

SAFEGUARDING COMMITTEE MAY 2024

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Instruct the Safeguarding Committee to develop and implement processes and working practices which ensure compliance with The Disclosure Scotland Act 2020, to be enacted in April 2025, and instruct Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries to cooperate with such processes and work practices (*Sections 2.4 & 3*).
3. Instruct the Safeguarding Service to consider the vision of safeguarding across all areas of the Church and encourage all to support the development of a positive Safeguarding Culture (*Sections 2.4.3 & 4.5*).
4. Note the ongoing work of the Safeguarding Committee to roll out the Leadership and Trustee Safeguarding training courses and encourage those for whom such training is mandatory to attend training and use their learning to promote a positive safeguarding culture (*Section 4*).
5. Note the ongoing work by the Safeguarding Service to assess child and adult wellbeing and protection concerns and provide professional advice to congregations, Presbyteries, CrossReach, the national offices of the Church of Scotland and the Girls Brigade (*Section 5*).
6. Note the ongoing work to review and update the 2009 report 'For of Such is the Kingdom of Heaven' (*Section 6.1*).
7. Note the ongoing work by the Safeguarding Service to manage those who pose a risk in Church Communities (*Section 6.3*).
8. Approve the Support for Survivors of Historical Abuse Policy as set out in the Appendix and encourage its implementation in Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries and the National Office (*Section 7*).

Report

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 "But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation."

Psalm 13:5

1.1.1 From the earliest days of church history and theology, the importance of trust has been acknowledged. Clement of Alexandria and Augustine both assert the place of trust as being a component of the earliest parts of our faith journey. Martin Luther speaks of trust in God and the Council of Trent (1545-63) also pay heed to trust as one of the steps in being justified before God.

1.1.2 In today's world, there are countless examples of where the public have lost trust, in companies, in politicians, in the media. The Church does not enjoy exemption from this pervading cynicism and lack of trust. The Safeguarding Service has to acknowledge that while we cannot place any guarantee that harm or abuse will not occur, we must do everything within our power to fulfil our duty to continue to build permanent structures, processes and training that work towards providing a safe church for all.

1.1.3 This year we have critically and honestly examined what we can do to care for those whose trust has been utterly shattered – survivors of abuse. Within a context of major denominational challenges and organisational change, the Safeguarding Service wishes to address important issues that emerge in the pastoral care of victim-survivors, notwithstanding issues such as spiritual disempowerment and fractured trust in God and in the world.

1.1.4 The Safeguarding Service is committed to working consistently, with balance and careful assessment of who we are and what we must do to protect and uphold robust safeguarding measures. We will do all we can do to fulfil our duty in protecting the most vulnerable amongst us and fostering a pastoral sense of safeguarding in the Church.

2. SAFE CHURCHES FOR ALL

2.1 Regulatory Compliance

2.1.1 As legislation governing Safeguarding in Scotland and further afield continues to develop, the administration requirements and tasks are constantly evolving. The work of the Safeguarding Service administration team covers a wide remit which includes being the first point of contact for all incoming enquiries to the Safeguarding Service and providing support and guidance to congregations and Presbyteries.

2.1.2 An effective administration team is essential and business critical as they have responsibility for processing safer recruitment checks for all regulatory work roles within the Church, including CrossReach. As part of this function, they must ensure the lawful use of personal information and the maintenance of records to meet regulatory standards and legislative duties.

The team process applications for membership of the Protected Vulnerable Groups scheme (PVG) on behalf of congregations, the Boys' Brigade and Girls' Brigade, Faith Action and Human Resources.

2.2. Statistics

2.2.1 The following information relates to the calendar year January to December 2023 and reflects the core tasks of the team.

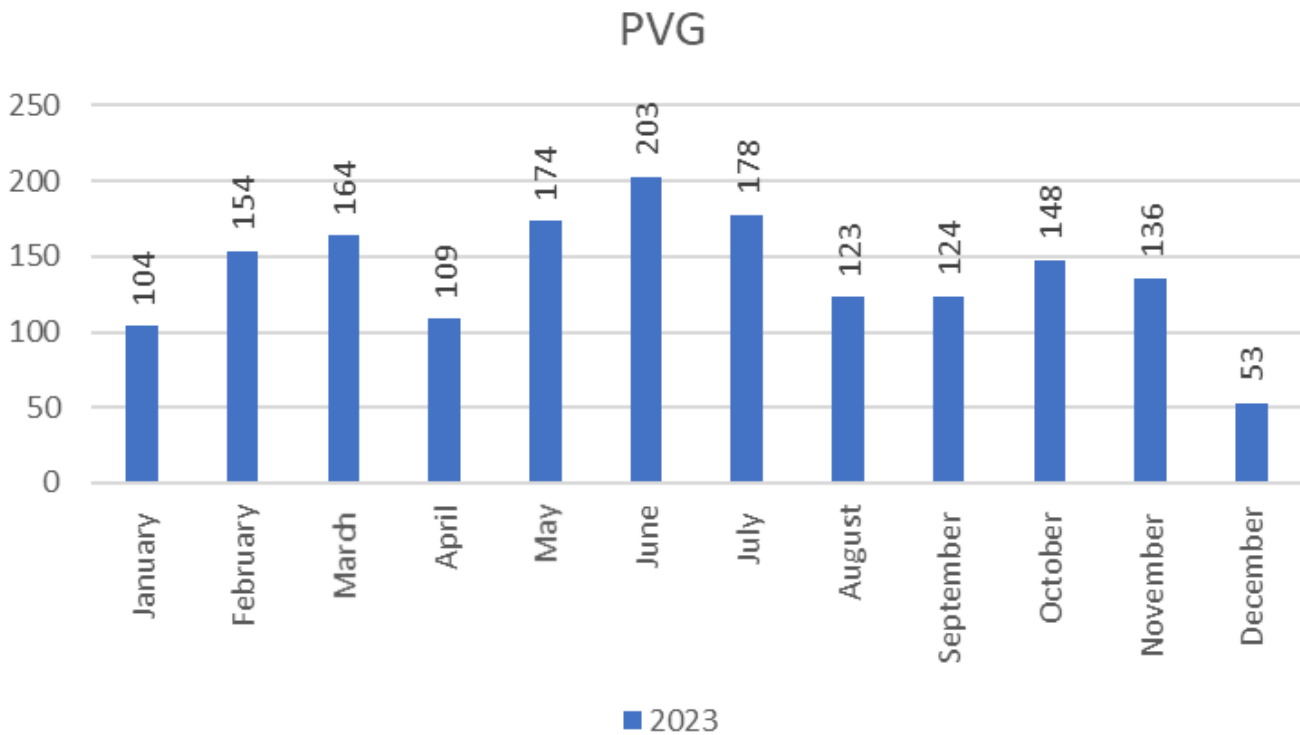
PVG applications: 1692 (Figure 1)

Disclosure and Barring Service checks: 26 (England & Channel Islands)

Basic Disclosure applications: 139

Disclosure Scotland notifications - removals 1211 (Removal of those no longer undertaking regulatory work)

Figure: 1



2.4 Priorities 2023 – 24: Disclosure Scotland Act (2020)

2.4.1 The implementation of the Disclosure Scotland Act (2020) was expected in April 2024; however, this has been delayed until April 2025. The implementation will mean significant changes to our PVG regulatory check processes as the new scheme requires an update application every five years. This will have a notable impact on the volume of work for the Administration Team. To prepare for the implementation we must prioritise information management processes to increase the efficiency of data collection and reporting.

2.4.2 Disclosure Scotland Act (2020) introduces tighter compliance checks in regard to records of individuals we have an ‘interest’ in. Having an ‘interest’ in an individual means we have declared that person is currently carrying out regulated work and, as a result, Disclosure Scotland will ensure they provide us with any relevant information which may mean the individual poses a risk to the protected group they are registered to work with. We also have a legal duty to inform Disclosure Scotland of any disciplinary action we take in respect of that individual to ensure ongoing accurate assessment of risk by statutory bodies. Currently we have an ‘interest’ in approximately 40,000 individuals while it is estimated our regulated workforce (including volunteers) is less than 30,000. This brings additional challenges in respect of compliance with data management legislation as we have no legal purpose to store information on individuals who are not actively involved in regulated work.

2.4.3 Ensuring accurate records in relation to those undertaking regulatory work is a significant challenge which we must overcome to meet the regulatory and legislative requirements. We rely on volunteer Safeguarding Coordinators to maintain accurate congregational registers, with an attestation of records being carried out annually by Presbyteries. This system is not working and we must explore options that will enable us to have confidence in our data and ensure compliance with legislation. In addition, accurate information in regard to Ministers is also a significant challenge. As a result, and as per proposed deliverances 2 and 3, the Safeguarding Committee requires the support and commitment from Presbyteries, Congregations and National Office to develop and implement processes and procedures to enable us to overcome these challenges.

3. PROFESSIONAL ADVISORY SERVICE

3.1 The Safeguarding Service continues to provide a professional advisory service to congregations, Presbyteries, National Office Departments, The Boys’ Brigade, The Girls’ Brigade and The United Reformed Church in Scotland. The types of enquiry it receives range from safer recruitment, regulatory checks such as Disclosure Scotland, policy, procedure and safe working practices. There were 549 enquiries in the 2023 calendar year.

3.2 Recruitment Sub-Committee

3.2.1 The Recruitment Sub-Committee has continued to regularly risk assess applications for both voluntary and paid positions across the wider work of the Church including congregations, Human Resources, Faith Action and CrossReach. Risk assessments are necessary when individuals disclose information in pre-employment forms or applications for regulatory checks, including membership of the Protected Vulnerable Group (PVG) Scheme or Disclosure and Barring Scheme (DBS), are returned with information that may impact on an individual's suitability for work with protected groups.

3.2.2 The sub-Committee currently also carry out this process for the Boys Brigade and the Girls Brigade. Whilst working closely with Disclosure Scotland and the Volunteer Disclosure Scotland Service in preparation for the implementation of the Disclosure Scotland Act 2020, an issue was identified with this aspect of our work. Disclosure Scotland are clear that information provided by them via Disclosure Certificates or 'Under Consideration for Listing' notifications must not be shared with any third-party organisation. In respect of Disclosure Scotland legislation, the Boys' Brigade and the Girls' Brigade are considered third-party organisations despite the long and integral connection. The organisation that 'holds the interest' in an individual, must make the final recruitment decision.

3.2.3 While the Recruitment Sub-Committee process for both organisations is the same as the process for recruiting within The Church, what happens after the recruitment decision is made by the Sub-Committee differs. For internal candidates, the relevant department or congregation Safeguarding Coordinator is informed that the application is 'cleared' or not. The decision of the RSC is final. When the RSC inform the Boys Brigade of the RSC decision, they request the information provided by Disclosure Scotland to present to their own Safeguarding Panel to enable them to make the final decision. The Girls Brigade Chief Executive requests the Disclosure information to discuss with the President and they make the final decision. Disclosure Scotland are unequivocal in their instruction that this information sharing process is unlawful and must not continue.

3.2.4 As a result, the service level agreement with the Boys Brigade will need to be terminated. At the time of writing, the Safeguarding Committee are in discussion with all parties to negotiate a planned transition. The Boys' Brigade is currently registered with Disclosure Scotland as they process applications for their own employees. The key aspect of the transition will be transferring the 'interest' in volunteers from The Church of Scotland to the Boys Brigade without the need to have all submit new application. Disclosure Scotland have indicated that they are keen to support us to make the transition as seamless as possible.

3.2.5 The Girls Brigade is satisfied that our process will be fit for purpose and are willing to forego sight of the Disclosure information and accept the RSC decision as final. They recognise that they do not have to capacity within the organisation to take on full responsibility for processing PVG Scheme membership applications and are grateful to be able to continue with the Service Level Agreement, and have it amended to reflect the changes in information sharing.

3.3 International Presbytery

3.3.1 The Safeguarding Service responsibilities includes the International Presbytery. Work is ongoing to develop our processes to ensure the Service has accurate records of individuals working in the International Presbytery and can effectively support safer recruitment as well as the provision of mandatory safeguarding training.

4. TRAINING

4.1 Safeguarding training plays a pivotal role in ensuring that those working with children or protected adults have the relevant knowledge and understanding to safeguard and prevent harm and abuse of children and protected adults. Training is facilitated by Volunteer Safeguarding Trainers, who are supported by Volunteer Safeguarding Presbytery Contacts, ensuring the smooth running of training in their respective Presbyteries. Ensuring the availability of training courses is an ongoing challenge. The Safeguarding Service work in partnership with Presbyteries to support the recruitment of trainers. We are immensely grateful for the commitment of all involved.

4.2 At the present time the Church has 93 volunteer safeguarding trainers, including those in training, who provide safeguarding training in Presbyteries. There are different Learning Pathways depending on the role of the individual. These were introduced in 2022. Some people will only be required to attend one training course while others will have to attend two or more. The following is a brief overview of the courses:

- *Introductory*: basic training to equip people with the understanding of how to identify concerns and how to report them. For those undertaking 'regulated work'.
- *Advanced*: focuses on the structures and processes of safeguarding within the Church. For Safeguarding Coordinator and members of Safeguarding Panels.
- *Trustee*: considers the role of trustees in relation to oversight of safeguarding within the Church. For all trustees.

4.3 Feedback from participants has been used to improve and further develop the training materials.

4.4 The table below, figure 2, provides participant numbers for each of the training courses.

Figure 2: 2023 Training Stats per Presbytery

Presbytery	2023			
	Advanced	Introductory	Trustee	Total
Argyll	8	0	97	105
Cleir Eilean l	0	0	3	3
Clyde	121	318	376	815
Edinburgh and West Lothian	51	80	411	542
England and Channel Islands	0	0	0	0
Fife	82	213	522	817
Forth Valley and Clydesdale	114	540	60	714
Glasgow	59	291	304	654
Inverness	46	181	163	390
Jerusalem	0	0	0	0
Lochaber	0	0	0	0
Lothian & Borders	98	266	522	886
North East and Northern Isles	81	246	559	886
Perth	171	469	662	1302
Ross	0	26	43	69
Sutherland	9	24	0	33
Lewis	0	0	69	69
Uist	0	0	0	0
Locharron - Skye	0	0	0	0
Caithness	0	0	0	0
Abernethy	0	0	0	0
The South West	56	137	661	854
Unknown	24	62	68	154
Total	920	2853	4520	8293

4.5 Ministers’ Learning Pathway & Refresher Training Update

4.5.1 The General Assembly 2023 instructed the Safeguarding Committee to amend the Ministers’ Learning Pathway. In June 2023, an additional course was agreed by the Safeguarding Committee: The Leadership Safeguarding Training package. The focus of the leadership aspect of this pathway is on evaluating and promoting safeguarding cultures. The course has now been delivered on a pilot basis to groups of ministers and associated roles. However, commitment to the Ministers’ Pathway has been limited with only 12 of an initial cohort of 20 attending the course. Feedback will be used to inform the roll out of this pathway.

4.5.2 The General Assembly 2023 instructed the Safeguarding Committee to develop and roll out refresher training and consider e-learning as a medium for volunteers and Trustees to complete this training. We have explored this deliverance and considered the benefits and advantages of online self-led training for volunteers. The Safeguarding Committee strongly believe that it is important that all those doing regulated work directly with children and protected adults attend facilitator led training (either online or face to face) every 5 years as a minimum requirement. Much of the learning on training courses comes from co-construction at the time of the training; people bring their own examples and their own perceptions of safeguarding and learn a lot from exploring these within a safe environment. This cannot be replicated through self-led training.

4.5.3 The Safeguarding Committee is continuing to explore the scope for “Refresher” Trustee Training to be provided as eLearning and will report back on decision making in relation to this in 2025.

4.6 CrossReach

4.6.1 The Service continues to work in partnership with CrossReach to ensure their safeguarding training needs are met. The Safeguarding Service and CrossReach trainers work together to provide both Child and Adult Protection training courses.

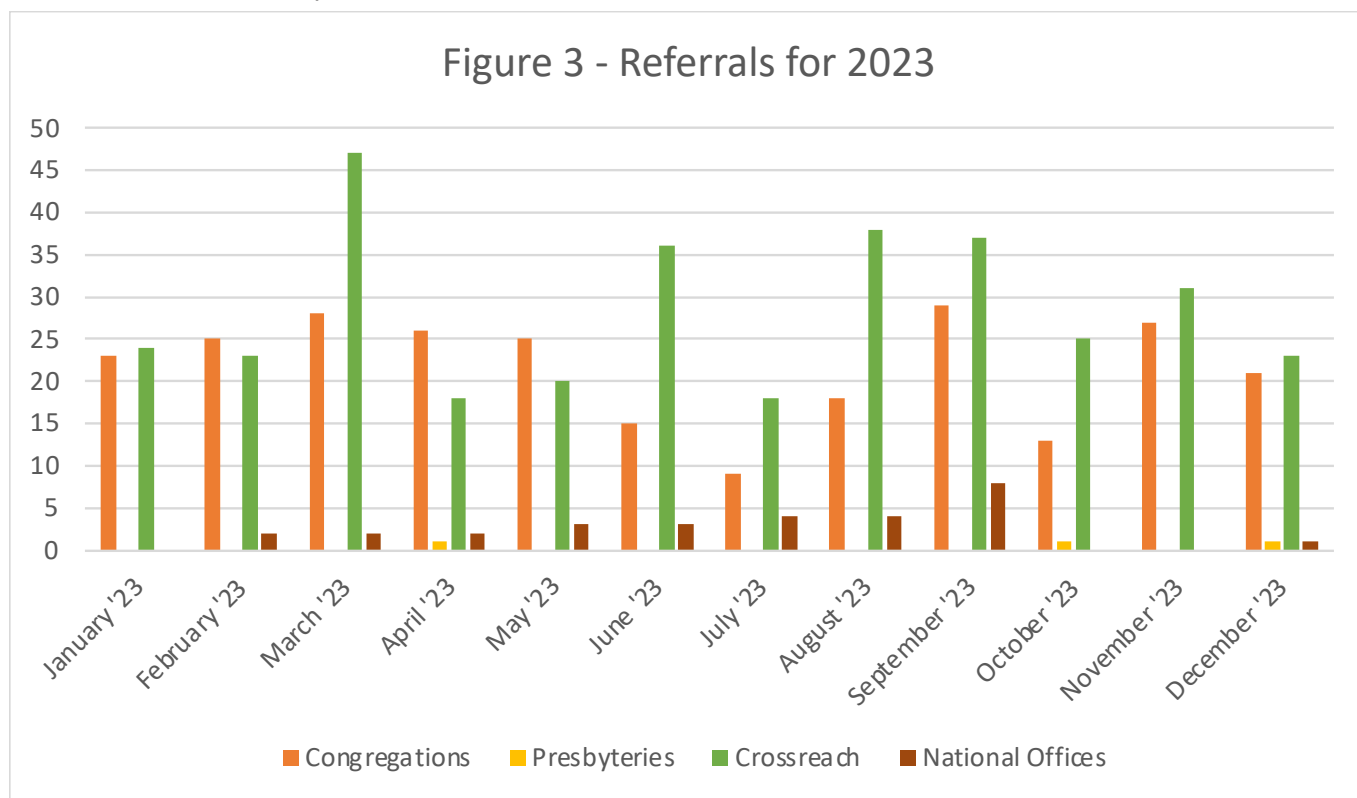
5. SAFE CHURCH FOR ALL - REFERRALS

5.1 The Safeguarding Service continues to provide advice and guidance in respect of safeguarding concerns submitted in referrals. This can be in relation to child protection, adult protection or public protection (managing those who may pose a risk to others).

5.2 The main sources of referrals are congregations, Presbyteries, CrossReach and the National Office. As well as supporting those with current concerns, the Safeguarding Service also manages non-recent (historical) abuse referrals.

5.3 Over the last 12 months, referrals have included requests for advice about a wide range of concerns including domestic abuse, technology enabled abuse and child sexual exploitation (CSE).

The total number of referrals for the year was 631. The graph below, figure 3, depicts the number of referrals by source received between 1st January 2023 and 31st December 2023:



5.4 The Safeguarding Service aims to further develop recording and reporting processes to enable reporting on a range of factors, for example, how many referrals a specific congregation or CrossReach service have submitted with concerns regarding physical abuse or spiritual abuse.

Such data could be used to identify trends and areas for improvement or focused work.

6. 'FOR OF SUCH IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN'

6.1 In 2023, the General Assembly instructed the Safeguarding Committee to begin the work of reviewing and updating the 2009 report 'For of Such is the Kingdom of Heaven'.

The purpose of the review is to identify areas of strength and areas that require further development to ensure our process and guidance continues to reflect best practice as well as national policy and legislation. Representatives involved in the review include Police, Criminal Justice Social Work and Stop it Now.

6.2 Progress

6.2.1 The first stage of the review involved collating views of those who have been working with Covenants of Responsibilities in the Church. This stage has been concluded. The next planned stage is to interrogate the information collated and to draw conclusions around strengths and areas for further development to inform future direction of the review. We aim to present the completed review and recommendations to the General Assembly of 2025.

6.3 Covenants of Responsibilities

6.3.1 A Covenant of Responsibilities is a written agreement between an individual and the Parish Church that they attend or wish to have a connection with and is our key tool for the implementation of 'For of Such is the Kingdom of Heaven'. The need for the Covenant arises when an individual is identified as posing a risk to children and/or protected adults due to being a convicted sex offender or having demonstrated harmful sexual behaviour that meets the threshold for Statutory Service monitoring and/or is thus in conflict with the Church of Scotland values and commitment to creating churches that are safe for all.

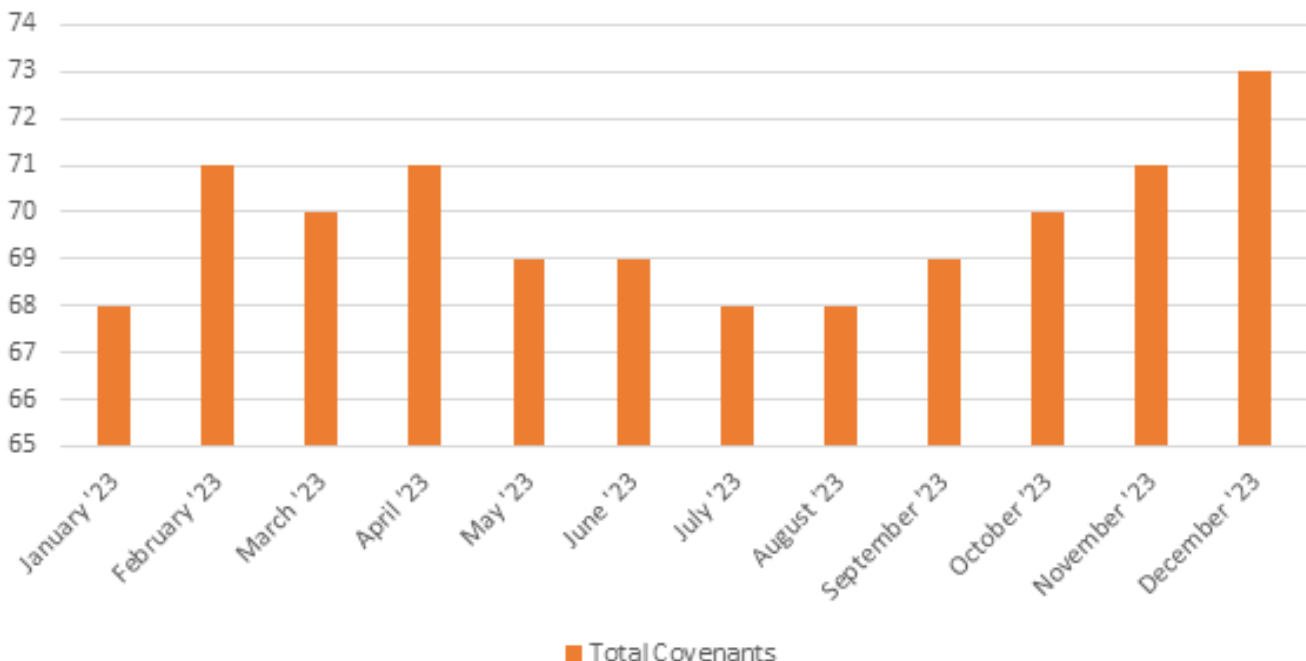
6.3.2 A Covenant of Responsibilities is akin to a behavioural agreement which lays down the expectations of how such a person will behave when attending Church or a Church-led event. Failure to abide by the agreement means that the individual is in effect, deciding not to worship or be involved in Church activity.

6.3.3 Covenants are developed and monitored by Parish Safeguarding Panels working in close partnership with Police Scotland and Criminal Justice Social Work Services. The Safeguarding Service manage the processes around Covenants and ensure appropriate support according to the risk posed and control measures required. We thank congregational safeguarding panels for their work in this area.

6.3.4 The total number of Covenants in place at the end of December 2023 is slightly higher than January 2023. Growing awareness of those who pose a risk in congregations and the fact that individuals are subject to a lifetime Covenant will most likely see a continuing upward trajectory for the future.

Total number of Covenants between January 2023 and Dec 2023:

Covenants for 2023



7. SURVIVOR POLICY UPDATE

7.1 The Independent Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, established in 2015, continues to highlight the importance of recognising those who have experienced abuse within institutional settings and statutory services in the past. The Church of Scotland is committed to co-operating with the Inquiry and to supporting survivors.

7.2 The Safeguarding Committee, in collaboration with Faith Action, CrossReach, Integrity, representatives from congregations, representatives from organisations for survivors of abuse and survivors, has worked toward the completion of this important policy. The policy provides guidance on responding to the needs of survivors of historical abuse and reaffirms our commitment to survivors. The policy aims to:

- Ensure that survivors are heard, understood, believed and supported
- Provide a sensitive and effective response for survivors who report any type of abuse perpetrated by a Church office bearer or employee (see glossary), in a Church activity, or by a worker or another service user in a social care service provided by CrossReach (Social Care Council), as well as those in a Church context who have experienced abuse in other settings and who have felt able to disclose the abuse
- Treat all disclosures of historical abuse seriously and respond in an appropriate and timely way
- Make sure that victims, survivors and Church workers know what process and procedures will be followed if someone discloses abuse
- Strive to understand the possible impact of trauma on the person disclosing abuse and the best way to respond to it
- Respond in a way that prevents further trauma to the person concerned
- Create a healthy safeguarding culture- one of listening, respect, openness and transparency to encourage an environment where people feel safe to disclose abuse
- Ensure that disclosures of alleged criminal activity and/or current risk of significant harm to the victim or survivor, child or adult, is shared appropriately with police or other public authorities

7.3 The full policy is provided as an appendix to the Safeguarding Service Report.

8. SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS

8.1 The Safeguarding Service continues to work in partnership with CrossReach and the United Reformed Church in Scotland through service level agreements. These relationships will continue, and we aim to improve our service through development of management information reporting over the next year.

8.2 As referenced in section 3.2.4 of this report, the service level agreement with the Boys' Brigade will come to an end due to the changes in legislation and practice within Disclosure Scotland. The Safeguarding Service will support the organisations by participating in negotiating the terms of the transition with Disclosure Scotland and Volunteer Scotland Disclosure Services to ensure a handover that is manageable and ensures continuing safety and protection for children.

In the name of the Committee

ADAM DILLON, *Convener*
JUDY WILSON, *Vice Convener*
DEBORAH BLACKHURST, *Service Manager*

Addendum

Rev Adam Dillon

This year, the Committee is sorry to lose the services of its Convener, Rev Adam Dillon. Adam became Convener in May 2019 and we are glad to have had the benefit of his convenership for a year longer than the usual term, as he kindly agreed in 2023 to remain on for an additional year. His term of service was an eventful one, as it included the duration of the pandemic, during which the Safeguarding Service continued to deliver its core services in a very challenging context for a long period. He also oversaw the introduction of a safeguarding training programme for ministers and bringing to the Assembly this year a Survivor Policy which we know will be welcomed by the Church. He has been a champion of good safeguarding practice and a safe hand on the tiller in the varied and important work of the Committee, taking all of this on in addition to his demanding role as a parish minister, latterly in Sherbrooke Moss Park Parish Church. He is also providing leadership and support as an Interim Moderator to a congregation in vacancy, where his drive and vision are valued as they are in his own congregation. Adam has served not only the national Church but his Presbytery in Safeguarding matters, and continues a short series of contributions to Presbytery meetings called Safeguarding Soundbites.

Friendships and family are deeply important to Adam who offers his friendship and support, often in most challenging times but in a quiet and unspoken way. As he steps down from his role as Convener we know that he will not be at a loss for work to occupy him but hope that he may have more opportunity to spend time with his wife Sheila, to enjoy nurturing these rich and rewarding friendships and to explore more of the world, not least in visiting family in some far-flung places. He leaves with our grateful thanks and best wishes for the future.

JUDY WILSON, *Vice Convener*
DEBORAH BLACKHURST, *Service Manager*

Appendix

APP. SUPPORT FOR SURVIVORS OF HISTORICAL ABUSE POLICY 2024 (also known as non-recent abuse) (Supplement to Safeguarding Handbook)

1. Policy Statement

1.1 This policy is about how the Church aims to respond to the needs of survivors of historical abuse. It is underpinned by the Safeguarding Policy Statement and Safeguarding Handbook [see [Safeguarding Service webpages](#) for current version].

See section 10 for definitions and section 9 for a summary flowchart.

1.2 The Church will:

- Ensure that survivors are heard, understood, believed and supported
- Provide a sensitive and effective response for survivors who report any type of abuse perpetrated by a Church office bearer or employee (see glossary), in a Church activity, or by a worker or another service user in a social care service provided by CrossReach (Social Care Council), as well as those in a Church context who have experienced abuse in other settings and who have felt able to disclose the abuse,
- Treat all disclosures of historical abuse seriously and respond in an appropriate and timely way
- Make sure that victims, survivors and Church workers know what process and procedures will be followed if someone discloses abuse
- Strive to understand the possible impact of trauma on the person disclosing abuse and the best way to respond to it
- Respond in a way that prevents further trauma to the person concerned
- Create a healthy safeguarding culture- one of listening, respect, openness and transparency to encourage an environment where people feel safe to disclose abuse
- Ensure that disclosures of alleged criminal activity and/or current risk of significant harm to the victim or survivor, child or adult, is shared appropriately with police or other public authorities

2. Church of Scotland Theology of Safeguarding

2.1 Jesus had a very clear message about the most vulnerable people. It is a theme which is replicated throughout the whole Bible, with God portrayed in the 121st Psalm as the 'keeper' of Israel. This Hebrew word can be translated as Safeguard, which is God's need and wish for the Church, not only that we are safe, but we all work for the safety of all people. That is affirmed in the theological idea of Salvation.

2.2 In both the Greek and the Latin version of the word, the root of the word is safekeeping. The theological imperative of God is the safety of his children. Jesus continues this theme in St Matthew 18, when he places a child in the midst of the disciples when they ask him: "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" His reply is revolutionary when he says: "Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven". (Matthew 18: 3-5). The power of the Jesus' imagery shows us the strength of his teaching about the most vulnerable in our midst. Yet again, Jesus gives us the example that worldly power is not the most important thing in his world, and that Christians are called to replicate that radical hospitality and celebrate Christ's Incarnation, by the love we have for the most vulnerable in our midst.

2.3 There are other examples in the Gospels of Jesus holding up the poor and vulnerable elderly as examples of great faith, as in the story of the widow, who brings her gift to the Temple. He holds her up as an example of humility and generosity. Jesus teaches that, in the Kingdom, people are judged by what is in their hearts and how they put their faith into action, rather than the learned, like the Pharisees who know the Law, but fail to put it into practice. Theologically, the Church of Scotland is committed to promoting environments where everyone is free from the risk of harm and abuse. This stems from the Gospel imperative that Jesus loves everyone, particularly those who are the least, the last and the lost in society, and wishes everyone to be safe and cared for, particularly those who are vulnerable.

2.4 The other side of this coin is that we know there are some people who worship in our congregations, or who might wish to work for the Church, who present a risk of harm and abuse to vulnerable people. For of such is the Kingdom of Heaven Report 2009, is the Church of Scotland's understanding of our theological attitude to Forgiveness, and how we support and manage people who pose a risk to vulnerable people. At its heart is an understanding that people who survive abuse should be cared for and not be placed in a situation, where the hurt they have experienced can be perpetuated, even inadvertently, by our actions. This means that in discipleship terms, someone who has abused can no longer be allowed to be in a place of leadership within the Church and they must be accountable for their continued discipleship journey.

2.5 Forgiveness can only be given by the survivor. The "institution" of the Church does not have the right to forgive an individual on behalf of anyone who has been abused. It may be that someone who has been abused may not be able to forgive the person who has abused them, and the Church should never make anyone feel obliged to forgive the kind of abuse they may have suffered. The Church should rightly leave that great responsibility and right to God. It is also important to remember that forgiveness is not about forgetting. Jesus still had the scars on his body after the resurrection and everyone lives with their own scars. People who survive abuse have hidden scars, and the Church should ensure that, as an institution, we do not add to their scars.

- 2.6** The person who poses a risk of harm and abuse and wishes to continue to worship within the Church of Scotland is required, as part of their discipleship journey, to recognise they are under the authority of God. They, like everyone who seeks to live out their discipleship, must try to acknowledge what they have done and how they have done it, and seek to find ways to amend their behaviour and to repent of their sin. This acknowledgement may only be to God, but it is hoped that with the support of the local congregation, and by bible study, prayer and reflection with the Minister and others, they might find a way to live with what they have done and to live safely.
- 2.7** Safeguarding is at the heart of God’s will for everyone and while it is sometimes challenging to incorporate its requirements into the life of the congregation, its foundations assure us that God’s love requires us to place the most vulnerable at the heart of what we do and who we are. This ensures that in the Body of Christ, we encourage everyone to live fully, radically and in God’s love and safekeeping.

2.8 Apologies

Apologising for historical abuse can be challenging, particularly when the perpetrators of the abuse have died or are no longer part of the church. Aspects of apologies are referred to throughout the Bible. There are many examples in book of Acts of how people can be held responsible for sins they may not have directly carried out; Peter charges the “[m]en of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem” (v. 14) with crucifying Jesus (v. 23, 36). To be sure, they did this by the hands of lawless men...” (v. 23), however as they had been present, they bore some responsibility for Jesus’s death.

- 2.9** Receiving an apology can be therapeutic for a survivor and can support their healing. We must reflect on what the Bible tells us and how we can make apologies that are meaningful. The following should be considered:

- *Recognition: I acknowledge what happened, and I see the negative effects of those sins of omission or commission.*
- *Remorse: I feel terrible for what has happened.*
- *Renunciation: I reject what has taken place in the past and repudiate those beliefs, words, thoughts, or actions.*
- *Repentance: I have sinned against God and will turn away from this evil and strive after greater obedience to God’s law in my life.*

(DeYoung, 2018)

3. Types of Abuse experienced in faith communities and the impact of abuse

- 3.1** Abuse can happen anywhere and can be perpetrated by anyone. Abuse within faith communities may include sexual, physical, emotional/psychological, domestic and spiritual abuse, financial or material abuse and neglect.
- 3.2** Survivors of abuse have shared their experiences, highlighting common themes about how abuse occurs within these communities and how their voices are heard or not.
- 3.3** The needs of survivors of abuse vary greatly depending on individual circumstances. They may or may not experience trauma as a result of life events. Many types of experience can lead to psychological trauma, including but not limited to, interpersonal violence, chronic or repetitive experiences such as child abuse and neglect. Experiencing trauma may shape how people respond to a particular situation or event and can have a wide range of adverse outcomes, including poorer mental and physical health, economic and social outcomes, and religious/spiritual impacts.
- 3.4** Their needs can change over time and be triggered at different points in their lifetime or be lifelong.
- 3.5** Whilst the majority of the population has been, directly or indirectly, exposed to at least one traumatic event in their lifetime, it is important to note that no two people experience harmful events in the same way. Some people are resilient and able to ‘bounce back’ without experiencing the same impact as their neighbour while other people may develop damaging coping skills e.g. problematic substance use.
- 3.6** Survivors might need practical support about how to report abuse and access appropriate medical help, advocacy support and therapeutic support such as counselling and psychotherapy.
- 3.7** For those with a safeguarding role in the Church (it’s everyone’s job), being aware of the impact of abuse on survivors and the connection between abuse and trauma, can help us provide an effective and timely response when needed.

4. Barriers and Challenges to Disclosing Abuse in Faith Communities

- The trust people have in religious leaders, which both creates opportunities for abuse and makes it less likely that survivors will be believed if they accuse a religious community leader
- The difficulty people have in thinking that someone of their own faith would abuse another member of that same faith, tied with the desire not to damage the reputation of the faith group by exposing such individuals
- An attitude of welcome and inclusion, which makes religious communities susceptible to people who wish to enter them in order to abuse. This can be tied up with issues of forgiveness and second chances
- Blurred boundaries between adults and children, for example on pilgrimages and other trips

- Reliance, especially at the level of individual congregations, on volunteers to handle safeguarding issues; volunteers who will have varying degrees of knowledge and confidence, and who can easily walk away if not properly supported
- A concern for organisational reputation, stemming at least in part from the status of religious groups as morally good organisations. This status is threatened by abuse within the organisation, and appears to be a consideration in the repeated covering up of potential scandals in a number of faith groups.
- Community organisations/charities, faith groups – especially smaller ones – may have limited resources to devote to safeguarding
- Many lack a culture of safe recruitment, supervision, human resources and other management structures which can lead to accountability and transparency
- Tension between religious laws and customs and statutory requirements
- How to best use limited resources (SCIE)

5. Importance of Trauma Informed Co-production

5.1 The voices of Survivors should be heard in a meaningful and non-tokenistic way. This means seeing survivors as a valuable resource, and reaching out to engage with them in safeguarding improvement work, for example through co-producing policies and procedures, training and safeguarding education. However, in our aim to be a trauma informed organisation, we must ensure engagement does not re-traumatise survivors of abuse. Reflecting this, the Church of Scotland Survivor Group has been assisted in its work by a number of different people with lived experience and representative organisations. We thank them for their time and commitment to ensuring this policy was well-informed.

6. Our commitment to survivors of abuse within the Church of Scotland:

6.1 Many survivors and survivor groups tell us they need

- To be heard
- To be listened to
- To be believed and not judged
- To receive caring and empathetic support from professionals and others

6.2 This policy aims to meet these needs through the implementation of this policy and the supporting procedures detailed below.

7. Procedure

7.1 This procedure provides a framework for responding to reports of historical abuse. It should be read alongside the flowchart on page 9

I. Disclosure

The process starts with a report of historical abuse by a survivor, or other person, about the harmful conduct by a person as defined in 1.2 above. The disclosure may relate to any organised activity or service-provision in the Church or in a current, or past, CrossReach service or in a context outwith the Church (flowchart, step 1).

It is important not to give the person disclosing the information the promise of confidentiality. The Church has a duty of care and responsibility to contribute to the protection of individuals and the public in general. While their information will be treated with sensitivity, it may be necessary to pass this on to statutory bodies including the Police and Social Work Services. However, reassurance can be given that information will only be shared on this basis and only those who need to know, will be told.

II. Safeguarding procedure

Historical abuse should be referred to the Safeguarding Service using the established safeguarding procedure for all reported harm (flowchart step 2).

III. Initial Risk Assessment

The Safeguarding Service will do a risk assessment (flowchart step 3) using the disclosed information to determine if there is a current risk and if the information disclosed needs to be shared with the police or other statutory bodies immediately (flowchart step 4). Sometimes the survivor may be at risk of on-going harm or another child or adult may currently be at risk of significant harm and this should be acted on.

If this is not the case, the Safeguarding Service will support the collation of basic information about what happened, where, when and who was involved. This is about establishing the context of the alleged abuse, NOT investigating the allegation. The police, or other statutory bodies, will take the lead role in any investigation (flowchart step 3a).

Appropriate senior staff in the Church Offices and/or CrossReach will be advised about the disclosure.

IV. Reported crime and/or current risk of harm?

When a disclosure suggests that a crime has been committed, the Church’s standard practice will be to share this information with the relevant Police service (flowchart step 4). The initial risk assessment will be used to determine when Police are informed – see (III) above.

- Sharing information with the police

If the survivor wishes to inform Police themselves, they will be encouraged and supported to do so.

The Church has a duty to contribute to public protection. If a survivor does not want to, or is not able to do this, the relevant Church department or The Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service will share this information.

However, the survivor retains control – they do not have to speak with the Police unless they want to. It is highly unlikely that the Police will contact the survivor when it is known that they do not want this to happen. It is the role of Police to decide what to do with the information e.g. note it for information or investigate.

V. Being Heard

“The greatest thing you can give a survivor is acknowledgement, not sympathy but acknowledgement” (1)

The survivor will have the opportunity to be heard if they wish through contact with the Safeguarding Service. The Safeguarding Service will work with the survivor to ensure appropriate opportunities to be heard are identified. Contact with the Safeguarding Service can be a face-to-face meeting, or the survivor may prefer to communicate via email, letter, telephone or video call (flowchart step 5).

VI. Responding to survivors’ needs

Being heard is the first step in responding to survivors’ needs. Survivors will be supported to share any needs they have identified with the Safeguarding Service. The Church will consider these, and where it is reasonable and appropriate to do so, make a response. These may include one or more of the following: being heard and listened to; provision of on-going pastoral care; professional counselling; police investigation; meeting with a senior representative of the Church; access to the survivor’s records from the time of the reported abuse; being put in contact with specialist voluntary organisations for supporting survivors.

(1) Quote from a survivor on the front cover of the Scottish Government report into historical abuse, Time to be Heard: A Pilot Forum, Tom Shaw, February 2011.

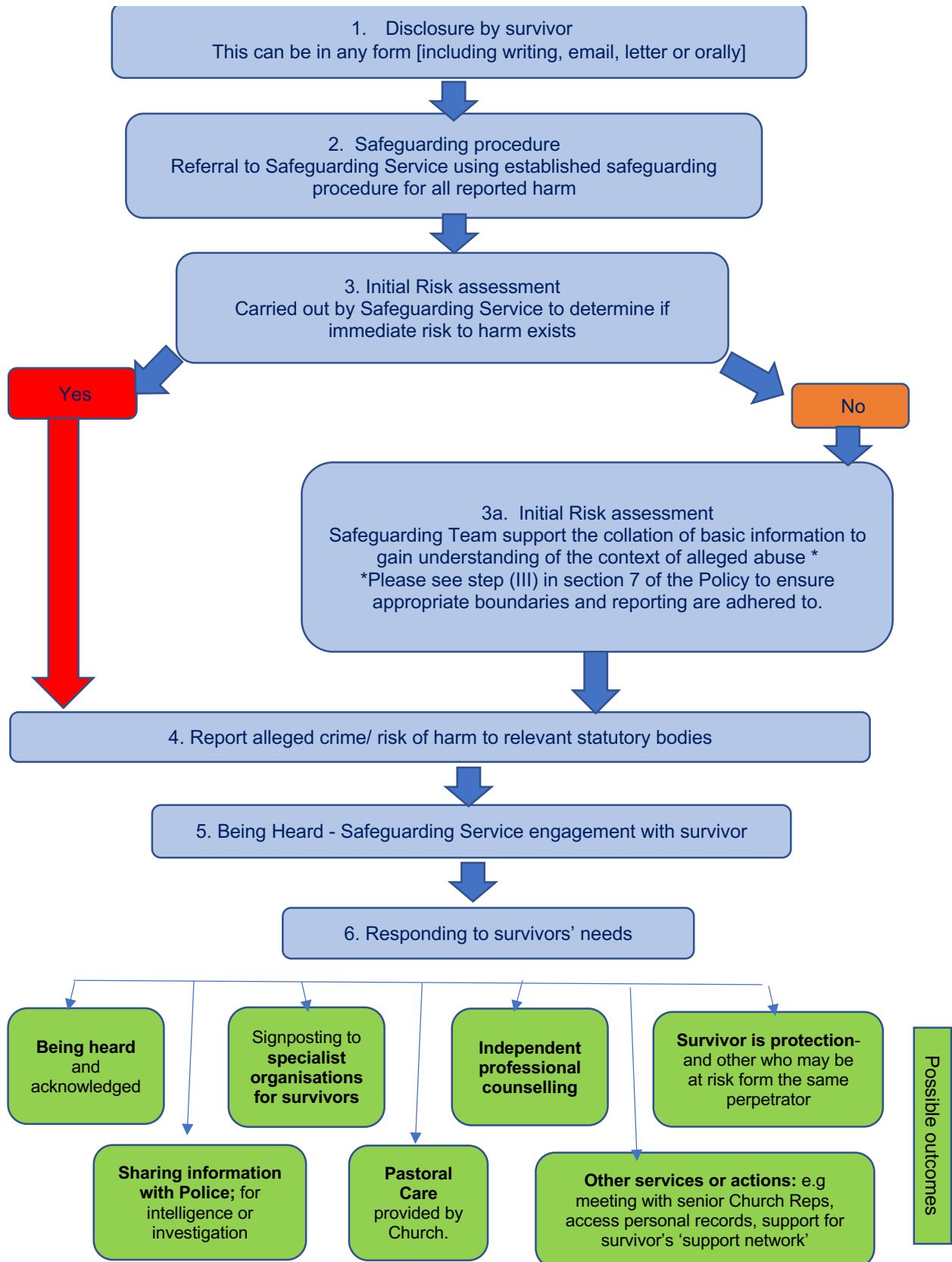
8. Summary

8.1 The Church will be receptive to the needs of survivors and will give them an opportunity to be heard. The policy and procedure provide a structure and process for this to happen. The measures of success will be the outcomes for survivors.

8.2 The Safeguarding Committee will regularly monitor and review this policy and procedure.

9. Flowchart

The Church of Scotland: Support for Survivors of Historical Abuse Policy, 2024



10. Glossary

Adults at risk

As defined in the Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007: a person who is unable to safeguard their own wellbeing, is at risk of harm, and, because they are affected by disability, mental ill health, physical or learning disabilities, is more vulnerable to harm than a person not so affected.

Child

A child is a person under the age of 18 years old.

Church

All Church of Scotland congregations and Presbyteries world-wide, General Assembly Standing Committees, statutory corporations, Church-provided social care services past and present, and any service provided by Church office bearers/employees.

Church office bearer and employee

An office bearer is (a) any person occupying a voluntary post or office in a congregation or Presbytery and (b) a Minister, Deacon, Reader, Candidate or Probationer of the Church of Scotland. An employee is a paid member of staff e.g. paid youth worker, pastoral care visitor, or paid staff working with 'adults at risk' in a congregation, staff in CrossReach services etc.

Disclosure or reporting

This is when an adult, or a young person, speaks about abuse they experienced in their childhood. The disclosure may relate to an individual's experience in the family home, community or while in foster, residential or other social care setting.

Historical abuse, also known as non-recent abuse

This means adults reporting abuse that occurred when they were children. Historical abuse includes neglect, emotional, physical, sexual and financial abuse which took place before the survivor was 18 years old; and that has been reported by the survivor a significant time after the event. For more about what is meant by harm/abuse see Safeguarding Handbook. The term historical abuse is a misnomer: the effects of abuse are current, not past, for survivors. Similarly, the offences may be 'historic' but reported criminality from the past needs to be investigated in the present which makes such cases current.

Perpetrators of abuse and historical abuse

The Church of Scotland historical abuse policy and procedure primarily relates to people who allege/report abuse by Church office bearers/employees and not to a person who discloses abuse by others whether or not this took place in a Church context. For the Church this means any current or former employee, office bearer, Church member or volunteer in any current, or former, congregation, Church organisation or CrossReach service. For CrossReach, and some activities in congregations, the alleged perpetrators could also be other children or adults at risk using the service.

However, this policy will also support survivors whose perpetrator of abuse had no connection to the Church, but have felt able to disclose their abuse to someone within the Church.

Statutory Body

This is Police Scotland, local authority social work services, health services or regulatory organisations (Care Inspectorate, Scottish Social Services Council).

Survivor

This is the preferred term for the person affected by historical abuse. A survivor is usually an adult but may also be an older child or an 'adult at risk'. The survivor's 'supportive family members', spouses and partners are also indirectly affected by that same abuse.

11. Supporting Documents

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- Church of Scotland: [Theology of Safeguarding](#), Church of Scotland, online, nd
- Dr Godfred Boahen & David Worlock: [Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse](#), The Church of England, 2021
- Eloise K. Thomas et al: [Clergy Apologies Following Abuse: What Makes A Difference?](#), ResearchGate, 2008
- Jasvinder Sangera CBE: ["Don't Panic - Be Pastoral"](#), Independent Safeguarding Board, 2022
- Kevin DeYoung: [Toward a Theology of Apology](#), The Gospel Coalition, online, 2018
- Pete Singer: [Toward a More Trauma-Informed Church](#), The Theological Journal of the Lutheran School of Theology and Wartburg Theological Seminary Vol.51 No.1, 2024
- Scottish Government & NHS Education for Scotland: [Trauma Informed Practice Toolkit, The Scottish Government, Edinburgh, 2021](#)
- Scottish Government: [National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021 – Updated 2023](#), The Scottish Government, Edinburgh, 2023
- Stephen Winter et al.: [The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State and Faith Based Care: A Preliminary Review](#), The Royal Commission, Wellington, 2018
- The Church of Scotland: [The Safeguarding Act](#), Church of Scotland, website, 2009
- The Mission and Discipleship Council and The Safeguarding Committee: [For of such is the Kingdom of Heaven](#), Church of Scotland, 2009
- The Safeguarding Committee: [Safeguarding Act Guidance](#), Church of Scotland, website, 2018
- The Safeguarding Committee: [Safeguarding Handbook](#), Church of Scotland, website, 2018 updated 2023
- Tom Shaw: [Time to be Heard: A Pilot Forum](#), Scottish Government, Edinburgh, 2011