

The Missionary Society of St Columban

Baseline Audit Report
April 2026

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1. Introduction

1.1 This is the baseline audit of the safeguarding arrangements of the British region of the Missionary Society of St Columban (also known as the ‘Columbans’). This audit has been undertaken as part of the Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency’s (CSSA) Baseline Audit phase of Religious Life Groups in England and Wales.

1.2 The Missionary Society of St. Columban was founded in Ireland in 1918 as the “Maynooth Mission to China”¹. Once work began in areas outside China the name was changed taking the 6th century Irish missionary St. Columban as patron. The International Leadership Team is based in Hong Kong. The Columbans are an exclusively missionary society, essentially pastoral in nature, traditionally working in parishes rather than in health or education. The Columbans are currently serving in 15 countries around the world. Of these, five (including Britain) are principally regarded as “support” countries, which work to maintain missions in places such as China, Pakistan, Myanmar, the Philippines, Chile and Peru. The Columbans are a comparatively small order, currently numbering around 270 priests, 12 of whom are resident in Solihull, in the Midlands.

1.3 The Columbans have two major functions: promoting and raising funds for overseas missions, while at the same time providing accommodation and purpose for ‘active retired’ English and Irish priests, the majority of whom will have returned from overseas missions. These priests, together with the support of staff and volunteers, run small outreach programmes concerned with justice issues, migrants and displaced persons, inter-religious dialogue and the environment (especially the protection and promotion of biodiversity). These programmes are mainly directed by lay staff with the support of the priests as required. The Columbans have one property in Britain, the Solihull Centre House. This incorporates the main residence, a retirement wing, the regional offices and the surrounding

¹ The information in this introduction is taken from the Missionary Society of St Columban’s UK website ([Columban Missionaries – Sharing Gospel Joy](#)) and from an interview with the Superior from the British Region of the Mission of St Columban.

grounds in which they are implementing an 'eco-project' which attracts visitors from schools and colleges for educational purposes.

1.4 There are twelve Columban priests currently living in the Solihull Centre House. Two have recently returned from overseas mission with seven aged 75 years or over. Most contribute to regional administration in some form or other. Three priests do mission appeals in parishes around the country at weekends in accordance with a rota established by the Catholic Missionary Union² and the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales³. In addition to this work, two priests provide occasional cover for local parish priests for the Archdiocese of Birmingham.

1.5 The Columbans have limited contact with members of the public and do so through their missionary programmes that are overseen and directed by lay members of staff and lay missionaries. The priests in England are all resident in the accommodation in Solihull which provides individual rooms and communal eating and socialising spaces. The grounds of the accommodation and offices in Solihull are used for ecological projects and are open to school groups who are able to visit under the supervision of their own staff and with the permission and oversight of the lay project lead. The priest's accommodation is part of a suite of buildings that include the Region's offices and is suitable only for active retired members of the community. The suite of buildings is not open to the public. The Missionary Society of St Columban has additional accommodation in Ireland that includes a residential home and nursing home that accommodates priests who are in need of supportive living. The decision to move to full retirement in Ireland is made collaboratively with the priests when the need arises.

1.6 The Columbans employ 20 lay staff, with the majority working at the Solihull property, performing administrative, maintenance and domestic roles, while others

² The Catholic Missionary Union of England and Wales is the forum where all missionary activity and interests come together to promote awareness in the Catholic Church in England and Wales and in society at large, of the Church's role and activity in missionary works worldwide and the practical implications this has for local Catholic churches and society [CATHOLIC MISSIONARY UNION - home](#)

³ The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales is the permanent assembly of Catholic Bishops and Personal Ordinaries in the two member countries of Catholic Church in England and Wales [Catholic Church in England and Wales - Catholic Bishops' Conference](#)

work remotely and attend the offices as and when required. The Columbans benefit from the services of a Columban lay missionary⁴ from Chile and one from the Philippines (although this contract was coming to an end at the time of audit). One Columban employee does mission outreach to schools and promotes environmental awareness particularly in relation to the ecological project in the Solihull house grounds, with school groups also invited to visit the project at the Solihull site. Another employee works in the field of inter-religious dialogue in the Birmingham area and in addition both he and his wife, who is a lay missionary, are involved in the ministry to migrants and displaced persons administering Fatima House, a refuge for around a dozen destitute female asylum seekers for Father Hudson Caritas⁵ within the Archdiocese of Birmingham. The Columbans welcome volunteers to support their administrative tasks and recruit one volunteer annually on a year-long contract to work directly with the outreach workers gaining experience in this field.

1.7 This audit seeks to assess the effectiveness of the current safeguarding arrangements by considering practice over the last 12 months. The CSSA has categorised Religious Life Groups (RLGs) on a scale from Level 1 (a small community with minimal outreach and no known safeguarding concerns), Level 2 (a medium sized community with some outreach to vulnerable populations and/or providing some Diocesan activities, such as Parish priests), to Level 3 (a large community and/or one with significant outreach to vulnerable populations and/or a disproportionately high number of open safeguarding cases). The Missionary Society of St Columban is categorised as a Level 2 community due to the number of members and ministries, and they completed a corresponding self-assessment.

1.8 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

⁴ Columban Lay Missionaries are lay people who volunteer for overseas mission with the Society for specific periods

⁵ Father Hudson's Caritas, within the Archdiocese of Birmingham is a network of charities, parishes and services that provide charitable work in the name of the Church throughout the Archdiocese [Father Hudson's Caritas – Social Care Agency](#)

professional judgement to ensure that Religious Life Groups are graded against the national standards in such a way that reflects their uniqueness.

2. Methodology

2.1 The CSSA met with the Director, the Safeguarding Lead and the Deputy Safeguarding Lead on 12 December 2025. It was agreed that audit of the Columbans would take place on 11 February 2026 with the self-assessment and supporting evidence to be submitted by 16 January 2026. The self-assessment was returned with supporting evidence on 15 January 2026. Additional evidence was viewed during the audit visit.

2.2 The Quality Assurance Analyst visited the Columbans as planned on the 11 February 2026. As part of the visit, audit interviews were undertaken with the following:

- The Director
- The Lay Safeguarding Officer
- The Deputy Safeguarding Officer
- The Trustees
- A focus group of community members
- A focus group of lay staff
- Two outreach project leads and a lay missionary

2.3 The Columbans operate within the Archdiocese of Birmingham and are members of the Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS)⁶. Information shared by both of these organisations showed that the Columbans have regular and appropriate contact with them and are proactive in seeking advice and support when required. There were no concerns raised by either organisation as to the Columbans' commitment to positive safeguarding practice.

⁶ The RLSS is a team of independent safeguarding professionals offering safeguarding services to the Religious of the Catholic Church in England and Wales [Religious Life Safeguarding Service – Religious Safeguarding](#)

3. Audit grading

3.1 Practice was assessed against the eight national safeguarding standards adopted by the Catholic Church in England and Wales⁷ and graded in accordance with the CSSA Maturity Matrix for Level 2 Religious Life Groups⁸.

3.2 Potential audit ratings against each standard, and the final overall rating, are: Below Basic, Basic, Early Progress, Firm Progress, Results Being Achieved, Comprehensive Assurance and Exemplary.

Overall grading	Comprehensive Assurance
Standard 1 – Safeguarding is embedded in the Church body’s leadership, governance, ministry and culture	Comprehensive Assurance
Standard 2 – Communicating the Church’s safeguarding message	Exemplary
Standard 3 – Engaging with and caring for those who report having been harmed	Comprehensive Assurance
Standard 4 – Effective management of allegations and concerns	Exemplary
Standard 5 – Management and support of subjects of allegations and concerns (respondents)	Exemplary
Standard 6 – Robust human resource management	Comprehensive Assurance

⁷ The eight standards lay out what CSSA expects in terms of level of safeguarding practice in church bodies (that is, dioceses and religious life groups) A description and full details of the Standards can be found on the CSSA website [here](#)

⁸ [APPENDIX-5-LEVEL-2-MATURITY-MATRIX-FINAL.docx](#)

Standard 7 – Training and support for safeguarding	Comprehensive Assurance
Standard 8 – Quality assurance and continuous improvement	Comprehensive Assurance

4. Audit findings against each standard

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

Strengths

4.1.1 The Missionary Society of St Columban has an established commitment to safeguarding and has had safeguarding policies and procedures in place and regularly updated since the 1980s. The leadership of the Columbans both internationally and in England continues to ensure that these policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and adapted to meet new developments in safeguarding practice. The Columbans have employed a lay safeguarding officer to support them with this work, and this provides them with expertise in safeguarding to draw on as they continue to ensure that safeguarding remains a high priority for all. The Columbans have, since 2018, also had a “Code of Ethical Responsibility” that provides guidelines and sets expectations for the priests on behaviour and conduct that supports the principles set out in the safeguarding policies and procedures. This too is periodically updated to reflect current practice. Safeguarding is an integral part of all meetings, and all priests, staff and volunteers receive training and support to fulfil their roles and responsibilities in this area.

4.1.2 In 2023, the Columbans published the Policy and Guidelines of the Missionary Society of Saint Columban on the Abuse of Minors and Vulnerable Adults and directed each local Region to prepare its own Safeguarding Policy as an appendix

to the society-wide document. To comply with this directive, the Safeguarding Policy – Region of Britain was written and approved by the Trustees in December 2023. This policy was widely shared with the priests and is also included in the Columbans employee handbook for staff and volunteers. The review of this policy is three-yearly. The policy document clearly sets out the roles and responsibilities for all in terms of safeguarding and includes practical guidance as well as formal reporting procedures and expectations. The policy document was widely known by the priests, staff and volunteers spoken to and is readily available on the Columbans' website and in hard copy format in the buildings visited.

4.1.3 The Columban leadership has made a public commitment to safeguarding through a safeguarding statement on the website. The employment of a lay safeguarding officer to work with the Columbans' own safeguarding officer (who is a member) took place in 2023. The lay officer now takes the lead on safeguarding for the Columbans, with the Columban safeguarding officer acting as her deputy. On their appointment, the lay safeguarding officer was asked to provide a safeguarding review for the Trustees to identify areas of strength and areas for development. Following this report Integrity in Ministry⁹ was re-circulated to the priests and safeguarding communications were updated to align with the new safeguarding policy. This internal review also enabled the Trustees to review, identify and mitigate safeguarding risks and to plan for training and development with the support of the lay safeguarding officer and the RLSS. Consideration has also been given as to how the Columbans promote and ensure a safe environment in terms of their contacts with the public for example through the joint working with project leads when they visit schools to promote the mission. Evidence showed that progress had been made following this internal review in all these areas over the past two years.

4.1.4 The Columban Region of Britain has two governing bodies. Policy decisions are made by the Regional Director and Council. The Regional Director is elected every three years by members of the community who also elect Council members from

⁹ Integrity in Ministry is a code of conduct for Religious engaged in ministry in the Catholic Church in England and Wales [Integrity in Ministry – Religious Life Safeguarding Service](#)

the community of priests to support him in his role. Legal representation of the region in civil society rests with the Board of Trustees of whom the Regional Director is always Chair. There is significant overlap, with the Trustees also being Council members, although at least one Trustee is not a Council member to ensure an additional measure of objectivity, challenge and oversight. There are four Trustees at present and five Council members. The Board of Trustees also constitutes the Safeguarding Board of the Region, and the responsible person is the Regional Director / Chair of Trustees. The Council meet monthly and safeguarding is a standing agenda item with the lay safeguarding officer invited to report on issues and progress on safeguarding actions as evidenced by meeting minutes. The Board of Trustees meet only to ratify decisions made by the Council or, if there is a need, for extraordinary meetings. Likewise, the Safeguarding Board do not meet separately unless there is a specific concern that needs to be addressed. Terms of reference and roles and responsibilities are clearly set out for the Council, the Board of Trustees and the Safeguarding Board in the policy and procedural documents seen.

Areas for development

4.1.5 The Columbans have provided evidence that they have made progress following their internal review in 2023, but do not have a formal safeguarding implementation plan that would support ease of oversight for the Trustees and allow for evaluation of the effectiveness of the actions taken. The development of a safeguarding implementation plan with SMART¹⁰ objectives and an associated action tracker would provide assurance for the Trustees and support prioritisation of the work of the lay safeguarding officer and her deputy.

Graded: Comprehensive Assurance

¹⁰ SMART objectives are a structured framework for setting goals that are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant, and **T**ime-bound. This methodology transforms vague intentions into clear, actionable plans, ensuring objectives are attainable, trackable, and aligned with broader strategic goals.

4.2 Standard 2 Communicating the Church's safeguarding message

Strengths

4.2.1 The core safeguarding document of the Missionary Society of St Columban, the Policy and Guidelines of the Missionary Society of Saint Columban on the Abuse of Minors and Vulnerable Adults, clearly sets out the expectations and provides guidance for ensuring that safeguarding messages are shared with the priests, staff and volunteers, and the general public. The document cites the need to make a clear statement on safeguarding intent, to reach out to survivors and to make contact details for safeguarding officers easily accessible and visible in all buildings and places where Columbans work as missionaries. The local policy reflects this guidance and although there is not a separate communications plan, the principles of good communication are set out, and evidence shows, adhered to by the Columbans in Britain.

4.2.2 Throughout the buildings and across the site in Solihull, posters with the contact details of the lay safeguarding officer and the deputy safeguarding officer were visible in addition to other posters that provided general safeguarding information including the details of Safe Spaces¹¹. The Columbans' website provides information on how to contact the lay safeguarding officer and the deputy safeguarding officer as well as the contact details and roles of Safe Spaces and the RLSS in raising a safeguarding concern or seeking help. Safeguarding messages are under constant review by the safeguarding officer and her deputy, and feedback was seen to have been sought from priests, staff, volunteers and others on the messaging and its effectiveness. This feedback was shown to have informed the decision on how many different posters should be made available, increasing the number from four to five.

¹¹ Safe Spaces England and Wales are a free and independent support service providing a confidential, personal and safe space for anyone who has been abused [Home – Safe Spaces England and Wales](#)

Areas for development

4.2.3 The safeguarding information is currently available in the English language only on the website. The Columbans should consider whether, given their reach into communities and with individuals where English may not be a first language, there is a need to make safeguarding information available in other languages and if a need is there, to develop this material.

Graded: Exemplary

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

Strengths

4.3.1 The Columbans' policy and procedure documents are clear in their expectations of priests, staff and volunteers who might engage with a person reporting harm. The leadership of the Columbans would proactively seek advice from their experienced lay safeguarding officer and RLSS on how to support those who report being harmed so that they are prepared in the event that an allegation is received. The Board of Trustees would oversee the management of any such allegations and would take responsibility for ensuring that anyone reporting harm received the help and support they needed. None of the priests or staff have had to respond to allegations of abuse in the past 12 months but were clear on the expectations and processes to follow should this occur. Some of the priests and volunteers spoken to had experience of dealing with people who reported non-church related harm and spoke of the need to reach out with compassion and with a willingness to listen and provide opportunities for support for them. There was a recognition of the impact on anyone of receiving disclosures of abuse of any sort and the need for peer support and supervision for those who may be exposed through their work to this. The outreach workers and lay missionary all had access to support and supervision to help them if required with the impact of receiving

disclosures of harm and abuse as these individuals are more exposed to this in their work.

4.3.2 The Columban priests and staff in England have limited contact with the public and recognise that responding to those reporting harm is an area in which they have little experience. To address this, they have engaged with the RLSS attending training and conferences where they can network and learn from the experiences of others. The lay missionaries who work with some of the most vulnerable in society share their experiences of those reporting non-church abuse and together with this and the experience of the lay safeguarding officer, learning can be identified and shared where possible. The deputy safeguarding officer also attends regular meetings with peers from other Religious Life Groups who share their experiences and learning on safeguarding amongst other topics.

Areas for development

4.3.3 The Columbans should consider how they might support priests who through their roles engage with survivors or those reporting harm through a de-briefing or supervision process and have a plan in place that can be initiated in these instances.

Graded: Comprehensive assurance

4.4 Standard 4 Effective management of allegations and concerns

Strengths

4.4.1 The safeguarding policy and procedure documents provide guidance, expectations and information for priests, staff and volunteers on what to do in the event of receiving a disclosure of harm or witnessing a safeguarding concern. The policy includes the requirement for information gathering and recording concerns which are to be completed and shared with the lay safeguarding officer or her

deputy at the earliest opportunity. All priests, staff and volunteers are expected to report concerns of any type with the emphasis on early intervention and response should there be a low-level concern that might escalate into a more significant issue. All have received training on how to respond to and report safeguarding concerns and when spoken to were able to articulate this, explaining to the person the need to report their disclosure in line with the 'One Church' approach to safeguarding adopted by the Catholic Church in England and Wales.¹²

4.4.2 The Columbans have not had any experience of dealing with a safeguarding concern over the 12-month pre-audit period, however the leadership were aware of their responsibilities should this occur. Initial concerns once raised would be shared with the safeguarding officer and deputy as well as the Regional Director. The RLSS would be contacted as soon as practicably possible to seek advice and support and to further any investigation that was deemed necessary. Copies of all documentation created would be shared with RLSS to enable them to complete their investigation, and the original copies would be stored either securely in locked cabinets in the office as hard copy or in a password protected database if electronic in line with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)¹³ requirements. The Board of Trustees are informed of any safeguarding concerns and would oversee the outcomes of any investigation undertaken. Serious safeguarding incidents, those requiring statutory reporting, would be reported to the international leadership team in Hong Kong as per international policy. The Regional Director and Trustees were aware of their reporting responsibilities to the Charity Commission, CSSA and insurers in the event of a serious safeguarding concern.

4.4.3 The Columban priests, staff and volunteers have all received training in identifying and reporting safeguarding concerns and were confident that they would be able to do so with the support and advice of the safeguarding officer and

¹² The One Church Approach was adopted by the Catholic Church in England and Wales that provides a consistent approach to safeguarding across the Church following the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (2022). [K.3: Embedding a culture of safeguarding and the 'One Church' approach | IICSA Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#)

¹³ The General Data Protection Regulations are the UK's data privacy laws that have been in effect since May 2018 [Data protection: The UK's data protection legislation - GOV.UK](#)

her deputy. The safeguarding officer and her deputy make themselves available both formally and informally to speak with people so that they can share any concerns they have. All of those spoken to value these opportunities and the availability of the expertise at RLSS should this be required. Priests, staff and volunteers were all aware of the need to report to the statutory authorities and to call the police in instances where there was an immediate risk of harm. There was an awareness of the need to avoid asking questions and seeking information that might compromise a formal investigation by the police or statutory authorities. Those working in dioceses were aware of the diocesan safeguarding policies and knew to contact the parish safeguarding representatives¹⁴ and diocesan safeguarding co-ordinators¹⁵ if they witnessed or received a disclosure of harm. The Columban staff and lay missionaries working at Fatima House were aware of the need to follow the local safeguarding policies for Father Hudson's Caritas and had been trained in these by that organisation. All of those working on behalf of the Columbans were aware of the need to share any incidences that arose in these settings with the safeguarding officer, her deputy and the Regional Director. The safeguarding officer and deputy have a feedback loop mechanism in place to ensure that any learning from incidences at all levels is shared at training sessions and safeguarding seminar sessions held with the priests, staff and volunteers.

Areas for development

4.4.4 No areas for development were identified at audit

Graded: Exemplary

¹⁴ A Parish Safeguarding Representative is a volunteer who supports their Parish in Safeguarding matters such as Safer Recruitment of volunteers and liaison with Diocesan safeguarding teams.

¹⁵ A Diocesan Safeguarding Coordinator (or Officer) is a professional appointed by the bishop to lead the safeguarding team, ensuring compliance with national standards, managing allegations, and supporting victims/survivors.

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

Strengths

4.5.1 The Columbans international safeguarding policy outlines the management of persons against whom a safeguarding allegation has been made. The policy details the actions to be taken and by whom in the course of a preliminary investigation¹⁶ in terms of reporting to both civil and canonical bodies. The policy states at what stage a subject should be informed of the allegation made and respects the requirements of informing civil authorities in the first instance and abiding by local laws that specify how much information can be shared with the respondent and at what point in the process. The respondent is also advised of the processes that will follow an allegation in terms of their contact with civil and canonical authorities during the investigative period. In addition, there is specific guidance for the respondent on what actions they should take in obtaining advice from canon and civil lawyers, funding for which is provided by the Columbans. All allegations received by the Columbans whether they be regarding priests, staff or volunteers are reported to and overseen by the Board of Trustees.

4.5.2 The international policy and guidelines are clear on the actions that must be taken by the Regional Director in the instance of a safeguarding allegation being made. Respondents will initially be removed from any public ministry and appropriate restrictions will be put in place to ensure the safety of others as well as themselves during an investigation. The priest will be advised that they will not have access to vulnerable adults and minors and will be required to reside in a specific Columban house, reporting to a named individual on an agreed basis. They will be offered the chance to seek medical and/or psychological assessment and advice if they choose and this will be facilitated and overseen by the Regional Director. The

¹⁶ In Canon Law, a preliminary investigation (*inquisitio praevia*), governed by Canons 1717–1719 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law (CIC), is an initial, administrative procedure conducted by an Ordinary (usually a Bishop or Religious Superior) upon receiving a *notitia criminis* (information regarding a potential offence or "delict").

Columbans count amongst their numbers specially trained individuals who have supported priests from other orders through this process on whose experience they can draw if required. They also have access to the expertise of RLSS in terms of providing assistance to respondents as needed. All personal needs for the respondent would be managed and financed by the Missionary Society of St Columban.

4.5.3 The requirement to report to Canonical authorities can also be seen in the international policy. The responsible person for reporting to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith¹⁷ is the Regional Director. The Columbans have access to canon lawyers from whom they can seek advice through the Archdiocese of Birmingham. The priests spoken to were all aware of the processes that would be followed in the event of an allegation being made against them and reported feeling confident that they would be listened to and supported throughout the process, including being asked for feedback on their experiences.

4.5.4 Allegations made against a staff member of a lay missionary would be managed in line with the safeguarding policy and the policies and procedures outlined in the employee handbook. The Columbans employ a Human Resources (HR) advisor who would support this process, working closely with the Regional Director and safeguarding officer. The staff and volunteers spoken to were aware of the employee handbook and the procedures that would be followed should an allegation be made against them. All of those spoken to were confident that any allegation would be managed fairly and in line with policy. Once again, a feedback loop is in place to ensure any learning from their experiences is captured and shared.

Areas for development

4.5.5 No areas for development were identified at audit.

Graded: Exemplary

¹⁷ The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF) is a department of the Roman Curia in charge of the religious discipline of the Catholic Church.

4.6 Standard 6 Robust human resource management

Strengths

4.6.1 The Columbans have developed a robust suite of policies for the safer recruitment and ongoing human resource management of priests, staff and volunteers. These policies include guidelines for the management of priests coming from overseas as well as the processes that must be followed to ensure that those who reside in England maintain safer recruitment standards in terms of Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)¹⁸ checks. Priests arriving or returning from overseas missions must provide a 'Testimonial of Suitability for Ministry' to the Regional Director from their previous setting. Once they have arrived further checks are completed including a DBS check and they meet with the safeguarding officer for training and further advice on safeguarding in England and Wales before they are involved in any public ministry or missionary work. All public facing staff and volunteers employed by the Columbans are subject to DBS checks dependent on their roles and responsibilities and these are recorded and monitored by the HR advisor for currency. At audit, all staff and volunteers had current DBS checks in place. All priests apart from two who had recently returned from overseas held current DBS checks and the two returnees' DBS certificates were pending. Whilst they were awaiting their DBS certificates, they were not involved in any work with the public. DBS blemishes or concerns are managed by the safeguarding officer and are shared with the Regional Director who will seek further advice from RLSS on how to proceed if required. The Columbans do not have a religious vocation programme in England and Wales. Ongoing formation is overseen by the Regional Director with all priests having annual meetings with him.

4.6.2 Staff and volunteer recruitment is managed in line with the policies and procedures set out in the employee handbook. There is an expectation that all staff have an induction where they have the opportunity to read and sign to say they

¹⁸ The Disclosure and Barring Service processes and issues criminal record checks on individuals applying for employment or a voluntary role for employers.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service>

understand the policies set out in the handbook and are provided with a schedule of mandatory training that includes safeguarding. All new members of staff and volunteers meet with the safeguarding officer to discuss safeguarding in the context of the role they are undertaking. Volunteers are interviewed by the outreach project leads and are also subject to the requirements set out in the employees' handbook. Ongoing review and monitoring of staff and volunteers is undertaken by team leaders and outreach project leads. Any issues are discussed with the Regional Director as required.

4.6.3 The Columbans have both a complaints policy and a whistleblowing policy. These were widely known by the priests, staff and volunteers spoken to. The Columbans also have a code of conduct that is shared with all whom they work with that sets out behavioural expectations in terms of dress, language and conduct which everyone is expected to adhere to. At the time of audit, the Columbans had not received any internal complaints or had any whistleblowing incidents to manage. The complaints policy is widely available on the Columbans' website, but no complaints have been received from the wider public either. Any complaints received would be managed in line with policy and overseen by the Board of Trustees. The Regional Director and safeguarding officer would use the expertise of RLSS and CSSA if required to support them through this process for safeguarding-specific complaints.

Areas for development

4.6.4 The recruitment policies and processes, induction and ongoing management of staff is well established by the Columbans however there is not currently a process for evaluating these processes particularly with staff and volunteers. Consideration could be given to developing an internal survey for staff so that any quality improvements can be identified.

4.6.5 Staff, volunteers and priests all raised the challenge of enculturation for both priests who come back to England after significant periods of time away and for those who arrive from overseas as lay missionaries. Consideration should be given as to how to develop current practice to make the transition easier and less stressful for all those involved. This could be achieved through evaluation of the

experiences of those who have recently returned and working with RLSS and other organisations to identify educational and supportive sessions to address the issues.

Graded: Comprehensive assurance

4.7 Standard 7 Training and support for safeguarding

Strengths

4.7.1 The training provision for the Columbans is a strength, with priests, staff and volunteers all having access to safeguarding training through both internal and external provisions. The training is determined by role and responsibilities with the requirement that all have basic safeguarding training regardless of their position. In addition, those who have responsibilities in regard to working with the public and those who work closely with minors and vulnerable adults all complete more advanced safeguarding training as well as training in specific areas to their role. Courses completed include domestic abuse, spiritual abuse and mental health first aid. The staff and volunteers who work with Father Hudson's Caritas and the priests who cover duties for the Archdiocese of Birmingham all attend the training that is required by these two organisations in addition to the training provided by the Columbans.

4.7.2 There is an expectation that formal safeguarding training is completed every three years by priests, staff and volunteers. In addition to this, all attend annual seminars on safeguarding that are run by the lay safeguarding officer and her deputy. These sessions provide updates on safeguarding practice and provide an opportunity for the use of scenarios so that attendees can discuss and practice their responses to different safeguarding situations. All training is recorded and these records are held by the Regional Director and overseen by the Board of Trustees. The most recent training covered spiritual abuse and was very well received by the priests, staff and volunteers who spoke about the positive impact of this at audit. All training sessions are evaluated with feedback forms and feedback is used to formulate future training provision. Those who attend external

training with other organisations through their work with the archdiocese and with Father Hudson's Caritas share their experiences at the seminars so that their own training can benefit others. In addition, the safeguarding officer who attends conferences and additional training for the Columbans shares learning from these and uses her experience to plan training sessions so that they address recent developments. Formal safeguarding training is provided by RLSS and is completed through online as well as face to face sessions and who confirmed engagement and attendance by priests, staff and volunteers.

Areas for development

4.7.3 The Columbans have identified their training needs and have acted upon these. There is at present not a formal training needs analysis document in place and this should be considered by the order.

Graded: Comprehensive assurance

4.8 Standard 8 Quality assurance and continuous improvement

Strengths

4.8.1 The Columbans are members of both RLSS and CSSA and have availed themselves of their advice, training and resources to support the review of their safeguarding practice. The safeguarding policies are determined by the international leadership who review and revise safeguarding policy every three years. The international leadership have set a minimum standard for safeguarding policies and practice which all local country policies must meet. All local safeguarding policies are scrutinised and have to be signed off by the international leadership team on the recommendation of the international safeguarding committee. The Board of Trustees of the Columbans provides scrutiny and oversight of safeguarding practice. The safeguarding officer provides regular updates for the Trustees but does not yet deliver an annual report on safeguarding that brings together the actions and updates for the year together with a summary

of the data such as training statistics and DBS checks. Evidence from meeting minutes showed that safeguarding practice is discussed at every Board of Trustees and Regional Council meeting.

4.8.2 The Columbans have welcomed this audit of their safeguarding practice against the eight national safeguarding standards as their practice has previously been driven by their international leadership and the experience they have gained in safeguarding as an order over the past 40 years. They consider themselves to be a reflective, learning organisation and have engaged with the CSSA fully during the audit process. They have demonstrated insight into their own practice and have plans in place to share the findings of this audit both regionally and internationally.

Areas for development

4.8.3 The Columbans should develop an annual safeguarding report that will provide a summary of progress in all safeguarding activity against a safeguarding implementation plan. They could consider the development of some Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)¹⁹ for training compliance and DBS compliance as well as looking at the outcomes of evaluating their communications and people's experiences of safeguarding in the order.

4.8.4 Currently, although minutes are taken at formal meetings, some decisions are made more informally and not recorded. There is a potential therefore for important information to get misplaced which should be addressed through more detailed record keeping using alternatives to formal minute taking in these circumstances.

Graded: Comprehensive assurance

¹⁹ Key Performance Indicators are a quantifiable measure used to evaluate the success of an organisation, employee etc in meeting objectives for performance. (The Oxford English Dictionary).

5. Summary of overall findings

5.1 The Missionary Society of St Columban has demonstrated that it has a robust governance structure in place that supports the oversight of safeguarding practice for the order. The safeguarding policies and procedural documents that have been developed both locally and internationally for the order are of a very high standard. The culture of safeguarding is embedded in the order and is demonstrated through their commitment to ensuring that all priests, staff and volunteers are recruited safely, trained in safeguarding and provided with the support of a lay safeguarding officer. This commitment is also shared with their statement on their website which clearly places the protection and safety of all at the heart of their missions.

5.2 The Columbans have demonstrated a high level of competence in their safeguarding practice and have self-identified areas where they can improve their practice including the recording of informal decisions and discussions. Although the evidence showed clear actions and progression in their safeguarding practice, this was not formally recorded and managed with a safeguarding implementation plan, although it has been accepted that actions drawn from a review has to date served this purpose. The development of a plan would support their strategic approach to safeguarding practice and provide more comprehensive assurance for the Board of Trustees.

6. Recommendations

To support improvement, the following recommendations are made:

Within 3 months

- Develop a safeguarding implementation plan to formalise the safeguarding actions being completed ensuring that there are SMART objectives assigned to each action and that a tracker is created to monitor progress.

- Consider mechanisms for recording the decisions and discussions on safeguarding that happen more informally such as a record of decisions template.

Within 6 months

- Gather the experiences of those who have returned to England or have come from overseas to inform improvements in the enculturation process. Consider seeking advice from RLSS on how education and support can be used to improve the experiences of those involved.
- Develop a template for an annual safeguarding report that will provide a summary of safeguarding actions over the previous 12 months together with some KPIs that will provide assurance for the Board of Trustees
- Develop a formal training needs analysis document.

Within 12 months

- Evaluate progress made against the recommendations made.

7. Arrangements for follow-up

7.1 In line with an overall rating of Comprehensive Assurance the earliest potential date of re-audit by the CSSA is in two years. If the CSSA becomes aware of a significant safeguarding concern or allegation in the intervening period, then an earlier audit will be required.