Knockbracken Congregational Church

Draft

Adult Safeguarding Policy & Procedures

August 2026

Introduction

Knockbracken Congregational Church is committed to promoting the safety, dignity, wellbeing and human rights of every adult who participates in or comes into contact with the life and ministry of our fellowship.

Knockbracken Congregational Church recognises that adults may experience abuse, exploitation or neglect in a variety of settings, including their own homes, family relationships, care settings, community settings, online environments and within church activities.

Knockbracken Congregational Church is committed to:

- promoting a culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility;
- preventing abuse, exploitation and neglect wherever possible;
- recognising concerns at the earliest opportunity;
- responding promptly, sensitively and appropriately to safeguarding concerns;
- supporting adults to make their own choices wherever possible;
- respecting an adult's dignity, privacy, rights, wishes and independence;
- taking appropriate action where an adult is at risk of harm;
- working in partnership with Health and Social Care Trusts, PSNI and other relevant agencies;
- ensuring that all allegations or concerns are taken seriously and acted upon, regardless of who is involved;
- ensuring that those who raise safeguarding concerns are listened to and supported; and
- maintaining appropriate records of safeguarding concerns, decisions and actions.

This policy should be read alongside Knockbracken Congregational Church's Child Protection Policy and Procedures. Northern Ireland safeguarding framework

This policy is intended to operate within the Northern Ireland adult safeguarding framework.

The principal regional documents are:

1. **Adult Safeguarding: Prevention and Protection in Partnership** – Department of Health/Department of Justice, 2015.
2. **Adult Safeguarding Operational Procedures: Adults at Risk of Harm and Adults in Need of Protection** – Northern Ireland Adult Safeguarding Partnership, 2016.
3. Relevant safeguarding and safer recruitment guidance issued by Volunteer Now.
4. Relevant requirements and guidance issued by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.
5. Relevant Northern Ireland legislation and guidance concerning safeguarding, employment, equality, data protection, criminal offences and access to justice.

The regional policy specifically applies to organisations in the faith sector as well as statutory, voluntary, community and independent organisations.

Knockbracken Congregational Church recognises that adult safeguarding does not operate through one single piece of legislation in Northern Ireland. Decisions concerning statutory intervention may involve the relevant Health and Social Care Trust, PSNI and other statutory agencies.

Adult Safeguarding Policy statement

Knockbracken Congregational Church has **zero tolerance of abuse, exploitation and neglect of adults**.

Every adult has the right to:

- live free from abuse, exploitation and neglect;
- be treated with dignity and respect;
- make their own decisions wherever they have capacity to do so;
- have their views, wishes and feelings heard;
- be protected from discrimination;
- have their privacy respected;
- receive appropriate support to help them remain safe; and
- have access to justice where a crime has occurred.

Knockbracken Congregational Church will seek to create a safe environment for worship, pastoral care, fellowship, outreach and other church activities.

Safeguarding is not solely the responsibility of the Minister, Elder, Deacons, Safeguarding Coordinator or Adult Safeguarding Champion. **Everyone involved in Knockbracken Congregational Church has a part to play in creating a safe church.**

What is adult safeguarding?

Adult safeguarding means taking action to promote the safety and wellbeing of adults and to prevent or respond to abuse, exploitation or neglect.

Safeguarding includes:

- prevention;
- awareness and education;
- creating safer church environments;
- recognising signs of harm;
- responding to concerns;
- assessing and managing risk;
- supporting adults to make informed choices;
- referring concerns to appropriate statutory agencies;
- cooperating with investigations; and
- learning from incidents and concerns.

Safeguarding is therefore more than responding to serious incidents. Knockbracken Congregational Church will seek to identify and reduce risks before harm occurs.

Adults at risk of harm

An adult may be at increased risk of harm because of circumstances affecting them at a particular time.

Factors may include, for example:

- age or frailty;
- disability;
- illness;
- mental health difficulties;
- cognitive impairment;
- communication difficulties;
- dependency on others for care or support;
- social isolation;
- homelessness;
- financial difficulties;
- domestic abuse;
- coercive or controlling relationships;
- substance misuse;
- exploitation;
- dependence upon a person who may pose a risk;
- bereavement or significant life changes; or
- other circumstances which may increase exposure to abuse, exploitation or neglect.

The presence of any of these factors does **not** mean that an adult lacks capacity or autonomy.

Knockbracken Congregational Church will avoid making assumptions about an individual's ability to make decisions.

Adults in need of protection

An adult may require protection where there is concern that they are being harmed, or are at risk of significant harm, through abuse, exploitation or neglect.

Where the circumstances indicate that statutory intervention may be necessary, Knockbracken Congregational Church will refer the concern to the appropriate Health and Social Care Trust and/or PSNI rather than attempting to investigate the matter itself.

The regional operational procedures identify the HSC Trusts and PSNI as having the principal responsibility for statutory protection and investigation, while emphasising that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

Types of abuse and harm

Safeguarding concerns may involve one or more forms of abuse.

These may include:

Physical abuse

Examples include:

- hitting;
- pushing;

- kicking;
- inappropriate restraint;
- misuse of medication;
- inappropriate physical punishment; or
- other acts causing physical injury or pain.

Sexual abuse

Examples include:

- sexual assault;
- unwanted sexual touching;
- sexual activity without valid consent;
- sexual exploitation;
- inappropriate sexualised behaviour;
- being forced to view sexual material; or
- taking or sharing sexual images without consent.

Psychological or emotional abuse

Examples include:

- threats;
- intimidation;
- humiliation;
- bullying;
- harassment;
- controlling behaviour;
- isolation;
- threats of abandonment;
- verbal abuse; or
- manipulation.

Financial or material abuse

Examples include:

- theft;
- fraud;
- coercion concerning money;
- misuse of bank accounts;
- pressure to make financial gifts;
- misuse of benefits or pensions;
- inappropriate control of possessions; or
- exploitation of an individual's generosity.

Particular care should be taken within church contexts where individuals may make donations, gifts or payments to church workers.

Neglect

Examples include:

- failure to provide necessary care;
- failure to protect an individual from foreseeable harm;
- withholding necessary assistance;
- inadequate attention to basic needs; or
- deliberate failure to respond to an individual's needs.

Discriminatory abuse

This may include abuse or harassment related to characteristics such as disability, age, sex, race, religion, sexual orientation or other protected characteristics.

Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse may include physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, financial or coercive and controlling behaviour.

Organisational abuse

This may arise where poor systems, practices or cultures result in harm, neglect or loss of dignity.

Exploitation

Exploitation may include financial, sexual, criminal or other forms of exploitation.

Spiritual abuse

Knockbracken Congregational Church recognises that religious authority or spiritual influence can potentially be misused to control, manipulate, frighten or exploit an adult.

Examples may include:

- using religious authority to control someone's choices;
- claiming that questioning a leader demonstrates disloyalty to God;
- using prayer, scripture or teaching to justify abuse;
- coercing someone into giving money or possessions;
- manipulating someone through threats concerning their faith;
- isolating an individual from family, friends or other sources of support; or
- inappropriate dependence between a pastoral worker and an adult receiving pastoral care.

Spiritual or pastoral authority must never be used to exploit or control another person.

Principles underpinning this policy

All safeguarding activity within Knockbracken Congregational Church will be guided by the following principles.

- Empowerment - Adults should be supported to make their own decisions and choices wherever possible.
- Prevention - Knockbracken Congregational Church will take reasonable steps to prevent abuse, exploitation and neglect before harm occurs.
- Proportionality - Any safeguarding response should be proportionate to the level and nature of risk.
- Protection - Where an adult is at risk of serious harm, appropriate action will be taken to protect them.
- Partnership - Knockbracken Congregational Church will work with the adult, their chosen supporters and appropriate statutory and voluntary agencies.
- Accountability - Knockbracken Congregational Church will be open about its safeguarding responsibilities and will maintain appropriate records of decisions and actions.

These principles reflect the Northern Ireland adult safeguarding framework, which emphasises a rights-based and person-centred approach while recognising that protective intervention may sometimes be necessary.

Consent, capacity and confidentiality

Knockbracken Congregational Church will normally seek the consent of an adult before sharing information about a safeguarding concern.

However, consent is not an absolute requirement in every safeguarding situation.

Information may need to be shared without the person's consent where, for example:

- there is a serious risk of harm;
- a crime may have been committed;
- another person may be at risk;
- the adult lacks capacity to make the relevant decision;
- sharing information is necessary to protect a child or another adult;
- a statutory agency requires information; or
- another lawful basis for sharing information applies.

Knockbracken Congregational Church will not promise an adult absolute confidentiality where a safeguarding concern has been disclosed.

A person who discloses abuse should be told, in clear and compassionate language, that information will be shared only with those who need to know in order to help keep people safe, subject to legal and safeguarding requirements.

The role of the Adult Safeguarding Champion

Knockbracken Congregational Church will appoint the Safeguarding Coordinator as the **Adult Safeguarding Champion (ASC)**.

The ASC will:

- provide leadership and advice on adult safeguarding;
- ensure that this policy is implemented;
- ensure that relevant staff and volunteers receive safeguarding information and training;
- advise anyone who raises a safeguarding concern;
- ensure appropriate safeguarding referrals are made;
- maintain appropriate safeguarding records;
- liaise with the relevant HSC Trust and PSNI where necessary;
- ensure that safeguarding concerns are escalated appropriately;
- monitor safeguarding practice within Knockbracken Congregational Church;
- ensure that learning from concerns and incidents is incorporated into practice;
- support safer recruitment and safeguarding checks;
- provide an annual safeguarding report to Knockbracken Congregational Church's Trustees; and
- ensure that this policy is reviewed at least annually.

The ASC must have sufficient authority, independence and access to Knockbracken Congregational Church's Trustees to discharge these responsibilities effectively.

Where possible, Knockbracken Congregational Church should also identify a deputy ASC so that safeguarding arrangements remain effective when the principal ASC is unavailable.

The Northern Ireland framework identifies the Adult Safeguarding Champion role as an important organisational safeguarding function.

Responsibilities of the Trustees/Minister/Pastor/Church leadership

Church leaders are responsible for ensuring that safeguarding is embedded within the life and culture of Knockbracken Congregational Church.

They must:

- promote a culture of openness and accountability;
- support the ASC;
- ensure safeguarding concerns are acted upon;
- ensure that no person is victimised for raising a genuine concern;
- ensure appropriate recruitment and vetting procedures;
- ensure safeguarding training is provided;
- ensure safeguarding policies are reviewed;
- ensure appropriate resources are available; and
- cooperate with statutory agencies.

No person should investigate an allegation against themselves.

In addition, Knockbracken Congregational Church's trustees have overall responsibility for ensuring that appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place.

They should:

- approve this policy;
- ensure appropriate safeguarding structures exist;
- ensure appropriate resources are available;
- monitor compliance;
- ensure safeguarding risks are included within organisational risk management;
- receive regular safeguarding reports;
- ensure appropriate insurance arrangements;
- ensure relevant legal and regulatory requirements are addressed; and
- ensure that serious safeguarding incidents are appropriately reported to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland where required.

The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland states that charity trustees should have appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures, suitable checks, clear reporting systems and arrangements for dealing with safeguarding concerns.

Responsibilities of leaders/workers

Every member of leader/worker has a responsibility to:

- treat adults with dignity and respect;
- maintain appropriate professional and pastoral boundaries;
- follow Knockbracken Congregational Church's safeguarding policy;
- attend required safeguarding training;
- recognise signs of possible abuse, exploitation or neglect;
- report safeguarding concerns promptly;
- record concerns accurately;
- avoid investigating allegations themselves;
- maintain appropriate confidentiality; and
- cooperate with safeguarding procedures.

Failure to comply with safeguarding requirements may result in appropriate management, disciplinary or volunteer-management action.

Principles of Good Practice

When visiting adults, the Minister, Elder and Deacons should:

- maintain appropriate boundaries;
- avoid unnecessary dependency;

- respect privacy and dignity;
- communicate appropriately;
- avoid favouritism;
- avoid inappropriate gifts or financial transactions;
- avoid unnecessary/inappropriate physical contact;
- avoid unnecessary one-to-one situations where safer alternatives are available;
- follow agreed arrangements for pastoral visits;
- take appropriate precautions when transporting adults;
- respect an individual's home and personal space;
- avoid becoming unnecessarily involved in an individual's personal finances;
- avoid borrowing or lending money to adults receiving pastoral care;
- obtain consent before taking or sharing photographs or recordings; and
- report concerns about their own conduct as well as concerns about others.

Recognising a safeguarding concern

A concern may arise because:

- an adult tells you that they are being abused;
- you witness something concerning;
- someone else reports a concern;
- you notice unexplained injuries;
- there are changes in behaviour;
- there are concerns about a person's finances;
- an adult appears frightened of someone;
- there are concerns about neglect;
- there are repeated low-level concerns;
- a volunteer or staff member behaves inappropriately; or
- information is received from another organisation.

A concern does not need to be proven before it is reported.

Do not investigate the allegation yourself.

If an adult discloses abuse

If an adult tells you that they are being harmed:

DO

- remain calm;
- listen carefully;
- take the person seriously;
- allow them to speak in their own words;
- acknowledge what they have said;

- reassure them that they have done the right thing by telling you;
- explain what you will need to do next;
- make a factual written record as soon as possible; and
- report the concern to the ASC or appropriate statutory agency.

DO NOT

- promise secrecy;
- ask leading or investigative questions;
- confront the alleged perpetrator;
- investigate the allegation yourself;
- express disbelief;
- blame the person;
- make assumptions;
- attempt to mediate between the adult and alleged perpetrator; or
- delay reporting because you are unsure whether the concern is sufficiently serious.

Immediate danger or emergency

If an adult is in immediate danger or requires urgent medical assistance, the priority is to secure their immediate safety.

Where necessary:

- contact the emergency services;
- seek urgent medical attention;
- contact PSNI where a crime may have occurred or there is immediate danger; and
- notify Knockbracken Congregational Church's ASC as soon as it is safe and practicable to do so.

Knockbracken Congregational Church must not delay emergency action while waiting for the ASC to become available.

Reporting a safeguarding concern

Knockbracken Congregational Church will maintain a clear reporting pathway:

Concern identified → immediate safety considered → ASC informed → statutory referral considered/made → concern recorded → ongoing support and risk management → review and learning

The person who receives the concern should report it promptly to:

Adult Safeguarding Champion:
Name: Sharon McWhirter

Deputy ASC:
Name: Lyn Mewha

Where the concern indicates that an adult may be at risk of harm or in need of protection, Knockbracken Congregational Church will contact the relevant **HSC Trust Adult Protection Gateway Service** and/or PSNI as appropriate.

Knockbracken Congregational Church will maintain an up-to-date list of local statutory safeguarding contacts in an appendix to this policy.

The regional operational procedures provide the framework for referral and response by HSC Trusts and PSNI.

Allegations against leaders/workers

Any allegation or concern about a person working for or on behalf of Knockbracken Congregational Church must be taken seriously.

This includes allegations involving:

- ministers;
- elders;
- deacons;
- trustees;
- volunteers; or
- any other person acting on behalf of Knockbracken Congregational Church.

Knockbracken Congregational Church will not conduct an internal investigation where doing so could compromise a statutory investigation.

The ASC or appropriate senior person will seek advice from the relevant statutory agency and/or other appropriate safeguarding authority.

Where the allegation concerns the ASC or senior church leader, the matter must be referred to an alternative safeguarding authority and, where appropriate, directly to the HSC Trust and/or PSNI.

Allegations involving another adult

Where the alleged perpetrator is another adult receiving services or participating in church activities, Knockbracken Congregational Church will:

- consider the safety of everyone involved;
- avoid unnecessary confrontation;
- report concerns appropriately;
- consider whether other adults may be at risk;
- cooperate with statutory agencies; and
- take proportionate steps to manage risk within Knockbracken Congregational Church.

Pastoral support

Safeguarding and pastoral care are related but distinct responsibilities.

Knockbracken Congregational Church will seek to provide compassionate pastoral support to adults affected by abuse or safeguarding concerns.

Pastoral support must not:

- replace professional safeguarding intervention;
- interfere with an investigation;
- pressure a person to forgive;
- pressure a person to remain in contact with an alleged perpetrator;
- encourage reconciliation where this may place someone at risk; or
- discourage a person from contacting the police or statutory services.

Prayer and spiritual support may be offered where welcomed by the individual, but should never be used as a substitute for appropriate safeguarding action.

Confidentiality and information sharing

Safeguarding information will be treated sensitively and shared only where there is a legitimate safeguarding, legal or organisational reason to do so.

Safeguarding information should be shared:

- on a need-to-know basis;
- securely;
- accurately;
- proportionately; and
- in accordance with applicable data protection requirements.

Records should clearly distinguish between:

- facts;
- information reported by another person;
- professional or safeguarding judgements; and
- actions taken.

Staff and volunteers should not discuss safeguarding concerns informally with other church members.

Record keeping

Knockbracken Congregational Church will maintain secure safeguarding records (see appendix - Record of Allegations or Suspicions of Abuse Form).

A record should normally include:

- date and time;
- name of the adult concerned;

- factual description of the concern;
- what was said, using the person's own words where possible;
- names of people involved;
- immediate action taken;
- whether the ASC was informed;
- advice received;
- referrals made;
- decisions made and reasons for decisions;
- ongoing risk-management arrangements; and
- date of review.

Records must be stored securely and retained in accordance with Knockbracken Congregational Church's retention schedule and applicable data protection requirements.

Safeguarding records should not be stored in ordinary pastoral files where doing so could compromise confidentiality or access controls.

Complaints

Any complaint relating to safeguarding will be taken seriously.

A safeguarding complaint may concern:

- failure to respond to a concern;
- inappropriate conduct by a church worker;
- failure to maintain confidentiality;
- discrimination;
- poor safeguarding practice; or
- another safeguarding matter.

Where a complaint also raises a safeguarding concern, the safeguarding concern will take priority.

Complaints must not be used to prevent or delay a safeguarding referral.

Whistleblowing and raising concerns

Knockbracken Congregational Church encourages anyone within the fellowship to raise concerns about safeguarding practice.

No person should suffer disadvantage or retaliation for raising a genuine safeguarding concern in good faith.

Where an individual believes that a concern has not been dealt with appropriately within Knockbracken Congregational Church, they may raise the matter with the appropriate HSC Trust, PSNI or other relevant authority.

Safer recruitment

Knockbracken Congregational Church will operate safer recruitment procedures appropriate to the roles being undertaken.

These may include:

- application forms;
- role descriptions;
- interviews;
- references;
- identity checks;
- consideration of previous experience;
- safeguarding declarations;
- appropriate AccessNI checks;
- safeguarding induction; and
- ongoing supervision.

The level of checking will depend upon the duties and nature of the role.

Knockbracken Congregational Church will not assume that every church volunteer requires the same level of vetting.

Current AccessNI and safeguarding requirements must be checked when roles are created or changed.

The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland notes that appropriate AccessNI checks may be relevant for trustees and volunteers who have regular or close contact with adults at risk, depending on the role.

Training

All leaders/workers whose roles involve contact with adults at risk will receive safeguarding information appropriate to their responsibilities.

Training should cover:

- adult safeguarding principles;
- recognising abuse;
- responding to disclosures;
- reporting procedures;
- consent and confidentiality;
- professional boundaries;
- financial safeguarding;
- domestic abuse and coercive control;
- spiritual abuse;
- safer working practices;
- record keeping; and

- the role of the ASC.

The ASC should receive enhanced training appropriate to their responsibilities.

Training should be refreshed periodically and whenever significant changes occur in safeguarding policy or practice.

Transport

Where leaders/workers transport adults:

- the journey should have a legitimate church purpose;
- appropriate insurance should be in place;
- the driver must be appropriately licensed;
- the vehicle should be roadworthy;
- agreed arrangements should be followed;
- unnecessary one-to-one transport should be avoided where practicable; and
- concerns arising during transport should be reported.

Where a person has additional support needs, appropriate arrangements should be agreed in advance.

Online safeguarding

The same safeguarding principles apply online as in face-to-face ministry.

Church workers should:

- use approved communication channels where possible;
- maintain professional boundaries;
- avoid inappropriate private messaging;
- avoid sharing confidential information through insecure channels;
- obtain consent before recording or sharing images;
- avoid inappropriate online relationships; and
- report online abuse or exploitation concerns.

Church social media accounts should be managed in accordance with appropriate data protection arrangements.

Adults who may pose a risk to others

Knockbracken Congregational Church recognises that safeguarding may involve adults who have previously caused harm or who may pose a risk to other adults.

Knockbracken Congregational Church will seek to balance:

- the person's rights;
- the safety of others;
- the person's participation in church life;
- legal requirements;
- safeguarding advice; and
- proportionate risk management.

Restrictions on participation should be based on an appropriate assessment of risk and should not be imposed arbitrarily.

Where appropriate, Knockbracken Congregational Church will seek advice from relevant safeguarding professionals.

Monitoring and review

The ASC will provide the governing body with an annual safeguarding report covering, as appropriate:

- safeguarding concerns received;
- referrals made;
- training completed;
- safer recruitment activity;
- policy compliance;
- emerging risks;
- lessons learned;
- actions arising from previous reviews; and
- priorities for the following year.

Individual identities should not normally be included in reports to the wider governing body unless necessary.

This policy will be reviewed at least annually and sooner where:

- there is a significant safeguarding incident;
- legislation or statutory guidance changes;
- organisational structures change;
- safeguarding practice identifies a need for revision; or
- Knockbracken Congregational Church begins new activities involving adults at risk.

Key safeguarding procedure – quick reference

If you are concerned about an adult:

1. Make sure they are safe - If there is immediate danger or urgent medical need, obtain emergency assistance.

2. Listen - Take the concern seriously. Do not investigate.

3. Record - Write down what you were told or observed as soon as possible.

4. Report - Contact the Adult Safeguarding Champion promptly.

5. Refer - The ASC will determine, with appropriate advice, whether the concern should be referred to the HSC Trust Adult Protection Gateway Service, PSNI or another agency.

6. Do not promise confidentiality - Explain that information may need to be shared to protect the person or others.

7. Do not confront the alleged perpetrator - Leave investigation to the appropriate authorities.

8. Keep records secure - Record decisions, advice and actions accurately.

Local safeguarding contacts

Knockbracken Congregational Church must complete and regularly review this section.

Adult Safeguarding Champion

Name: Sharon McWhirter
Role: Safeguarding Coordinator

Deputy Adult Safeguarding Champion

Name: Lyn Mewha

Relevant HSC Trust Adult Protection Gateway Service

Trust: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust
Telephone: 028 9504 1744 (9am to 5pm)

028 9504 9999 (outside hours)

PSNI

Telephone: 999 (for an emergency)

101 (for non emergency)

Emergency

Where there is an immediate risk of serious harm or a medical emergency, contact the appropriate emergency service.

Policy Date	
Approved by	
Next review	September 2027

FORM A

Knockbracken Congregational Church
RECORD OF ALLEGATIONS OR SUSPICIONS OF ABUSE

*Please complete this form using **BLOCK CAPITALS**. Thank you.*

DATE:		***TIME:***	
NAME OF ADULT CONCERNED:			
FACTUAL DESCRIPTION OF THE CONCERN TO INCLUDE: • *What was said, using the person's own words, where possible* • *Names of people involved*			
IMMEDIATE ACTION TAKEN:			
ADULT SAFEGUARDING CHAMPION INFORMED:	***YES / NO***		
ADVICE RECEIVED:			

TO BE COMPLETED BY ASC, DEPUTY, MINISTER OR MEMBER OF THE LEADERSHIP TEAM

REFERRALS MADE TO ADULT PROTECTION GATEWAY SERVICE OR PSNI, INCLUDE: • *Date* • *Time* • *Name of social worker / PSNI officer*	
DECISIONS MADE AND REASONS FOR DECISIONS:	
ONGOING RISK-MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS:	