

Safeguarding Policy (including online safety policy)

Safeguarding children, young people and adults at risk

Staplehurst United Reformed Church

**Promoting safeguarding
Preventing abuse
Protecting everyone**



**This edition March 2022
(Replacing all previous versions)**

Safeguarding Policy Statement

The following statement was agreed by the Church Meeting of Staplehurst United Reformed Church.

Safeguarding is taken seriously by Staplehurst United Reformed Church.

We define safeguarding as the promotion of the safety and welfare of children and adults who are at risk of, or experiencing, harm, abuse or neglect in all forms.

We acknowledge children's and adults' right to protection from any form of abuse or neglect regardless of age, gender reassignment, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, marriage/civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity. Therefore, as members and workers of the church, we are committed to:

- the care and nurture of all children and adults,
- the safeguarding and protection of all children and adults at risk,
- the establishment of a loving church environment which is safe and caring for all people and where the dignity of each person is respected,
- an informed vigilance about the dangers of all forms of abuse, harm and neglect within all aspects of work in the Church, and how to respond appropriately,
- ensuring everyone who engages with the life of the Church is responsible for keeping people safe,
- working together with voluntary/statutory agencies and other denominations and faith-based organisations.

We recognise that we all have a responsibility to help prevent any form of abuse and neglect of children and adults and to ensure the wellbeing and pastoral care of those who are, or may be, at risk.

We will prevent abuse related to extremism or radicalisation and put all suitable health and safety arrangements in place as well as safeguarding, first aid, fire safety and online safety policies that everyone understands.

We will create and maintain a safe and inclusive environment for all, especially children and adults at risk, in which the dignity and rights of each person are respected.

We believe that domestic abuse in all its forms is unacceptable, inconsistent with a Christian way of living and it can affect both adults and children.

We will always acknowledge that the welfare of the child and adult at risk is paramount, and that the priority is always to act in their best interests, following legislation, statutory guidance and recognised good practice guidance to enable them access to support and protection.

We will support everyone to ensure that as a community of Christians we will all work within the agreed procedures of our safeguarding policy. The Safeguarding Co-ordinator or the Deputy Safeguarding Co-ordinator are the persons to whom all concerns or allegations should be addressed for appropriate actions to be taken. In the absence of a Safeguarding Co-ordinator, the Synod Safeguarding Officer should be contacted. Their contact details will be always available on our posters, websites, or in other communications with the public.

We will exercise proper care in the appointment and selection of trustees and those who will work with children or adults at risk within the Church, whether paid, volunteers, lay or ordained. We will ensure that trustees, staff and volunteers are suitable and legally able to act in their positions. We will use DBS/PVG checks as part of a wide range of checks on trustees, staff and volunteers to ensure that we have a broad and informed view to assist us in minimising the risk of abuse, harm or neglect.

We will support, supervise, resource and train all those who undertake work with children and adults in need of protection.

We will respond without delay to every concern, incident or complaint which suggests that a child or adult has been harmed, or is at risk of harm, and cooperate with the Police, the Designated Officer (DO , formerly known as LADO), Children's Partnership Boards (formally Local Safeguarding Children's Boards) and Children's and Adult Social Care Services in any investigation, while maintaining the confidentiality of any investigations to those directly involved.

We are committed to working with those who have suffered or suffer any form of abuse, offering appropriate pastoral support where possible as well as challenging any abuse of power, especially where it involves someone in a position of trust.

We will manage risks and those who might pose a risk to the welfare of people and the life of the Church and offer support to those known to pose a risk to children and/or adults, including supervision, referral to the appropriate agencies, and implementation of safeguarding contracts, when appropriate.

We are committed to ensuring that any allegations, concerns and complaints about abuse or neglect are recorded accurately, reported promptly and shared safely within and outside of the denomination.

We will review our safeguarding policy, practices and procedures annually, considering lessons learned from safeguarding cases and changes in legislation, statutory guidance and good working practice.

We will ensure processes and practices in all aspects of safeguarding, including discipline, risk management, whistleblowing and bullying/harassment are in alignment with *Good Practice 5* – the United Reformed Church's policy and guidance in safeguarding children, young people and adults at risk.

Any local policy changes will be formally approved by the local church trustees.

Aim and purpose of this policy

The aim of this policy is to ensure that protecting people from abuse, harm or neglect is central to our culture. It provides procedures for promoting safeguarding, preventing abuse and protecting children, adults at risk and staff. This includes clear procedures for taking appropriate action when safeguarding concerns are raised involving children and adults within our church, or those who attend our activities and events. It includes the church online safety policy.

Who this policy applies to

This policy is approved and endorsed by the Elders and applies to:

- all members of our church
- all those who attend and serve our church/place of worship and its services
- our trustees and elders
- paid staff (both internal and external, such as consultants)
- volunteers
- organisations and groups which hire our building with written agreement to operate under the church safeguarding policy.

The policy and procedures should be interpreted in accordance with the principles in this policy statement and the most recent URC good practice guidance. Children, parents/carers, adults at risk and those responsible for safeguarding them will be informed of this policy and our procedures.

Definitions

The term 'children' refers to those under the age of 18 years.

The term 'adult at risk' refers to any adult aged 18 or over who, by reason of mental or other disability, age, illness or other situation, are permanently, or for time being, unable to take care of themselves, or to protect themselves against significant harm, abuse or exploitation.

Duty of care and confidentiality

We have a duty of care to all beneficiaries of the church, whether adults, children or young people. We will always maintain confidentiality, except in circumstances where to do so would place the individual or another individual at risk of harm or abuse.

Preventing abuse

The church will appoint Safeguarding and Deputy Safeguarding Coordinator(s) for safeguarding children and adults. A job/role description is attached as **Appendix 1**.

Activities will be organised in accordance with URC's safeguarding policy and guidance to promote a safe environment and healthy relationships, whilst minimising opportunities for harm, misunderstanding or false accusation. For each event, risk assessments will be carried out, appropriate and accessible consent forms will be used (for children's activities or activities for people with special needs), appropriate records will be kept, and adequate insurance will be in place.

We are committed to safer recruitment and selection of all paid staff and volunteers with emphasis on those in regulated activities. We will treat applicants who have a criminal record fairly and do not discriminate because of a conviction or other information revealed (see **Appendix 2** for the church policy statement on the recruitment of ex-offenders) and ensure that all safer recruitment-related procedures are followed, which include:

- asking applicants to complete an application form
- providing workers with job or role descriptions and person specifications
- completion of self-declaration forms
- obtaining Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) / Protecting Vulnerable Groups scheme (PVG) checks for eligible roles and positions
- taking up two references (not from family members)
- interviewing candidates
- providing workers/volunteers with written contracts/agreements.

All trustees, paid staff and volunteers will work within a code of conduct (code for workers attached as **Appendices 3** and **4** depending on the vulnerable group) and understand that there may be action taken if this code is not followed, possibly involving suspension or the termination of people's service.

If we become aware of someone within our congregation known to have harmed or harm children or adults, we will inform the Church Safeguarding Coordinator or Synod Safeguarding Officer within 24 hours and co-operate with them and the relevant statutory authorities to put in place a plan to minimise the risk of harm to children, young people and adults.

When any church premises are let to an external, informal group or individual, those hiring the premises should hold and abide by their own safeguarding policy. If a hirer does not have a policy, they must abide by the church's own safeguarding policy, a copy of which should be made available. Each hiring body is required to ensure that children and adults at risk are always protected by taking all reasonable steps to prevent injury, illness, loss or damage occurring.

How to recognise abuse

It is important to be aware of possible signs and symptoms of abuse. **Appendix 5: Signs and Symptoms of Abuse** provides definitions of different forms of abuse and further help and guidance. Some signs could be indicators of several different categories of abuse.

It is essential to note that these are only indicators of possible abuse. There may be other, innocent, reasons for these signs and/or behaviour. There might be domestic abuse that requires a different approach (please see **Appendix 6: A Guide to domestic abuse**). The indicators 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.

Church workers and members will also pay attention to online safety and their electronic communications with children and adults. Grooming and abuse of any form can occur offline (both physically and verbally) and online.

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

If a child, young person or adult makes a disclosure that they are being abused and have been abused, it is important that the person being told:

- stays calm and listen carefully
- reassures them that they have done the right thing in telling
- does not investigate or ask leading questions
- explains that they will need to tell someone else if anyone is at risk of harm, in order to help them
- does not promise to keep secret what they have been told
- informs the church Safeguarding Coordinator within 24 hours (if they are implicated in the allegation, inform the Deputy or the Synod Safeguarding Officer)
- makes a written record of the allegation, disclosure or incident and signs and dates this record (using the template in **Appendix 7**). This should be given to the church Safeguarding Coordinator or the Synod Safeguarding Officer and stored securely in a locked filing cabinet.

Procedure in the event of a concern of abuse

If there is an immediate threat of harm, the Police should be contacted without delay.

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

- The concern should be discussed with the Church Safeguarding Coordinator or the Synod Safeguarding Officer **within 24 hours** and a decision needs to be made as to whether the concern warrants a referral to statutory authorities (**NOTE:** Key Contacts of relevant statutory contacts in your local authority should be added in this policy)
- A confidential record will be made of the conversation and the circumstances surrounding it using the template at **Appendix 7**. This record will be kept securely, and a copy passed to statutory authorities if a referral is made
- The person about whom the allegation is made must not be informed by anyone in the church if it is judged that to do so could place a child or adult at further risk. If the statutory authorities are involved, they should be consulted beforehand
- The Synod Safeguarding Officer should be kept informed of any serious concerns and referrals to police and statutory authorities.

Prior to any referral to children's services, the child's wishes and rights should be considered when determining what action to take. There should also be a verbal consultation with local authority's children's services to ensure that making a referral is an appropriate action. The parent/carer will normally be contacted to obtain their consent before a referral is made. However, if the concern involves, for example alleged or suspected child sexual abuse, domestic abuse, Honour Based Violence, fabricated or induced illness, or the Synod Safeguarding Officer has reason to believe that informing the parent at this stage might compromise the safety of the child or a staff member, nothing should be said to the parent/carer ahead of the referral, but a rationale for the decision to progress without consent should be provided with the referral.

In the case of referrals to adult social care or other services for adults at risk, information should be shared with consent if the adult has capacity within the meaning of the Mental Capacity Act and if this does not place the referrer, them or others at an increased risk. A person's right to confidentiality is not absolute and may be overridden where there is evidence that sharing information is necessary to support an investigation or where there is a risk to others. See section 14 of Good Practice 5 for further advice and guidance.

If the allegation is regarding a church staff member or church volunteer

If someone in the church is alleged or known to harm/have harmed children or adults, it is essential to inform the Synod Safeguarding Officer so that they can offer advice and support.

For any concerns relating to children, the Designated Officer (previously known as LADO) will be contacted. The timing and method of any action to be taken will be discussed and agreed with the DO. This will cover communication with the worker, suspension, investigation and possible strategy meetings. A decision will be taken by the DO about when to inform the worker and the church will follow this advice. As noted, DO contact details, should be included in the Key Contacts section of this model policy.

For concerns relating to adults, Adult Social Care will be contacted. Likewise, their contacts details should be included in the Key Contacts section of this model policy.

In accordance with the law, a referral needs to be made to the DBS / PVG for consideration of barring to share information about any individual in regulated activity where for safeguarding reasons the organisation has either terminated the employment, failed to appoint, or would have terminated the employment had the individual not moved on through resignation, retirement or re-deployment. In such cases, the synod safeguarding officer needs to be advised/informed.

Depending on the seriousness of incidents or allegations, a report to the Charity Commission will also need to be considered at the elders/trustees' meeting, as they deem such a referral to be a 'serious incident' and require notification.

Managing those who may pose a risk to the welfare of people

The use of rigorous and careful supervision is paramount to protect people from the risks associated with known offenders within the congregation, including implementing safeguarding contracts with known or alleged offenders and those who have been assessed as posing a risk. Where it is known that someone has a caution or conviction for committing a sexual offence, the church can play an important role in the prevention of further abuse by helping the offender to live an offence-free life.

If anyone is made aware that a person attending their church has been convicted of an offence against a child or has had an allegation of this nature made against them at any time, we immediately inform the Synod Safeguarding Officer and Minister or Interim Moderator. Note that in Scotland, the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service should be contacted.

It is important to provide known or alleged offenders with a group of people who will offer support, friendship and supervision. Following advice from the Synod Safeguarding Officer, when appropriate, a formal safeguarding contract will be drawn up between the church, the person who is considered to pose a risk to the welfare of people in the church, and any statutory agencies when involved.

Training

Safeguarding training will be provided and volunteers and paid staff will be given support and supervision in their role. All relevant staff members and volunteers will receive appropriate safeguarding training delivered by the synod. The Safeguarding Coordinator(s) should ensure that trustees/elders and people involved in regulated activities with children or adults (including Ministers, staff and volunteers) have undergone safeguarding training, as recommended by the URC.

ONLINE SAFETY POLICY

Technology is constantly advancing, bringing with it additional safeguarding considerations. The inclusion of online safety is necessary to safeguard all electronic communications between the church and children/young people (those under 18 years of age) recognising the merging between online and offline worlds and the distinctiveness and difficulties within faith based organisations of defining clear boundaries for everyone.

This online safety policy sets out the roles, responsibilities and procedures for the acceptable, safe and responsible use of online technologies for adults and children within this church, including the use of mobile phones, computers and other electronic devices.

It explains what will happen in the event of unacceptable use of these technologies and details the support that will be provided to support children, parents and others in the safe and responsible use of these technologies beyond the church.

Why we have an online safety policy

The use of the Internet and mobile devices has become an integral part of church and home life. There are always going to be risks to using any form of communication which lies within the public domain. It is therefore imperative that there are clear rules, procedures and guidelines to minimise these risks and especially when children use these technologies.

It is also important that workers and church members are clear about appropriate procedures so that they are safeguarded from misunderstandings or allegations through a lack of knowledge of potential risks.

This church acknowledges that whilst we will endeavour to safeguard against all risks we may not be able to completely eliminate them. Any incidents that may arise will be dealt with quickly and according to policy to ensure that children are best protected

Policy Aims

- to ensure the safeguarding of children within and beyond church by raising awareness of appropriate and acceptable uses of online technologies
- to outline the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved
- to have clarity about procedures following the misuse of any online technologies
- to work with parents / carers and to maintain a continued awareness of both the benefits and potential issues of online technologies

Our commitment to online safety

We will equip children with the skills and knowledge that they need to use the technology in this church safely and responsibly, and to manage the possible risks. We will also ensure that they are aware of where they can go to get help, apart from trusted adults, if they are uncomfortable with anything in the digital world.

Children and Young People are expected to make appropriate and safe use of the electronic communication (devices)

When using a computer or electronic device with internet access at this church, children will be made aware of what is acceptable usage and will agree not to:

- search for and/or enter pornographic, violent, racist or hate-motivated websites
- download, forward-on, copy or burn onto CD any music, images or movies from the Internet where permission has not been granted by the copyright holders
- disclose any personal information e.g. addresses (postal, email or messenger), telephone numbers, bank details, including personal information about another person
- send or display offensive messages or pictures
- deliberately browse, download, upload or forward material that could be considered offensive or illegal
- use obscene language
- violate copyright laws
- trespass in folders, work or files belonging to others
- retrieve, send, copy or display offensive messages or pictures
- harass, insult, bully or attack others
- damage computers, computer systems or computer networks
- use another user's password
- use computers for unapproved commercial purposes

Sanctions:

- violations of the above rules will result in a temporary or permanent ban on Internet use
- further action may be taken such as informing parents / carers
- when applicable, police or local authorities may be informed

Appendix 8 has an agreement of conduct that children/young people and/or parents/carers will be asked to sign.

We will make appropriate use of any photographic images and/or video footage taken during church activities.

Clear guidelines will be operated as follows:

- permission will be sought from parents / carers before any images are taken and/or displayed. Images will only be used for the specific purpose agreed by the person photographed
- written consent will specify what purposes the image will be used for, and how it will be stored. For instance if the intention is to use an image on the church website or other forms of publicity, this will be clearly stated at the time that consent is sought
- further written consent will be sought if images are to be used in ways other than originally specified
- if children object, even if parents / carers have agreed, their wishes will be respected
- photographs that include children will be selected carefully and will not enable individual children to be clearly identified
- children's full names and/or other details will not be used anywhere in association with photographs or other media
- when using photographs of children, group pictures will be used wherever possible
- any use of images will reflect the diversity of age, ethnicity and gender of the activity
- personal mobiles will not be used to take photographs or other digital media
- except in exceptional cases, which will be agreed, and known about, digital media relating to children will be stored on church computers. Should this not be possible for any reason, where the media is to be stored will be recorded

We will ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place, including the use of filtering software on all computers used within this church.

To ensure that unwanted and unsolicited information, viruses and other malware does not intrude on the use of digital technology, we will ensure all appropriate and reasonable steps are taken to protect computers and the users of them as follows:

- filtering software will be installed on all computers used at this church or as part of any activities operated by the church.
- on our church website/s, details will be prominently displayed as to where to find help online including having the CEOP button on the website

We will respond appropriately and sensitively to all online safety concerns.

In the event of concern that there may be an online safety incident, this will be reported to the church's designated safeguarding co-coordinator in the same manner as the reporting of any other safeguarding concern. The safeguarding co-coordinator will then determine if the matter should be reported to the statutory authorities or other appropriate agencies, including CEOP or the Internet Watch Foundation. In case of church's designated safeguarding co-coordinator not being available, the matter needs to be reported to the synod safeguarding officer.

We will operate safe email communications with children and young people.

When using email to communicate with children and young people, workers will:

- obtain parental agreement before they use email services to communicate with a child or young person
- use clear, unambiguous language to reduce the risk of misinterpretation
- ensure that all messages can be viewed if necessary by the worker's supervisor and that this policy is explained to children and young people.

We will make appropriate use of mobile phones where they are needed.

Not every child or young person has the use of a mobile phone and, even if they do, parents may not want a worker to have the number. Workers will therefore have alternative means of communication and will ensure that communication goes through parents if this is their preference.

Mobile phones should only be used where necessary and will be guided by the following considerations:

- where appropriate group rather than individual texting will be used
- care will be taken with the language used, avoiding ambiguous abbreviations such as 'lol' which could mean 'laugh out loud' or 'lots of love' and always end with people's name.
- any texts or conversations that raise concerns will be saved and passed on/shown to the worker's supervisor
- any images of children taken on a mobile phone will be downloaded to the church computer and kept securely
- workers will not take or keep images of children on their personal mobile phone.
- workers will not give out their personal mobile number to children
- as well as ensuring that calls / texts are not sent after 9pm or before 9am, workers will also ensure that calls and texts are not sent whilst the child is at school / college, as this may be against the educational establishment's rules
- workers will enable a password/lock on all devices to ensure data protection and will prevent unauthorised access being gained

We will consider the appropriate use of Chat & Messenger Services and whether these are necessary.

Instant Messenger Services (IM) are internet programmes that allow people to write and receive messages in real time.

As with other forms of online communication, workers will take care with regard to language and content, as well as when and for how long a communication lasts.

Workers will ensure that all communications using IM services adhere to the following:

- communication will not take place between the hours of 9 pm and 9 am *[or alternatives]*
- workers will ensure that they enable settings when using IM services which allow for significant conversations to be saved as text files and will keep a log of when and with whom they communicated
- children/young people will be made aware that conversations will be recorded and kept (via text files or similar)

We will make safe and appropriate use of social media platforms when communicating with young people.

When using social media platforms we will ensure that the following guidance is used by all workers:

- workers will not add young people with whom they work to their personal social media platforms if they are under the age of 18.
- workers will set up a Facebook group / page for the church or church group and invite young people (in the appropriate age group) to be members
- workers will only use an agreed social networking account for contact with young people with whom they are working
- workers will ensure that their personal profiles on any social media platforms are set to the highest form of security to avoid young people accessing personal information or seeing any pictures of a personal nature
- messages sent to young people regarding youth activities will be posted openly and 'inbox' messaging should be avoided. If this is necessary in exceptional circumstances, a copy will be sent to an identified person to assist transparency

Sanctions

Workers will be made aware that not complying with any of the above will incur sanctions, which could include suspension or dismissal and referral to appropriate authorities.

Appendix 9 has a worker agreement for online conduct that workers will be asked to sign.

We will store data securely

There are a variety of ways that data can be stored. Where data of any form about children is stored this will be password protected and in general be stored securely on the church premises. If this is not possible then a record will be made of where the data is stored. Where it is necessary for data to be transported, memory sticks will be purchased for workers so that there is a separation between personal and church information.

Concerns, Complaints and Compliments

Should anyone have any concerns, complaints or compliments please contact:

Name Reverend Andrew B Royal

Telephone No 01622 297195

Email ministermaidstoneurc@gmail.com

It would be helpful 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.

Any written complaint will be responded to within 10 days.

Key Contacts: Sources of advice and support

- The church **Safeguarding Coordinator** is the person to whom all concerns or allegations relating to children, young people or adults should be addressed:

Name Mrs Anna Ramsay

Telephone No 07594440449

Email littleportian2@gmail.com

- In the absence of the Safeguarding Coordinator, the **Deputy Safeguarding Coordinator** can be contacted:

Name Ms Alison Alderson

Mrs. Maggie Marks

Telephone No 01580 890 261

01580 892674

Email alisonalderson@btinternet.com

maggiemarks55@gmail.com

- **Synod Safeguarding Officer**

Name Belinda Nielsen

Telephone No 07716 640 596

Email safeguarding@urcsouthern.org.uk

- **URC Safeguarding Office**(This should only be used if you are unable to contact your Synod Safeguarding Officer)

Telephone No 020 7520 2729

Email safeguarding@urc.org.uk

- **ThirtyOne: Eight**(This should only be used for urgent advice if you are unable to contact URC)

24 hour helpline: 0845 120 4550

- **Designated Officer (DO)** or the equivalent in Scotland and Wales

Name Kent County Council Local Authority Designated Officer

Telephone No 03000 410 888

Email kentchildrenslado@kent.gov.uk

- **Statutory contact in the case of a child**

Children's Front Door (Social Services) 03000 41 11 11 (Monday-Friday 9am-5pm)

Outside of office hours (emergencies only) 03000 41 91 91

- **Statutory contact in the case of an adult at risk**

Kent Adult Social Care and Health (Social Services) 03000 41 61 61 (Monday-Friday 9am-5pm)

Outside of office hours (emergencies only) 03000 41 91 91

NOTE: A list of useful contacts for all forms of abuse of children and adults can be found on **Appendix 10** and be used in this section of the local policy.

Review

The Elders will review this policy annually, amending and updating it as required, and informing Church Meeting that this has been done.

Date of the most recent review: 16th March 2022

Date of the next review: March 2023

Signed: _____

(on behalf of the church Elders)