being managed. The DSO delivers training for MSGs and attends most MSG meetings to ensure robust monitoring. The MSG independent chair is the point of contact with the Subject and monitoring and support is increasingly robust and this has been a substantial piece of work -and ongoing. The DSO ensures the independent chair completes annual review of Contracts.

5.5 Standard 7: Changes to Safeguarding policies, practices and guidance are disseminated at all levels across the District

Regular Forums, DSO monthly newsletters, DSO meetings with SOs, DSO input into superintendent meetings/synod, the presence of a superintendent on the DSG all enable good communication of safeguarding policies, practices and guidance at all levels across the district.

5.6 Standard 8: The District Safeguarding Group is satisfied that safer recruitment procedures are being followed throughout the District.

This is an area that was identified in 2019 as needing improvement and the DSO is now much more confident that significant roles have safe recruitment in place, though she is never complacent. The DSO is getting asked more questions about safer recruitment at church and circuit level and, through safer recruitment in the safeguarding training, there is a growing awareness at local church level of the potential of role drift in volunteer posts.

5.7 Standard 10: Safeguarding training is promoted and provided in the District in accordance with statutory and Connexional requirements, working together with the regional Learning Network

The district DBS and training status spreadsheet lists 151 ministers. Regarding training status, 5 supernumerary ministers and 7 ministers (including one URC AM) have outstanding training to complete. There is abundant evidence that a concerted effort is made to deliver regular training in different formats that is well publicised and invites participant evaluation. There are also examples of bespoke training – of an LP who is a survivor for example - and flexibility in responding to local needs.

5.8 Problems identified needing further attention

Audit interviews identified four issues that the DSO/DSG may need to follow up:

- Work is needed on implementing safeguarding policies and procedures on churches operating a two-site model. One or two officers? One or two policies?

- Concerns surround ministers who are SOs in local churches/community projects. Dual role issues?
- Concerns that the SO role in some churches/circuits is becoming too large. What would a “team approach” look like?
- Concerns from some church SOs that (too) much is expected of its volunteers. Is there a case for paid SOs?
- Insufficient attention to safeguarding matters at some ministerial handovers needs to be addressed. Leadership from the superintendent is crucial.

6. To extract learning from each audit so that best practice can be shared across the Connexion (including how to overcome obstacles to good practice).

6.1 DSG membership

A professional and multi-agency DSG has helped to raise safeguarding standards in this district. This model appears to be so effective that we would recommend that it be written up as a case study that can then be shared across the wider connexion.

6.2 Theology of presence

The attentiveness given to ensure that the district staff work as a team and are visible across the district at all levels - district, circuit and local church - significantly contributes to the development of a robust safeguarding culture.

6.3 Safeguarding forums

The provision of safeguarding forums by the DSO, which anyone can attend, has helped to raise the safeguarding profile at church and circuit level.

6.4 Chaplains at on line training courses

A chaplain is available for online safeguarding training via a phone number. Their number is shared at the start of the training and that person ensures they are available throughout the length of the training.

6.5 Voices of Survivors

This is a key part of providing robust safeguarding practice. How might other Districts embed voices of survivors in their policy, procedures and practice?

6.6 Barriers to good practice or issues that need more consideration at Connexional level

6.6.1 Several responses around supervision indicated that more attention may need to be focused in supervision training on considering risk and in encouraging supervisees to use the supervisory space to reflect on safeguarding issues.

6.6.2 The relationship between district and connexion can be fraught regarding the employment and management of DSOs. Connexional case work management has not always been helpful. The potential for the DSO to be employed connexionally is a cause for serious concern because of the potential to lose the local networking connections that underpin robust practice. The wider picture is that it highlights the feeling from senior leaders that their voice is not being heard connexionally.

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26 January 2022