



A common protocol for churches relating to independent organisations working with children

INTRODUCTION

The context

The Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland (hereafter referred to as the Churches) each has their own child protection guidelines. It is considered helpful if these guidelines substantially agree with one another in respect of minimum standards of good practice in dealing with children. As each set of church guidelines is based upon *Children First Act 2015*, *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017* and *Child Safeguarding: A Guide for Policy, Procedure and Practice*, we believe that they do substantially agree in their policy and procedures while allowing for flexibility of practice depending on the individual church's structure of government and administration.

It is recognised that it would also be helpful if the Churches agreed a common protocol for dealing with external organisations which regularly use church premises. This document seeks to clarify the expectations and responsibilities of both the Churches and the independent organisations, especially in the areas of child protection policy, appointment of leaders, information sharing and reporting of concerns that may arise within an organisation.

Definitions

An independent organisation is a group that, while not operated by the church, nonetheless uses church premises. Such organisations may be specifically youth organisations, or organisations which occasionally work with children, e.g. St John Ambulance.

The organisation may have an outside headquarters and a separate method for the appointment of leaders e.g. Scouts, Guides, Boys' Brigade, Girls' Brigade, Crusaders. Although some of the leaders may attend the local host church they are not appointed by the church and are not directly responsible to the church, nor is the church responsible for the conduct of such organisations, given that they are separate entities.

1. General guiding principles

- 1.1 In all our practice the Churches and organisations agree that the welfare and safety of children is the paramount consideration.
- 1.2 It is recognised that churches and organisations are interdependent, and it is therefore vital that constructive working relationships are developed and maintained.
- 1.3 If an organisation using church premises is operated independently of the local church, while the church will not be responsible for the appointment of leaders or general running of the organisation, it is recognised that the church must be satisfied that the organisation is being run to an acceptable standard. Certain of the organisation's events may take place on church property and the church will give formal permission for the organisation / unit to use the premises. It is recognised that even if an organisation is independent of the church, the public's perception may be that it is in some way associated with the church.

- 1.4 If a church has concerns that certain practices breach child protection guidelines, such concerns should be raised with the organisation leader and/or the headquarters of the organisation. If the concerns are not satisfactorily dealt with the host church may withdraw permission for use of the premises by that organisation.
- 1.5 While the church is not to be responsible for the appointment of leaders to an independent organisation it is good practice for the Kirk Session / Parish Panel / Church Council to be informed annually (September) of the names of the leader in charge in writing.
- 1.6 This protocol should be reviewed on an annual basis at a meeting of the Inter-Church Child Protection Group and representatives of independent organisations, in the light of any revision of church or organisation policies.

2. Agreed criteria

The Churches suggest that the following criteria be agreed with independent organisations using church premises, e.g. Scouts, Guides, Boys' Brigade, Girls' Brigade, Crusaders, Christian Endeavour and other groups.

It is the duty of the organisation to ensure that the premises are suitable and appropriate for planned activities. The organisation shall also ensure that activities shall be carried out safely. Any safety concerns regarding the premises shall be notified by the organisation leader to the appropriate person within the church as soon as possible.

- 2.1 The organisation shall confirm to the local church that it has adopted and consistently implements a child protection policy which accords with the standard of *Children First Act 2015*, *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017* and *Child Safeguarding: A Guide for Policy, Procedure and Practice*. A copy of the organisation's policy shall be supplied to the Kirk Session / Parish Panel / Church Council or written verification that the policy is accepted by the church at central level.
- 2.2 The local church shall supply to the organisation leader the names and contact details of the church officials responsible for the premises. The organisation shall supply to the Kirk Session / Parish Panel / Church Council the names and contact details of the leader in charge of the organisation/unit. The organisation shall confirm that new appointees have been vetted; that no information was received which debarred their appointment; and, that they have been found suitable to work with children.
- 2.3 The organisation shall ensure that leaders and helpers in the organisation receive appropriate child protection training and are aware of the organisation's reporting procedures.
- 2.4 If a report has been made by the organisation of a child protection concern, suspicion or allegation through its procedures, the person(s) responsible for child protection in the local church should be informed in confidence that a report has been made.
- 2.5 The organisation shall supply written confirmation from its insurer that adequate insurance cover is in place for the organisation's activities or written verification that the insurance policy of the organisation is accepted by the Church at central level.
- 2.6 A form of approval (sample below) shall be signed by the leader of the organisation / unit and a church representative confirming that the conditions have been met. It is appropriate for this to be completed annually or at least every three years depending upon church requirements.

Form of approval for independent organisations wishing to use church premises for activities involving children

Name of church _____

Name of organisation _____

Name of person in charge of organisation _____ Tel. _____

Time and place of organisation's meeting _____

CONDITIONS

1. The organisation confirms that it has adopted and implements a child protection policy which accords with the standards of the *Children First Act 2015*, *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017* and *Child Safeguarding: A Guide for Policy, Procedure and Practice*. A copy of the organisation's policy is provided or written verification that the policy is accepted by the church at central level.
2. The organisation confirms that it has completed a risk assessment, adopted a child safeguarding statement and appointed a relevant person(s) in accordance with the *Children First Act 2015*. A copy of the organisation's Child Safeguarding Statement is provided and displayed on premises during organisation's activities.
3. The local church shall supply to the organisation leader the names and contact details of the church officials responsible within the church for the premises and for child protection. The organisation shall supply annually (September) to the Kirk Session / Parish Panel / Church Council the names and contact details of the leader in charge of the organisation/unit. The organisation confirms that new appointees have been vetted; that no information was received which debarred their appointment and that they have been found suitable to work with children.
4. The organisation shall ensure that leaders/helpers in the organisation shall receive appropriate and timely child protection training and are aware of the reporting procedures.
5. If a report of a child protection concern is made by the organisation through its procedures, the person responsible for child protection in the local church should be informed in confidence that a report has been made.
6. The organisation confirms that insurance cover which has been deemed adequate by the church is in place for its activities (copy of policy attached), or confirms that written verification that the insurance policy is accepted by the church at central level.

The organisation shall seek to ensure that activities shall be carried out safely. Any safety concerns regarding the premises shall be notified by the organisation leader to the appropriate person within the church as soon as possible.

We confirm that the church and the organisation agree to the above conditions.

SIGNED _____ (ORGANISATION LEADER)

DATE _____

PLEASE TICK AS APPLICABLE:

The church grants the above organisation use of the premises.

OR

The church grants the above organisation use of the premises in accordance with the attached agreement.

SIGNED _____
(Incumbent)

DATE _____