

ISSUE 1 / September 2026

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Hello

Welcome to the first edition of our Safeguarding Newsletter. We hope this new communication tool will help to keep our Designated Persons (DPs), Designated Liaison Persons (DLPs) and Adult Safeguarding Champions (ASCs), better informed and up-to-date with Safeguarding developments.

This first edition aims to introduce our recently expanded team, and to share some of the work currently taking place within the department.

My name is Geoff Marshall, and I am the temporary Safeguarding Lead at PCI. I am also an elder at Wellington Presbyterian Church, Ballymena. A few years ago, after retiring from a career in criminal justice, I came to work part-time in the Safeguarding Department in Assembly Buildings, Belfast.

I am very grateful to work alongside a team from a variety of backgrounds with a wide range of professional skills and experience, and over the past six months all the team have worked to strengthen and develop our safeguarding

services. Many of you will already have met some of us through our recent roadshows or training events.

The task at hand is challenging, so I want to thank all the designated staff, newly formed safeguarding teams and our trainers for your help and support over the past six months. All are key to the safeguarding arrangements at congregational level and we are so grateful for your work and your patience. As a team, we are committed to making a positive difference, so please pray for this work as we continue to review, reshape and deliver clear, defined lines of responsibilities in safeguarding.

Geoff Marshall

Temporary Safeguarding Lead



Safeguarding Department Staff Team

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Diane Carnell Safeguarding Officer
<i>Lead on AccessNI/Adult Safeguarding</i>• Jade Henderson Safeguarding Officer
operational lead ROI• Caitlin Neale Safeguarding Training Officer• Jonathan Duff Safeguarding Officer (PT)
lead on public protection• Colin Reid Safeguarding Officer (PT)
lead on policies and procedures | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rebecca Macfarlane Safeguarding Administrator (FT)• Ashley McKearney Safeguarding Administrator (FT)• Chloe Lavery Safeguarding Administrator (FT temp)• Wilma Steele lead on Garda Vetting (PT) |
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Meet the team...

Jade Henderson

Safeguarding Officer

My name is Jade Henderson, and I joined the team as a full-time Safeguarding Officer in April.

Previously, I worked with the department on a number of training events and felt passionately about the work the team was doing, and the plans for safeguarding going forward.

I have a background in theology and previously

worked in the PCI care service Thompson House alongside offenders, and I believe that experience will benefit my current role. Throughout my previous employment I have naturally gravitated towards roles that enable me to support others, and having dealt with statutory agencies and being aware of trauma-informed practice, I felt that the role of Safeguarding Officer was a natural progression. I have felt so welcome, and the support received from the team has been so encouraging it has made my transition into this new role smooth and enjoyable.

Through the training sessions and enquiries, I have really appreciated getting to meet and chat with Designated Persons, ministers and kirk session members from different congregations, communities and indeed different jurisdictions, all within the banner of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. It has been great to build connections and work together in partnership, and it has been so encouraging to get alongside the local churches to make safeguarding a priority.

ACCESS NI

Following The Safeguarding Team assuming responsibility for the AccessNI process from the Council for Social Witness at in early 2026 there has been a significant increase in the volume of applications.

Partially due to the introduction of the requirement for AccessNI re-vetting every three years, as well as increased congregational awareness of vetting through the Safeguarding training sessions.

The Team are currently processing a high volume of summer applications, alongside all other applications in order of their online submission date. At the same time, the team continue to receive a significant number of new submissions by post and email each day.

The AccessNI process can be daunting but the Safeguarding Team are committed to continually reviewing and improving the systems to make the task as straightforward as possible.

Ashley McKearney

Safeguarding Administrator

Wilma Steele administers our ROI vetting involving the National Vetting Bureau, and will provide an update on this in the next publication.

When querying an AccessNI application status please include the following information:

- Case reference number
- Date of online submission

Common issues on application forms.

Taking a few moments to check these before submission will help prevent delays in processing:

1. Name of the Church left blank
2. Incomplete personal details, including:
 - a. Previous surnames if applicable
 - b. **All** legal forenames
3. Address detailed online does not match what is detailed on the paperwork
4. Role and responsibilities have not been fully detailed
 - a. Applicants should list **all** roles in which they are a direct leader/helper for within their Church e.g. holiday Bible club, Girls Brigade, creche etc
5. Regulated activity (if applicable) has not been completed by ticking the relevant box and providing the requested details
6. Case Reference Number and Date of Submission not provided

Training Update

Child Safeguarding

We are pleased to share that throughout May and June, there were over 30 child safeguarding training events delivered across our denomination, – equipping leaders, helpers and volunteers with the knowledge to recognise, respond to and report harm. These sessions reinforced our shared commitment to creating safe and welcoming spaces for everyone. This would not have been successful without the help of our volunteer trainers. I would like to thank each and every person who provided training, sometimes further afield than their local church. We are deeply grateful for all our volunteer trainers, most of whom are in full-time employment but still feel called to serve the Lord in this way.

Kirk Session

We have also been able to provide 15 kirk session training events from March to June. kirk session training is delivered by either Geoff or Jonathan, with Caitlin, Jade, Colin and myself also attending for support. This training is absolutely vital as there have been some big changes with regard to safeguarding. The main takeaway from the training is that the kirk session holds ultimate responsibility for safeguarding within their own congregation, this is a big change but a good change. Our role as a Safeguarding Department is to equip and empower kirk sessions to make their own decisions when it comes to safeguarding. We still encourage kirk sessions to pick up the phone or send an email us if there is some uncertainty.

"I would like to thank each and every person who provided training"

Designated Person/Designated Liaison Person training

As well as this, our plan is to provide Designated Person/Designated Liaison Person training in November 2026. We are very aware that our DPs/DLPs are volunteers, and their role within church is vital and they need to be adequately trained. We have worked incredibly hard to get out as much training as we have and will continue working hard to develop effective training material for DPs/DLPs.

Moving forward

We had a training break over the summer and training will recommence in September. We used the holiday period to look at the current training material and developing it. I am looking

forward to working alongside Caitlin to support her in her new role as training officer. Since Caitlin started in early July, We have organised 45 training sessions for kirk session, and child safeguarding training for leaders/helpers/volunteers all before Christmas, with plans to roll out DP training in November. Our team has been effectively working together for a very short period of time – only seven months and we are aware there is much more to do but we do want to thank you all for your continued understanding, support and most importantly prayers as we navigate these changes for our denomination.

Rebecca MacFarlane

"Kirk Session have ultimate responsibility for safeguarding within their own congregation"



Caitlin Neale
Safeguarding Training Officer

A view from the new Training Officer

My name is Caitlin Neale, and I am absolutely thrilled to have recently taken on the role of Safeguarding Training Officer. Originally from Scotland, I now live in Portadown with my husband and our Cocker Spaniel called Jura.

I am incredibly excited to be joining such a knowledgeable and experienced safeguarding team. Throughout my career so far, my passion has been centred on creating, empowering, and educating others on building safe, supportive, and trauma-informed spaces for children, young people and adults within our communities.

I am genuinely excited to work alongside our amazing volunteer trainers and DPs, and I look forward to supporting, collaborating with, and learning from you all as we work together to deliver training across Ireland.

Policies and procedures

Revising and replacing the Taking Care suite of guidance documents has been a significant undertaking.

This has been an ongoing work since the end of March 2026 when PCI published guidance in Northern Ireland (NI) and the Republic of Ireland (ROI), covering both children and adults' safeguarding. The procedures have been complemented by the development of new forms and other guidance. In ROI, there are new processes to ensure compliance with the requirements of Children First by the appointment of 'relevant persons' and recognition of 'mandated reporters'. Although there are differences between NI and ROI arrangements, reflecting different legislation, there are many overlaps and the aim is to have common forms and guidance between both jurisdictions where possible.

The intention of the procedures being online is to have accessible easy-to-use material that can be updated quickly. The procedures are a living document and being developed – a number of further Children First amendments to the ROI procedures have recently been done and have been added to the procedures. We have also included references to Emergency Safeguarding Panels following agreement at the recent General Assembly.

DPs/ DLPs will be provided with an update of these changes on a twice yearly basis.

Colin Reid

In the future it is planned to provide guidance as a downloadable document

Next steps

It is recognised that the local development and customising of procedures can seem daunting for congregations. As the new procedures become more familiar the Safeguarding Team are committed to work alongside all relevant parties to evolve protective arrangements.

Congregations are all different in terms of mission, size, demographics and geographical location but there are a number of things to prioritise in the immediate term.

Moving ahead, it is envisioned congregations will want to develop and customise further guidance as necessary and for specific circumstances. The Safeguarding Team will aim to provide helpful templates where this will be of assistance and welcome any feedback in this regard.

"So, what do I need to do?"

- Kirk session (KS) should appoint someone to lead on adult safeguarding – this could be an existing DP/DLP or a separate appointment in a large congregation. This will start to profile adult safeguarding and more information about this role will be available in due course.
- In ROI, the kirk session should formally appoint a 'relevant person' and document its 'mandatory reporters', as there is a requirement to report these to Presbytery and forms are on the website to do this.
- All kirk session should complete and sign off their safeguarding risk assessment. The intention is to capture the primary safeguarding risks/mitigations – there is a safeguarding risk assessment template available on the PCI website here. In ROI this is a legal requirement under Children First and kirk sessions will need to work with the relevant person in the development of a Child Safeguarding Statement.
- Develop a local safeguarding policy for public display. There is a template for this which links the PCI policy and procedures into an easy-to-develop document that can be customised for local circumstances. It will be likely be three-four pages in length, focusing on 'who do I go to?' and local reporting arrangements to authorities. This can be developed for websites and notice boards and will help with compliance with Charity Regulators.
- Customise the Code of Conduct for the congregation (template on the website). It is planned to have a young persons' example available too.
- Adapt and use the procedures as appropriate, for example the section on mobile phone use and photographs will be useful in the planning for holiday bible clubs
- Think about the promotion of safeguarding through websites and Safeguarding Sundays.
- Finally, there is a helpful audit tool on the website to help kirk session chart progress and it is recommended this is part of a kirk session meeting in the Autumn.

Contact details

General safeguarding contacts

Email: safeguarding@presbyterianireland.org

Tel: +44 (0)28 9041 7234

Vetting queries

Email: vetting@presbyterianireland.org

Safeguarding Training Requests

Email: safeguarding.training@presbyterianireland.org

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presbyterianireland.org/safeguarding