**Interim Regional Safeguarding Group (IRSG) for the Eastern Districts**

**Beds, Essex & Herts, East Anglia, Lincolnshire, Northampton and Nottingham & Derby Districts**

**Terms of Reference for a review of the RSG purpose, function and operation, and proposed review criteria**

**The context**

The Methodist Church is progressing plans to re-structure its mission and ministry and oversight arrangements as they pertain to current districts. The preferred model is the development of larger districts and it is anticipated that these will take shape between 1st September 2024 and 2027. Early pioneers of this new approach are the Eastern Districts with plans in place to begin co-operation and collaboration in a number of areas on this basis from September 2022. Connexionally, the Church must also be ready to implement any recommendations stemming from the publication of the final IICSA report, and the new enlarged Districts will be at the forefront of delivering these as appropriate.

**Current safeguarding arrangements**

Each of the districts in the new region currently employ one or more District Safeguarding Officers (DSOs), whose work is overseen by a District Safeguarding Group (DSG) or the wider District Leadership Team. Therefore, as safeguarding remains a high priority for the Church and its regions, any new governance structures being proposed need to ensure ongoing support for and scrutiny of safeguarding arrangements across the whole region. Therefore, the Eastern Districts propose to form an Interim Regional Safeguarding Group (IRSG) from 1st September 2022 designed in part to advise on and monitor effective transition from wholly district-based structures to a regional model, which may in turn allow for more localised oversight arrangements where appropriate.

**The Interim RSG**

Independently chaired with appropriate Church and professional membership, the IRSG for the Eastern Districts will be charged with actively supporting the intended transitional process. At this point, neither employment arrangements for DSOs, nor a potential regional team structure for delivering the safeguarding service, have been confirmed. However before the conclusion of the transitional period the regional planning team, has proposed that the role and functioning of the interim RSG be reviewed in March 2024 in order to receive assurance that the group is both fit for purpose and being effective, prior to September 2024 completion. Additionally, it has been proposed that review criteria be established and published in order that the independent chair and group members are fully aware of how their performance will be assessed.

**Terms of Reference**

The Eastern Districts of the Methodist Church will commission a review of the purpose, function and operation of the IRSG in March 2024. Primarily this is to determine how well it meets the needs of the Connexional and District Safeguarding teams and the wider safeguarding community across the region, in terms of promoting safe practice, developing local policy and providing rigorous scrutiny. The review will be conducted by an independent person, who will:

* review all available and relevant policy documentation pertaining to the work of the group and safeguarding arrangements in the Region;
* identify examples of good practice in other similar faith settings that can provide a benchmark, drawing on work that the Connexional Safeguarding Team may undertake;
* interview the independent chair, members of the IRSG and the professional safeguarding team;
* interview a sample of voluntary local church and circuit safeguarding officers;
* consult with the Connexional Safeguarding Team to assess the quality of operational relationships;
* liaise as appropriate with regional ecumenical safeguarding partners;
* prepare a written report for the regional leadership team that identifies, for example, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the planned arrangements, as well as recommendations for assured future developments.

The review process will be designed not to be burdensome, nor duplicate other work, particularly in the light of the series of District audits planned by the Connexional Safeguarding Committee. The reviewer would be expected to reflect the findings of any audits that had taken place within the Region by the time of the review,

**Proposed review criteria**

The following are proposed headings, which, if agreed to in principle, will be developed further to detail the indicative evidence that the review process would be seeking.

* The IRSG meets regularly according to its terms of reference, is normally quorate and transacts the required business.
* Membership is satisfactory and reflects the breadth of the regional safeguarding community and that there is regular professional external/statutory agency attendance.
* The IRSG commissions and receives reports from the DSO team and Connexional Safeguarding team that illustrate both activity levels and case studies along with quality assurance.
* The IRSG makes clear decisions and recommendations and ensures that these are properly recorded and acted upon.
* There is an appropriate level of agreement with current district leaders about the efficiency and effectiveness of the regional safeguarding arrangements.
* The IRSG ensures there is a good level of transparent external scrutiny of regional safeguarding services, management arrangements and itself.
* The IRSG has produced its own work plan and prepares an annual report that records the achievement of goals and any reasons for preventing delivery.
* The IRSG takes appropriate steps to assess the culture of safeguarding in the region and offers advice about possible measures to make improvements where identified.
* There are recorded examples of policy and practice challenges both to regional leadership and the DSO team, and the outcome of these.

There is already a DSG standards document, published in 2021, and the detailed criteria for the regional review will include these standards as appropriate.

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