

# **A Protocol to Govern the Purpose, Composition, Operation, Responsibilities and Reporting Requirements of the Safeguarding Committee of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of the British Isles and Ireland**

## **Terms**

*“Archdiocese”* - The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of the British Isles and Ireland.

*“Metropolitan”* - The Metropolitan Archbishop of the Archdiocese, from time to time appointed by the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Antioch, or his duly and canonically authorised representative.

*“Archdiocesan Charity”* - The archdiocesan charity, registered as a charity with the Charities Commission of England and Wales, registration number 1175538.

*“Board”* - The Board of Trustees of the Archdiocesan Charity.

*“Committee”* - The Safeguarding Committee of the Archdiocesan Charity, or the members thereof.

*“Protocol”* - This document.

## **A: Purpose**

1. The business of the Committee shall be to:
  - a. Develop and implement safeguarding policies for all Archdiocesan institutions, at all levels;
  - b. Keep up to date with legal developments in relation to the safeguarding of vulnerable people;
  - c. Support parishes and other institutions of the Archdiocese to ensure that they are compliant with Archdiocesan policy;
  - d. Investigate allegations of inappropriate conduct in any Archdiocesan institution, or concerning any Archdiocesan officer or member of a parish, or any individual engaged in business in or to the benefit of any Archdiocesan institution, and to refer any such allegation to the police or other competent external authority if it becomes apparent that a breach of the law may have occurred;
  - e. Provide timely reports to relevant Archdiocesan structures, ensuring that appropriate confidentiality is maintained; and
  - f. Provide such evidence to the Board as is necessary to satisfy the Board that their fiduciary obligation is met.
  
2. The remit of the Committee is both highly sensitive and essential to the good governance of the Archdiocese and, as such, its right to operate independently is guaranteed by the Board, saving only the provisions below concerning appointment and removal of members of the Committee, and the Committee’s reporting obligations.

3. All business shall be conducted strictly according to the rules set out in the Protocol, and the Committee shall have no discretion except where explicitly stated. Any matters coming before the Committee which exceed its authority, as set forth in the Protocol, shall be promptly referred to the Board for consideration.
4. As the body with ultimate fiduciary responsibility in law for the operation of the Archdiocesan Charity, the Board shall reserve the right to receive at any time a report from the Committee on any matter in the Committee's purview, in order to be satisfied that the Board's responsibilities are being met in full.

## **B: Composition**

1. The Committee shall normally comprise four appointed members, each of whom shall be nominated and appointed by the Board, with the Metropolitan's blessing. The Board shall not make an appointment without first considering each candidate's skill and experience in relation to the responsibilities of the Committee. The minimum number of members of the Committee (excluding *ex officio* members) is two, and the total membership shall not exceed six at any time.
2. Each committee member shall serve on the Committee until the next meeting of the Board after the third anniversary of their appointment, whereupon their term of office automatically expires. If the member is willing to serve for another term, and the Board does not wish to consider alternative candidates, then the Board may (with the Metropolitan's blessing) reappoint the member and membership continues without interruption. There shall be no term limit for committee members.
3. Each member of the Committee shall normally be a member of a community within the Archdiocese, with no more than two Committee members from any one community. Any ambiguity concerning membership or eligibility will be resolved by the Metropolitan. A member who ceases to be a member of an Archdiocese community shall normally cease to be a member of the Committee but may serve until the next meeting of the Board at the request of the Chair, for example, if the size of the Committee would otherwise be too small.
4. Members of the Committee shall not be required to be also members of the Board, but membership of the Board is not ordinarily a bar to appointment, save that no more than 50% of the Committee shall concurrently serve as members of the Board. In the event of a query about the eligibility of a person for membership of the Board, the Metropolitan's decision is final (subject to all applicable English law).
5. In the absence of a functioning Committee, all responsibilities delegated to it shall revert to the Board until such time as a new Committee has been appointed.
6. *Resignation.* A committee member may resign from the Committee before the end of their term of office, by giving notice in writing to the Secretary of the Board.
7. *Dismissal.* The Board shall reserve the right to dismiss any individual member of the Committee, if given sufficient cause to believe that that member is unable to properly

discharge their duties. Such action shall not be taken without first giving the member the opportunity to make representations to the Board.

8. *Officers.* The Committee shall elect, for a period of three years, and from within its membership, and subject to the blessing of the Metropolitan:
  - a. An Archdiocesan Safeguarding Lead (ASL); and
  - b. An Archdiocesan Safeguarding Officer (ASO).

Other members of the Committee shall be termed Deputy Safeguarding Officers (DSO), and shall undertake duties as directed by the ASL or ASO. These appointments shall be recorded in the minutes, and the ASO shall notify the Secretary of the Board as soon as possible after the election.

9. *Confidence.* If the Board has a reasonable belief that the Committee is not functioning according to the Protocol, it may table a motion of no confidence, after giving the Committee a minimum of 28 days' notice that such a motion will be tabled.
  - a. The Committee may make written representations to the Board no later than 48 hours before the Board meets to consider the motion of no confidence.
  - b. In the event that the Committee does not have the confidence of the Board, the Committee shall be dissolved immediately, and the Board shall publish its justification.
  - c. A new Committee shall be constituted by the Board no more than 28 days after the dissolution of the previous Committee subject to the necessary clearance obtained from the Safeguarding Agency

## **C: Operation**

1. The Committee shall meet as often as is necessary to transact its proper business, but no less frequently than four times per year.
2. Meetings shall be held in person or by use of teleconferencing facilities (such as Zoom). All committee members shall be made aware, prior to their appointment, that meetings may take place remotely, and that such meetings may be recorded. Acceptance of appointment shall signify permission to be recorded as part of such remote meetings. The ASL, or in their absence the ASO shall ordinarily preside over meetings. No meeting shall take place if both the ASL and the ASO are absent.
3. The ASL shall keep copies of all correspondence sent to and from the Committee, howsoever received or sent, and shall keep a written record of all meetings of the Committee, and all decisions made. Due to the sensitive nature of the correspondence received by the Committee, it shall not be divulged outside of the Committee except in grave need. The ASO shall decide whether the correspondence may be disclosed, and the disclosure shall be anonymised to protect the source and any alleged victims and perpetrators. The ASL shall keep a detailed record of which correspondence has been disclosed to whom, and for what purpose.
4. Meetings of the Committee shall not be held unless a quorum of members is present. A meeting shall be quorate if at least 50% of the membership is present, and that

number includes either the ASL, or the ASO, or both. The ASL shall maintain the minutes of the meeting, which shall ordinarily remain strictly confidential, saving the provisions in paragraph 3 above.

5. Voting. If the business of the meeting requires a vote, then this shall be overseen by the ASL or ASO and shall be conducted by show of hands or a suitable electronic alternative for members who attend by a remote link.
  - a. All motions shall require a simple majority to pass.
  - b. In the event of a tie, the ASO, if present, shall have the option of a casting vote. If the ASO is not present, the discussion shall resume to determine whether a re-vote or a vote on an alternative proposal would be decisive. The Committee may decide to adjourn the matter to a later meeting.
  - c. The ASL shall record the vote of each member in the minutes. There shall be no secret voting.

#### **D: Areas of Competence**

1. Responsibility for all Safeguarding matters rests with the Board, however the Committee shall maintain competence over the following areas and shall regularly produce such evidence to the Board as is necessary to satisfy the Board that all legal obligations are met. The areas of competence, as defined by the Charity Commission, are as follows:
  - a. Prepare and regularly review policies and procedures for adoption by the Board.
  - b. Check that trustees and volunteers are suitable to act in their roles.
  - c. Identify and handle concerns in a full and open manner.
  - d. Maintain a clear system of referring and reporting to relevant agencies as soon as concerns are suspected or identified.
  - e. Identify risks and maintain a risk register.
  - f. Follow statutory guidance, good practice guidance and legislation relevant to the charity.
  - g. Respond quickly to concerns and carry out investigations in a timely manner.
2. In order to provide competent and independent advice on all matters of safeguarding, including training and investigations, the Committee shall maintain a relationship with an established provider of the same. Initially, this provider shall be *Thirtyone:eight* (<https://thirtyoneeight.org>). The Committee may consider using an alternative provider but shall not do so without explicit approval from the Board.

#### **E: Training and Compliance**

1. The Committee shall design training syllabi appropriate for those with different responsibilities within the Archdiocese, such as (but not limited to) trustees, clergy, children's workers and safeguarding officers.
2. The Committee shall determine how frequently training courses must be refreshed and shall maintain a register of responsible persons within the Archdiocese, including

the responsibilities they undertake, the parish or Archdiocesan institution to which they are attached, the date of completion of their most recent training, and the date by which their training must be refreshed.

3. The ASL shall notify responsible persons in good time that they must complete refresher training, and provide all the necessary information to enable this to be undertaken. If this training is not completed within a reasonable time, the ASL shall issue a Notice of Default to the parish or Archdiocesan institution concerned, and shall make the Metropolitan aware of the breach of Archdiocesan policy.
4. The ASL shall request an annual return from each parish and Archdiocesan institution. This return shall include all responsible persons currently in office, together with the date of the last training undertaken by each person. If this information is not supplied within a reasonable time, the ASL shall issue a Notice of Default to the parish or Archdiocesan institution concerned and shall make the Metropolitan aware of the breach of Archdiocesan policy.

## **F: Reporting**

1. The safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults has both a spiritual and a legal character. For this reason, the Committee shall be accountable both to the Board and to the Metropolitan separately.
2. Upon the request of the Secretary of the Board, and at least before each regular meeting of the Board, the Committee shall produce a written report encompassing each of its areas of competence. This report shall be submitted to the Secretary of the board no later than two weeks before the next regular meeting of the Board, unless a different timescale is requested. This report shall additionally contain summary, non-identifying information of ongoing and completed safeguarding incidents, sufficient to satisfy the Board that its safeguarding responsibilities are being correctly discharged.
3. The ASO, or in their absence, the ASL shall be invited to, and shall attend each regular meeting of the Board, to answer any questions arising from the written report, and to provide any updates to matters included therein.
4. Separately, the ASL/ASO shall provide to the Metropolitan a full report on all ongoing safeguarding concerns after each meeting of the Committee, and at other times as appropriate. This report shall be minimally redacted and summarised, to the extent necessary to comply with legal obligations.
5. At all times, the ASO shall be mindful of the obligation to report safeguarding concerns to the police, to the appropriate local authority, and to the Charity Commission, as necessary. Such external referrals shall be at the sole discretion of the Committee, and the Secretary of the Board shall be notified as soon as the referral has been made.