

Religious Life Group

Baseline Audit Report
April 2025

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1. Introduction

1.1 This is a baseline audit of the safeguarding arrangements of a religious life group based in England and Wales. In accordance with CSSA standard practice this report has been redacted due to an assessment that publication would create a risk of harm to a party linked to the religious life group.

1.2 The religious life group in question has scored an overall grading of Early Progress, although two standards have been graded at Below Basic and elements of practice have been identified that do not adequately manage safeguarding risks. In addition to discussing expected actions with the religious life group, the CSSA has alerted the Religious Life Safeguarding Service¹ and diocese in which the religious life group is physically situated. Both have indicated their willingness to support the religious life group to develop their safeguarding arrangements. The CSSA will maintain contact with involved parties to ensure that progress is made ahead of a re-audit in late 2025.

1.3 There are several hundred members of the religious life group worldwide. There is a General Leader, and each region has a Regional Leader who approves the ministries undertaken. The Regional Leader will appoint the treasurer and Local Leader for each smaller community. Members are typically assigned to a community for 6 years and then move on, elderly members may be left in a community which they prefer, and the members will care for one another as their health declines. None of the members are in employment.

1.4 The congregation in England and Wales is very small and they reside within a deprived area, in one shared property, that is leased to them from the local diocese. The religious life group undertake a range of ministries. These include hospitality and youth projects run from their place of residence, which is also open to adult visitors who come for conversation or support. The religious life group is well known in their community which is reflected in their number of visitors. In turn, they visit adults in their own homes, some who have been known to them generationally,

¹ The Religious Life Safeguarding Service are an independent organisation who provide safeguarding services to religious life groups in England and Wales. [Religious Life Safeguarding Service \(religioussafeguarding.org\)](http://religioussafeguarding.org)

occasionally also taking communion to them. They also provide street ministry, offering support to the homeless, prison chaplaincy and mentoring sessions within education settings. The members also support the Mass at the neighbouring Church and have contact with its schools on special occasions.

1.5 The CSSA has devised a categorisation scheme for Religious Life Groups as part of the pilot audit phase; this placed Religious Life Groups on a scale from Level 1 (a small community with minimal outreach and no known safeguarding concerns), through Level 2 (a medium sized community with some outreach with vulnerable populations and/or providing some Diocesan Activities such as a Parish Priest) to Level 3 (a large community and/or one with significant outreach with vulnerable populations and/or a disproportionately high number of open safeguarding cases). Although they are a small congregation, the religious life group has been audited using the Level 2 Audit framework in accordance with the extensive public ministry of the congregation and associated risk management, given one member is subject to a safety management plan.

1.6 The CSSA recognises the rich diversity of the Religious and acknowledges that the Religious Life Groups within any category may vary significantly in terms of size, ministry, and safeguarding practice. Consequently, CSSA analysts may use professional judgement to ensure that Religious Life Groups are graded against the national standards in such a way that reflects their uniqueness.

2. Scope & Methodology

2.1 In advance of the formal audit week, the religious life group were requested to complete a Level 2 audit self-assessment tool providing information on their adherence to the Eight National Safeguarding Standards and progress in the overall implementation of said standards.

2.2 Information provided within the self-assessment and supporting evidence provided by the safeguarding lead was reviewed by the CSSA analyst and this evidence was assessed against the Level 2 Maturity Matrix to arrive at ratings for each standard and a combined overall grade.

2.3 The following audit methods were employed:

2.3.1 Interviews

Interviews took place with the following key individuals from the religious life group on 16 October 2024:

- Local Leader
- Members' Focus Group
- Respondent

2.3.2 Document Review

Review of the following key documents additionally took place:

- Self-assessment form
- International congregation website for the religious life group
- Supplementary evidence (listed at Appendix A)

2.3.3 Casework Review

Although there are currently no complaints against the religious life group, there is one member who is currently the subject of a safety management plan. An interview was conducted with the Respondent, and the case work files relating to the Respondent have been reviewed and a separate case work audit tool has been completed.

2.3.4 Agency Checks

The CSSA analyst has liaised with the Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS) and the local Diocese in respect of engagement with the religious life group.

3. Audit Grading

3.1 Practice is assessed against the Eight National Safeguarding Standards adopted by the Catholic Church in England and Wales and graded in accordance with the CSSA Maturity Matrix for Level 2 Orders where scores from the individual sub-standards are used to calculate the overall standard gradings. Each standard was graded on an ascending seven-point scale of *Below Basic*, *Basic*, *Early Progress*, *Firm Progress*, *Results Being Achieved*, *Comprehensive Assurance*, and

Exemplary. Grades for individual standards were combined to produce an overall grading.²

Overall grading	Early Progress
Standard 1 – Safeguarding is embedded in the Church body’s leadership, governance, ministry and culture	Below Basic
Standard 2 – Communicating the Church’s safeguarding message	Firm Progress
Standard 3 – Engaging with and caring for those who report having been harmed	Early Progress
Standard 4 – Effective management of allegations and concerns	Below Basic
Standard 5 – Management and support of subjects of allegations and concerns (respondents)	Basic
Standard 6 – Robust human resource management	Basic
Standard 7 – Training and support for safeguarding	Firm Progress
Standard 8 – Quality assurance and continuous Improvement	Early Progress

² Further information about the grading system employed by the CSSA is available here: <https://catholicsafeguarding.org.uk/resources/our-quality-assurance-framework/>

3.2 The key findings from this audit is that there is an emerging understanding of the basic principles of safeguarding within the religious life group, and that significant work has been undertaken by the Local Leader to develop safeguarding in line with the Eight National Safeguarding Standards, however substantial progress is needed in respect of the practical application of safeguarding within the day-to-day activity of the members to safeguard themselves as well as those with whom they work.

4. Audit findings against each standard

4.1 Standard 1 Safeguarding is embedded in the Church body's leadership, governance, ministry and culture

4.1.1 The religious life group have served the local community for over 30 years and have long standing established links with families from within the local community and beyond and it is clear that they are a valued resource in the area.

4.1.2 The Local Leader is the safeguarding lead for the community, although this is not usually the same person, due to extenuating circumstances there was no one else within the community able to fulfil this role. The Local Leader joined the international congregation of the religious life group upon adulthood and has spent 12 years with the community in poorer areas, within leadership roles. The Local Leader was appointed to the community in England by the Regional Leader, a post the Local Leader had not expressed an interest in fulfilling.

4.1.3 The Local Leader has however embraced this role and has accessed training with the RLSS to support the discharging of the safeguarding duties of the role. The Local Leader is committed to improving safeguarding practice within the community having previously written congregational policy. Following the separation of the community from the local diocese in relation to safeguarding arrangements, the Local Leader has demonstrated autonomy in the development of local safeguarding policies and procedures and their application, and with the exception of the Regional Leader approving the proposed work of the community and being provided with an annual update, there is limited governance or oversight of the work completed by the religious life group.

4.1.4 The Local Leader has engaged with the RLSS and has established positive local links with other Church bodies that have been supportive in the development of policies and practice in relation to safeguarding. It is clear that the Local Leader has dedicated significant time and effort since being appointed to increase the members' understanding of safeguarding and the profile of safeguarding within their work.

4.1.5 The Local Leader developed a 3-year Safeguarding Implementation Plan in October 2023 which is divided into 8 key points, which are policies, DBS, reading and signing a code of conduct, references for members' training, risk assessments for ministry, displaying public safeguarding information and ensuring that this plan is reviewed annually. In addition to the 3-year Safeguarding Implementation Plan, a Safeguarding Action Plan has been developed which is a working document with actions needed, date identified, and the progress made in addressing identified actions. The action plan has been in place since at least June 2023 and many of the actions have since been completed and new actions added. These are appropriate safeguarding plans for a smaller community.

4.1.6 Community meetings are taking place with members on a frequent basis and of the nine meetings that have occurred since September 2023, seven have included discussions in respect of safeguarding. It was shared during the members' focus group that one member had shared a difficult experience they encountered during the course of ministry, and that all members had reflected on this incident as a group, and it had been a point of learning for them. Community Meetings are an opportunity to discuss safeguarding arrangements formally, however informal discussions take place on a daily basis, as during breakfast members' will discuss their plans for the day and ensure that each other's whereabouts are known to the group. The members often aim to work in pairs, thereby evidencing that risk management is being considered by the members on a daily basis.

4.1.7 Congregational policies are reported to be well established and in operation within the religious life group, however these policies are superseded by local policies and expectations. Integrity in Ministry has been shared with all members in October 2023.

4.1.8 The religious life group have adopted the RLSS Safeguarding Policy, and the Local Leader has made sensible adaptations to the policy making it more accessible and relevant to members, as it includes the contact details for local services such as the adults' and children's safeguarding services. The safeguarding policy will be reviewed annually or in line with any significant changes to the organisation and or legislation. Members were provided the opportunity to make suggestions to the safeguarding policy.

4.1.9 The religious life group do not have a website and there is no publication of the safeguarding policy, which is stored within a folder at the residence, similarly the congregational safeguarding policy is not available on the religious life group congregational website.

4.1.10 The Local Leader has also adopted and updated the CSSA Code of Conduct for Leaders and Helpers, outlining the expectation of members and any helpers. The Code of Conduct for Leaders and Helpers has been signed by all members as per the Safeguarding Implementation plan.

4.1.11 The religious life group have signed formal contracts with both the RLSS and CSSA, and the Local Leader has proactively engaged with the CSSA regarding the audit process and is familiar with the Eight National Safeguarding Standards that are also displayed for members on a notice board in the residence. The Local Leader has also engaged with the RLSS in respect of one of the members subject to a safety management plan, and suggestions made by the RLSS following site visits.

4.1.12 The Local Leader routinely considers safeguarding risks and all activities by members are now subject to risk assessments, and the youth projects have a job description for the lead role.

4.1.13 The Local Leader has demonstrated an understanding of the need to address low level concerns and share information with appropriate statutory agencies, recognising that in the absence of being able to share this with schools, contact can be made with children's social care. Within the members' focus group, it was reported by all members that they would share any concerns with the Local Leader and in his absence if there was a serious concern the police, which is aligned with the safeguarding policy.

4.1.14 Whilst there are several positives about the safeguarding arrangements within the religious life group, most significantly being the appointment of the Local Leader who has demonstrated an unrelenting commitment to improving approaches to safeguarding, the practicalities of safeguarding are inadequate for both the members and the vulnerable groups with whom they work.

4.1.15 The members are offering support to a variety of groups and the informal nature of this support could lead to vulnerable adults and children coming into contact with one another, and whilst it is without question that the members would seek to resolve any contact quickly with minimal impact, it cannot be underestimated that there are potential risks should this occur. It is therefore suggested that a more structured approach to each group is devised, or alternative locations are considered for informal conversations with adults.

4.1.16 The arrangements for the youth projects also need to be improved, as whilst the members are well known and respected within the local community, and it is likely that parents are freely providing consent for their children to take part in activities organised by the members, the current practice of allowing children to return consent forms is not rigorous enough and it is imperative that when working with children and young people consent is obtained indisputably from a parent or guardian. In line with practices by other voluntary organisations that work with children, it is recommended that members ensure a signed consent form is completed and returned by an adult parent or guardian, this is likely to require members making contact with a parent or guardian and arranging a time to facilitate this.

4.1.17 Furthermore, the members are significantly vulnerable to allegations given some of the work completed with youth groups and it is therefore essential that members work in pairs for all youth projects and engagement, particularly when working with children in less public areas.

4.1.18 The religious life group routinely implement risk assessments for all new activities, and it is clear that risk assessments aim to avoid members being alone with vulnerable children and adults, however the risk assessments do not include what needs to happen if whilst during an activity an allegation is made against one or more of the members or a volunteer and how this will be managed safely, this will need to be included within future risk assessments.

4.1.19 Whilst the Local Leader has completed medical training previously, there is no one within the community that possess a first aid certificate and given the nature of activities and vulnerable groups, it is recommended that this is resolved as a matter of urgency.

4.1.20 Despite significant progress in policy development, risk assessments and planning of activities, current safeguarding practices are not sufficiently robust.

Graded: Below Basic

4.2 Standard 2 Communicating the Church's safeguarding message

4.2.1 The religious life group have given some consideration as to whom they wish to communicate safeguarding messages to and how, which is recorded in the 3-year Safeguarding Implementation Plan, in which at point 7 it is highlighted that "*a public notice on safeguarding is to be displayed*" and in the Safeguarding Action Plan at point 15. The members have displayed a safeguarding poster at the entry point to the home and within the guest bedroom, which is used by friends and family members. The poster highlights that the Local Leader should be contacted if there are any concerns.

4.2.2 Similarly, to support the youth project a flyer is provided to parents highlighting key information and who to contact in the event of concerns regarding members.

4.2.3 Safeguarding messages are communicated to members at community meetings and there is an expectation that members will be updated by the Local Leader with anything that they need to be aware of. Within the members' focus group it was stated that the Local Leader and RLSS lead on safeguarding, and this was considered a strength by the community. One of the members also regularly receives safeguarding communications from an international religious organisation that he shares with other members and on occasion the RLSS.

4.2.4 The religious life group have established external links with the local Priests that serve the neighbouring Church, the staff within the neighbouring schools and others religious life groups that are in the area, which are all contributing to the promotion of a safer environment for community members and young people whom the schools are also aware of and are supporting. The Local Leader's links with other local religious life groups has been fundamental to the development of safeguarding policies for the religious life group over the last 12 months.

4.2.5 The religious life group would benefit from giving further consideration to expanding the current Safeguarding Action plan to include a communications plan and to review this more thoroughly, this does not need to be an extensive piece of work given the size of the community, however the members are engaged in a number of activities with vulnerable groups with whom it is essential understand the responsibilities of the members to keep them safe, how they intend to do this, and how this will be monitored and reviewed. Furthermore, the religious life group may wish to give consideration to the development of their congregational website to include safeguarding and the activities and work completed by each of the smaller communities, although it is acknowledged that this is beyond the control of the community in England and Wales.

Graded: Firm Progress

4.3 Standard 3 Engaging with and caring for those who report having been harmed

4.3.1 The religious life group members have all completed basic safeguarding training with the RLSS and the congregation, and the Local Leader has provided evidence highlighting appropriate information sharing with statutory services in respect of low-level concerns. The Local Leader has also spoken about support offered by the community to an adult who had been the victim of cuckooing.³

³ Criminals may use a vulnerable person's home as their base of operations. This is known as 'cuckooing'.

4.3.2 All members work extensively with vulnerable groups and have received safeguarding training. However, focus group participants reported that they have not had any experiences of receiving allegations or disclosures, but shared that in the event that they were concerned or if a concern was shared with them, they would tell the Local Leader and if the Local Leader was not available, they would speak to the Parish Safeguarding Representative. In the event of an emergency focus group participants shared that they would contact the police.

4.3.3 To support the members' ability to respond to disclosures or allegations of abuse the Local Leader has compiled safeguarding information into a ring binder, including the contact details of local support services delineated into services for men and women. Next to the telephone there is a guide in respect of how to receive an allegation or concern. This is a helpful and appropriate document that advises members to listen, record and report, and it is encouraged that "*listening is done in a caring way*". There are details of how to respond, including a prompt to tell the caller that the information will need to be passed to the safeguarding lead. Contact details for the Local Leader, Parish Safeguarding Representative and RLSS is included in this leaflet.

4.3.4 The local Leader has demonstrated an awareness of some of the concerns that may be shared with members, and has highlighted that the members primarily work with victims of historic abuse, yet it is essential that all members are vigilant to the possibility of a disclosure at any time so that their responses are appropriate, and victims are encouraged to speak to the police and access support, as is highlighted within the congregational policy. It is essential that the members do not view historic abuse as an indicator of current low or no risk to the individual victims, or wider society as potential perpetrators of abuse may still be targeting vulnerable groups.

4.3.5 The local Leader has shared that there are resources available within the religious life group for specialist support for members, and the religious life group have previously used local appropriate services to support novices struggling with emotional health. Similarly, the Local Leader has advised that resources can be made available to support a victim and or survivor of abuse if this was required.

4.3.6 Focus group participants have shared that they feel well supported within the community and that their emotional well-being is promoted, members receive

spiritual guidance from outside the congregation twice a month, and they feel that they support one another well by meeting twice a day to share any concerns and offer one another support, in addition to praying together three times a day. Members are supported to engage with friends in the community and host Skype calls with family and friends who live further away. There is a guest bedroom in the home where family and friends of members are welcome to stay for visits.

4.3.7 The Local Leader has reported that every member is close to at least two or three members within the region and the Local Leader also has support from the Regional Leader and the General Leader who does visit the community, however the Local Leader has advised that he is confident in his role and does not require their support.

4.3.8 There is clearly some good practice in responding to low level concerns and engaging with and caring for those who report having been harmed, however practice in this area could be improved by all the members being supported with regular reminders of how to respond to historic abuse and additional/ refresher training for members on how to support victims and survivors would be beneficial. The members may also benefit from further case studies to prompt discussions about what action to take, these could be devised by the Local Leader using the support of the RLSS or other Church bodies.

Graded: Early Progress

4.4 Standard 4 Effective management of allegations and concerns

4.4.1 The religious life group have adopted the RLSS Safeguarding Policy in which procedures are outlined should members become aware of a safeguarding allegation or concern, and it is highlighted that members must contact the RLSS immediately and share any and all information.

4.4.2 The Local Leader understands the need to make accurate records of any concerns, highlighting in the Safeguarding Policy that records could be requested as part of criminal and civil proceedings or enquiries. The Local Leader has created

files for hard copies of concerns and there are electronic records for the matter involving the Respondent, in which the Local Leader has retained emails and correspondence. There is evidence in casework of liaison with appropriate services such as the RLSS and the Local Diocese.

4.4.3 The religious life group have developed recording tools to support them in capturing information and highlights the types of information to collect and that contact details for appropriate individuals and services should be recorded.

4.4.5 The casework audit undertaken in respect of a Respondent within the religious life group has identified a number of concerns in relation to the effective management of the allegations and concerns, and it is evidenced that there are wider congregational issues of appropriate, effective and timely information sharing and risk management that need to be addressed.

4.4.6 There are additional concerns that the congregation did not act in a timely manner on the advice provided by the Diocese which was to ensure information sharing with the RLSS and to commission a psychological assessment. Additionally, despite being his superior, the Local Leader was not made aware of the concerns about the Respondent until further concerns had been raised by a member of the public.

4.4.7 It is unclear if the congregation understand the purpose and benefits of a psychological assessment, as the Respondent was tasked with commissioning (although not funding) his own assessment and upon completion of the psychological assessment the Respondent was provided with the only copy, which he redacted prior to sharing with the RLSS and the Local Leader. Furthermore, there has been no action taken to identify further clinical support for the Respondent.

4.4.8 The congregation have failed in their duties to protect children as the Respondent was enabled unsupervised access with children and vulnerable adults despite known concerns and the lack of a psychological assessment, that had then been outstanding for some time. Whilst the Regional Lead had advised the RLSS that the Respondent would not be placed in a position of power or responsibility in the community, it does not appear that information was shared with the RLSS in respect of the Respondent having access to children. Whilst there had been no known previous concerns about the Respondent having been inappropriate with

children, he had abused a position of authority, and leaders within the community have failed to respond appropriately in assessing or mitigating further risk to both children and vulnerable adults.

Graded: Below Basic

4.5 Standard 5 Management and support of subjects of allegations and concerns (respondents)

4.5.1 The religious life group are currently managing one member subject to a safety management plan, and whilst none of the members are specifically trained in managing those subjects to a safety management plan, the Local Leader is overseeing the plan in close collaboration with the RLSS. There is evidence within emails of the Local Leader seeking the views of the RLSS in response to potential scenarios for the Respondent to have contact with children and clear advice was provided by the RLSS to the Local Leader to ensure effective compliance.

4.5.2 The Respondent's views are not present in recordings by the community. There is no local record of the initial meeting held between the Regional Lead and the Respondent, and there has only been one meeting held between the Local Leader and the Respondent upon additional concerns being shared, of which limited information is recorded. All other meetings have been held with the RLSS as safety management plan meetings.

4.5.3 The Respondent has shared his dissatisfaction with being the subject of a safety management plan, however reports that he does comply with its expectations. The Respondent has had access to emotional support from a member of the community and he has also sought spiritual support for himself from a Diocesan Priest. Whilst the Respondent has not had any access to Canon Law advice, he is not subject to any Canonical restrictions upon his Ministry. Canon Law advice would therefore only need to be made available to the Respondent in the event that there were to be restrictions of a non-voluntary nature placed upon his ministry.

4.5.4 Focus Group participants all felt confident that should they be the subject on an allegation they would be supported by the congregation and a support person would be appointed. It is nevertheless recommended that members are provided with more detailed information of what to expect if they are the subject of allegations or concerns. The congregation may wish to formulate a policy establishing the spiritual, emotional, legal, and financial support that would be available to community members if they were subject to an allegation or concern.

4.5.5 To ensure compliance with the safety management plan the Local Leader has had to enforce more stringent boundaries in regard to youth projects and the expectations of children and young people.

4.5.6 The Local Leader has advised that the expectations of the safety management plan are practical and that the Respondent is cooperative therefore enabling the plan to be accommodated by the community, however, if there were more stringent expectations or serious concerns meaning alternative accommodation would need to be identified, this would likely need to be with a friend of the Respondent or of the community, as the religious life group have no other property in England and Wales that could be immediately utilised.

Graded: Basic

4.6 Standard 6 Robust human resource management

4.6.1 The religious life group have used the Safeguarding policy to formalise their commitment to safer recruitment in which it is recorded that leaders "*will ensure that members are subject to the appropriate Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks (including enhanced DBS) in line with both statutory and Catholic Church requirements. Volunteers will be subject to the same level of checks if they are responsible for any of the ministries or will have one to one contact with the public*". There are additional points of note including that the appointments will be based on a candidate's skills, knowledge and experience, no offer will be made without a valid DBS and two references, and for members one reference will need to be from the Regional Leader. All members currently hold a valid DBS.

4.6.2 Similar processes are in place for new prospective members wishing to join the community, although there have been no new members in the last 12 months. The religious life group are an international congregation and as such new members do join from outside England and Wales. There is an expectation that new members discern for at least a year and provide reference checks prior to joining the congregation, however DBS checks would only be completed for members once they are physically within the local community. It is reported by the Local Leader that obtaining DBS certificates for overseas members is difficult due to a lack of necessary identification, and so additional steps needed to obtain identification in the UK such as applying for a driving licence can delay DBS applications being made. This is a challenge that is not unique to this religious life group and is not an indication of poor practice on their part.

4.6.3 The religious life group advise that those wishing to volunteer on the behalf of the community, need to be compliant with DBS and safer recruitment processes, however there is only one volunteer that works with the community at this time. The religious life group advise that any volunteers or new members without a DBS is supervised by one of the other members.

4.6.4 Despite best efforts by the Local Leader, safer recruitment processes require significant improvement. The only volunteer with the community currently has an expired DBS, and whilst practise by the members would be to ensure that the volunteer is not left unsupervised with any service users, given the small number of members, it is recommended that volunteers are not permitted to work with the community unless subject to a valid DBS certificate, and this stipulation is extended to all volunteers despite any professional background or experience.

4.6.5 The Respondent, whilst having a valid DBS does not have a reference from the Regional Leader as this has been refused, and whilst the reasons for this are acknowledged, this undermines the compliance of the congregation with their own safer recruitment processes.

4.6.6 The religious life group have experienced a member reporting a lack of understanding around cultural expectations and so the Local Leader in conjunction with another Church organisation is considering the development of an induction pack that can be shared with overseas members. It is recommended that is provided to all members prior to arriving in the UK, this does not have to be an

exhaustive piece of work and will largely be the collating and sharing of existing policies and information and ensuring that it is understood. It is, however acknowledged that the Local Leader receives new members at the discretion of superiors.

4.6.7 There are no known complaints against the religious life group. There is a complaints procedure available within the Safeguarding Policy which details that complaints must be made in writing to the Safeguarding Lead or Local Leader, and a response will be made within a specified time period, and should a complainant not be satisfied the matter will be referred to the RLSS. The Whistleblowing procedure is also available within the Safeguarding Policy where it is highlighted that if there are concerns about the practices of the religious life group this must be referred to the RLSS.

4.6.8 The Local Leader may also wish to ensure that the complaints procedure detailed within the Safeguarding Policy highlights the CSSA as the final port of call for complaints. Similarly, the Local Leader will need to consider how the complaints policy for youth projects can be promoted to those who access the service and their carers.

Graded: Basic

4.7 Standard 7 Training and support for safeguarding

4.7.1 The importance of safeguarding training is acknowledged by the Local Leader who has included the expectation of safeguarding training within the Safeguarding Policy in which it is highlighted as every 2 years, in practice all members are up to date with training expectations. The community have all accessed basic training via the congregation and the RLSS, with two members completing advanced safeguarding training. The Local Leader has accessed training for leaders, in addition to safeguarding adults training and safeguarding young people, the Local Leader has also accessed training to support additional aspects of the role. Additionally, members of the community attended the RLSS Annual Safeguarding Conference in 2023 and 2024.

4.7.2 The Local Leader seeks out training for members via the RLSS and keeps a record of all training attended with copies or training certificates. Another member of the community, as previously mentioned, is engaged with another religious organisation and he shares training materials that they provide with the wider community.

4.7.3 There is support for safeguarding by the Local Leader who ensures that safeguarding is a topic of the community meetings which have been held, and it is clear from the preparation and approach to this audit that there is a commitment from the community to improving safeguarding practice, albeit there is some trepidation as the community do not want their ministry to be limited by what they see as the sometimes bureaucratic nature of safeguarding policies, as they feel that their ministry could be reduced.

4.7.4 All members of the community, with the exception of the Respondent, have extensive public ministry and so it is recommended that all active members complete advanced safeguarding training. The Local Leader may also wish to consider bespoke training for each of the members in line with their ministry.

Graded: Firm Progress

4.8 Standard 8 Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement

4.8.1 The Local Leader has undertaken a significant task since his appointment in developing the safeguarding policies and procedures of the religious life group, work that is still being developed at this time. The Local Leader has shared the Eight National Safeguarding Standards and Integrity in Ministry with members, and these are stored within a ring binder which is accessible to members.

4.8.2 The Local Leader acknowledges the need to review and improve practice and so there are review dates for the 3-year implementation plan and key safeguarding documentation such as the Safeguarding Policy. The Local Leader has supported the community in embedding discussions of safeguarding in everyday conversation, such as considering their daily activities and whereabouts and ensuring one another's safety.

4.8.3 The religious life group have signed contracts with both the RLSS and the CSSA and there is evidence that the Regional Leader and subsequently the Local Leader has sought advice and guidance from the RLSS as and when needed, which is evidenced more recently in discussions in respect of data retention.

4.8.4 The Local Leader has identified that areas of development for the community are to update the volunteer section of the Safeguarding Policy, and to ensure that the current volunteer has an up-to-date DBS certificate, and as previously mentioned an induction pack for members coming to the UK so that they are fully aware of cultural expectations.

Graded: Early Progress

5. Summary of overall findings

5.1 Safeguarding is not yet embedded in the leadership and governance of the religious life group. The Leadership of the congregation appears disjointed and information sharing practices are poor, the Local Leader was not made aware of concerns relating to one of the members and equally as new concerns have been shared, these have not been conveyed to senior leaders. The religious life group appear to be self-governing, albeit it is reported that the Regional Leader approves new activities and is considering a safeguarding policy for European members and approves any spending over a set amount.

5.2 Since his appointment the Local Leader has made significant developments in relation to safeguarding and has developed an appropriate and purposeful 3-year Safeguarding Implementation Plan and a Safeguarding Policy that is understood by the community members. The Local Leader has encouraged discussions about Safeguarding at more formal community meetings, and during everyday activity such as breakfast, and evening meals so that members are aware of the whereabouts of one another, contributing to a safer environment.

5.2 The Local Leader has given some consideration as to whom members wish to communicate with and within the Safeguarding Implementation Plan it is recorded that posters will be displayed within the home, and this has since been completed.

Safeguarding posters are also displayed in the guest bedroom and a leaflet has been developed for the parents and carers of children attending youth projects. A complaints policy for one youth project has also been developed but is yet to be displayed or shared.

5.3 Despite working extensively with vulnerable groups the community have limited experience of responding to disclosures of harm, although the Local Leader has provided examples of the community supporting an adult male who was the victim of cuckooing to move property. The Local Leader has shared that the majority of the ministry of the community is with adults who are likely to be victims of historic abuse. The Local Leader and focus group participants have shared that they are aware of the importance of responding in a caring manner, and the Local Leader has developed practice guidance that is next to the phone in the Presbytery to support members if they receive a call from a victim of harm.

5.4 The Safeguarding Policy provides sufficient expectation and guidance of the effective management of allegations and concerns, however practice in this area is undermined by the delayed response to concerns in relation to the Respondent. It is however more positive that upon the Local Leader being made aware of additional concerns about the Respondent (information that should have already been made available) these were shared with the RLSS who assumed responsibility for completing an investigation and offering guidance in respect of a safety management plan.

5.5 The Local Leader has reported confidence in ensuring compliance with the safety management plan for the Respondent and the Respondent has shared that they are compliant with the plan and that they are being supported by the community and external support which has been self-identified. The limited recordings about the initial concerns in relation to the Respondent does not evidence that the leadership of the religious life group understand the circumstances in which a safety management plan may be required for a member of the community and raises significant doubt that the leadership understand how to safeguard members and those with whom they work.

5.6 The Local Leader has developed an appropriate safer recruitment policy and has set expectations for both new members and volunteers, however the efforts by the Local Leader are undermined as the current volunteer with the community does

not have a valid DBS and the Respondent does not have a reference from the Regional Leader, which is an expectation of the policy. The Local Leader is developing an induction pack for new members which evidences that the Local Leader is able to reflect on lessons learnt.

5.7 All members have completed basic safeguarding training, and the Local Leader and one other member have completed more advanced safeguarding training in line with their roles. The Local Leader clearly understands and prioritises training and has outlined the expectation of safeguarding training within the Safeguarding Implementation Plan, clearly evidencing an ongoing commitment to training. It is recommended that all members are offered advanced safeguarding training due to their extensive work with vulnerable groups.

5.8 The Local Leader has acknowledged the importance of reviewing safeguarding practice which is evidenced in the planned review of the Safeguarding Implementation Plan and safeguarding policies.

5.9 Whilst there has been significant progress in the approach to safeguarding since the appointment of the Local Leader, wider congregational issues and decision making have impacted upon the overall practice of the religious life group and subsequently this audit. However, the Local Leader and community members should not be deterred from the positive progress that they have made in the last 12 months and need to continue their efforts in embedding and expanding the existing good policies and practices.

6. Recommendations

6.1 The following recommendations are to support the action plan that has already been devised by the Local Leader:

- A more structured approach to each group activity to be devised and/or alternative locations to be considered for informal conversations with adults.
- Consent forms for activities with children under the age of 18 to be indisputably obtained from a parent or guardian
- Members should ensure to work in pairs for youth projects and engagement

- Risk assessments to include what needs to happen if whilst during an activity an allegation is made against one or more of the members or a volunteer and how this will be managed safely
- The religious life group may wish to give consideration to the development of their congregational website to include safeguarding and the activities and work completed by each of the smaller communities
- All members to be supported with an annual reminders of how to respond to historic abuse
- Consideration to additional training for members in how to support victims and survivors
- Consideration to the use of case studies to prompt discussions about safeguarding scenarios and what action is needed
- Consideration to expansion of the safeguarding policy to include expectations in respect of commissioning specialist assessments
- Consideration to be given to the formulation of a policy advising community members of the spiritual, emotional, legal, canonical and financial support that would be available if they were subject to an allegation or concern
- DBS check needed of current volunteer, with any regulated activity to be supervised in the meantime
- Regional Lead to consider supplying a reference for the Respondent to ensure compliance with the safer recruitment policy
- Safeguarding Policy to be updated highlighting the CSSA as the final recourse for complaints
- Complaints Policy for youth project to be promoted to those who access the service and their carers
- All active members to complete advanced safeguarding training
- Induction pack for members coming to the UK to be developed and shared with members prior to their arrival
- At least one member to complete first aid training

7. Arrangements for follow-up

7.1 In line with the overall rating of Early Progress reaudit by the CSSA will take place after a minimum period of one year.