

# **Independent Safeguarding and Governance Review of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland**

## **A Summary of the agreed Terms of Reference**

March 2026

### **Governance, Accountability, and Oversight**

1.1 Governance is the essential link that ensures safeguarding moves from a theoretical policy to an operational reality. In Northern Ireland, safeguarding is a fundamental component of the 'Public Trust' requirement; therefore, a failure in safeguarding is legally viewed as a failure of the charity's core purpose, which can result in the loss of charitable status. Robust governance structures provide the oversight, supervisory and disciplinary functions necessary to address professional misconduct or breaches of trust that might otherwise go unchecked. Ultimately, the Charity Commission views the 'ownership' of these governance structures by trustees as the primary driver for advancing the cultural change required to rebuild public trust and ensure the safety of all beneficiaries.

1.2 To this end the Review will:

- Assess the effectiveness of governance across all component elements of the PCI, with a focus on Trustee responsibilities and regulatory compliance.
- Examine and evaluate frameworks for supervision and the efficacy of disciplinary processes in addressing safeguarding concerns or other related matters, for example, breaches of trust, or professional misconduct.
- Assess how insights from previous incidents, audits or reports are captured and embedded into continuous improvement processes.

### **Personnel Suitability and Skills**

1.3 Trustees, including Ministers and Elders, must possess the professional competence necessary to discharge their legal and fiduciary duties while upholding the integrity of the church's 'Religious Designation'. The PCI is also responsible for ensuring that safeguarding professionals hold the specific technical qualifications required to manage complex cases and offer expert, trauma-informed support to survivors.

1.4 The Review will therefore:

- Evaluate the policies and practice that ensure those in leadership and safeguarding roles possess the requisite skills and meet suitability standards.
- Evaluate the ongoing training and advice provided to Church Safeguarding Officers, Trustees and local governing bodies.

### **Policy and Operational Practice**

1.5 Effective safeguarding depends on a rigorous alignment between formal policy and its practical application. To remain effective, organisations must continuously test and evaluate how policies perform in practice.

1.6 The Review will therefore:

- Examine the adequacy of safeguarding policies and their implementation, specifically regarding leadership oversight, line of sight, case management and record-keeping.
- Assess the effectiveness of guidance provided by the PCI's central bodies to its constituent parts.