

Southwark Mothers' Union Safeguarding Policy

October 2025

INTRODUCTION:

This Policy is designed to provide a framework for safeguarding practice within Mothers' Union in Southwark Diocese.

As an organisation concerned with Christian principles and ministry in family life, the nurture and protection of children, young people and adults is at the heart of Mothers' Union. Both individually as members and collectively as an organisation, Mothers' Union has a duty to protect children, young people and adults, doing everything possible to ensure that they are safe when involved in Mothers' Union activities.

Why is Safeguarding Important?

Firstly, it needs to be recognised that everyone is vulnerable at some point and in certain circumstances. The degree of vulnerability, however, depends on how safe an environment is, how any possible risk is assessed and addressed, and that the circumstances of a child or person's vulnerability are taken into account. This applies to those facilitating and working in Mothers' Union programmes and activities, as well as those participating and benefiting from our work.

Secondly, given the work of Mothers' Union it is important that everyone is aware that abuse most frequently occurs in families or is perpetrated by someone known to a child or adult.

Thirdly, what might be considered to be inappropriate behaviour by some, might not be considered to be so in certain cultures. BUT using cultural practices as a reason for children or adults being subject to abusive practices is not acceptable. Such behaviour needs to be considered in the context of the harm perpetrated, as well as the legal framework in place to protect children and adults.

It is important to bear in mind the intent with which actions or behaviours are perpetrated, but that **all abuse is based on the power the perpetrator has over the victim.**

It is for all the above reasons that safeguarding needs to be taken seriously, and policy and procedures adhered to.

AIM AND PURPOSE

Mothers' Union will promote the welfare of children, young people and adults by aiming to prevent abuse from occurring, to protect those who are at risk of abuse and to respond well to those who have been abused. We will follow procedures to enable the identification of those who may present a risk to others and, should this occur, seek appropriate professional and pastoral support for them.

The aim of this Policy is to provide clear, uncomplicated guidance so that all those involved in the work of Mothers' Union in Southwark Diocese:

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- have an understanding of what safeguarding means in the context of our work
- raise awareness of the importance of providing a safe environment for those participating in our services, and for our staff, volunteers, members, contractors and affiliates
- to be able to recognise a safeguarding concern
- to know what to do if you are concerned about a child, family or adult who may be at risk of harm
- to ensure that you are not placed in a situation of risk
- to ensure that you look after yourself and seek support when needed.

SOME USEFUL SAFEGUARDING DEFINITIONS TO HELP YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF SAFEGUARDING:

Child: in Britain a child is anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday.

An adult at risk: vulnerability in adults is not easy to define. It is helpful to consider whether an adult is vulnerable in the context of a person aged 18 or over whose ability to protect themselves from violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation is significantly impaired, either temporarily or indefinitely, through physical or mental disability or illness, old age, emotional fragility or distress.

What does the term Safeguarding Children mean?

The NSPCC defines safeguarding as

“the action that is taken to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm.”

What is the difference between Safeguarding Children and Child Protection?

Safeguarding Children means:

- protecting children from abuse and maltreatment
- preventing harm to children's health or development
- ensuring children grow up with the provision of safe and effective care
- taking action to enable all children and young people to have the best outcomes and reach their full potential.

Child protection is part of the safeguarding process. It focuses on protecting individual children identified as suffering or likely to suffer significant harm. This includes child protection procedures which detail how to respond to concerns about a child. It is the responsibility of statutory agencies working with children, and on occasions, the Police to investigate, assess and take action to protect children who are at risk of abuse and harm.

Safeguarding Adults: What does the term Safeguarding an Adult at Risk mean?

An Adult at risk is an individual aged 18 years and over who:

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- a) has needs for care and support (whether or not the local authority is meeting any of those needs) and,
- b) is experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect and,
- c) as a result of those care and support needs is unable to protect themselves from either the risk of, or the experience of abuse or neglect.

Abuse can link to the mistreatment of an adult at risk by someone with whom they have a relationship, such as a family member, friend, carer (either formal or informal) or may be by a stranger. It may also encompass self-neglect.

Various legislation is in place in England, Wales and Scotland, the basic premise of which is protect adults from risk of harm and abuse. The Care Act (2014), England and Wales, identifies different kinds of adult abuse which is useful to consider in the context of this Policy and Procedure, namely:

- Physical abuse
- Domestic violence or abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Psychological or emotional abuse [in the context of faith organisations the term 'spiritual abuse' has been used]
- Financial or material abuse
- Modern slavery
- Discriminatory abuse
- Organisational or institutional abuse
- Neglect or acts of omission
- Self-neglect

Mothers' Union works with children, families and adults in a variety of programmes and activities. The following provides an indication of who might be considered an adult at risk:

- Those, usually women but not always, who may be subject to or at risk of domestic abuse
- Those experiencing mental health problems or mental illness, including mothers suffering postnatal depression
- Those with a learning disability
- Those with a physical disability
- The elderly who may be disabled or infirm
- Those with dementia or other neurological illnesses which impedes their understanding and cognitive ability
- Those who have a chronic illness
- Those who are in receipt of end-of-life care
- Those serving custodial sentences and their families
- Those who have a child with a disability
- Those who misuse alcohol and/or substances (including cannabis)

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- Those who experience discrimination/abusive behaviour because of their colour, race, ethnicity and/or sexual orientation
- Those who have experienced abuse in childhood.

The above list is not definitive but provides examples of some of the vulnerabilities of the adults and families with whom we work and who are engaged in our activities may be experiencing or have experienced.

Domestic Abuse: What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is any type of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between people who are, or who have been in a relationship, regardless of gender or sexuality. Domestic abuse is mainly, but not exclusively, carried out by men against women.

It can include physical, sexual, psychological, emotional and financial abuse. For those in an abusive relationship, such behaviour can result in serious injury, anxiety, mental illness and in some instances death.

The exposure of children to domestic abuse between parents/carers or the partner of a parent/carer, is considered child abuse. Children can be directly involved in incidents of domestic abuse, or they may be harmed by seeing or hearing abuse happening. Children in homes where there is domestic abuse are often also at risk of other types of abuse or neglect.

If you are concerned that a parent, carer or adult participating in a Mothers' Union project or activity is experiencing domestic abuse or discloses to you that they are being abused, it is essential that your first concern is for their welfare and the wellbeing of any child/children in the household. As with any safeguarding concern, it is important to discuss the situation with the Safeguarding Lead with designated responsibility for the activity and or organisation, and if needs be, the MU Designated Safeguarding Lead for Southwark Diocese.

Whilst respecting the right of a person who is subject to domestic abuse to consent to information being shared about them; please remember that where a child/children are involved in a parental abusive relationship, they are considered by statutory agencies, e.g. children's services, police, to be at risk of harm.

In situations where children are involved, if requested by a parent or carer to keep any disclosure of domestic abuse confidential, you cannot agree to do so. It is important that you do not find yourself in a compromising situation where you feel that you cannot disclose important information concerning the safety of a child, because of a relationship that you may have formed with a parent, carer or grandparent. The welfare of a child needs to be recognised as being of paramount importance, whilst also taking account, as far as is possible, of the need to ensure the parent, carer or adult is not placed at further risk.

Whilst confidentiality cannot be promised when children are involved, it is important to take into account the courage on the part of the person disclosing domestic abuse to share this

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information. Therefore, as with all safeguarding disclosures and concerns, information must only be shared 'on a need to know' basis – i.e. the Safeguarding Lead with designated responsibility for the activity and or organisation, and if needs be, the MU Designated Safeguarding Lead for Southwark Diocese or at times of emergency, police and statutory agencies. This not only ensures that knowledge of sensitive information is limited to those designated to manage safeguarding concerns, but also offers some protection to those making disclosures from risk of further harm.

MENTAL HEALTH

Adults involved in Mothers' Union projects and activities, whether as a parent or older person, may well have experienced issues related to their mental health. The Covid Pandemic and resulting lockdown, death of family members, loneliness and isolation have dramatically affected the mental wellbeing of many parents and children, and adults, especially the elderly. This, together with the economic crisis facing so many people, has had a major impact on family life, outcomes for children and their parents/carers and the wellbeing of the elderly and adults who are at risk.

The issue of the mental health of those with whom Mothers' Union works may well arise in the course of your interaction with those engaging in our projects and activities.

The importance of the mental health and wellbeing of parents, carers and adults to ensure best outcomes for themselves and their children cannot be underestimated. If you have concerns for the mental health of a parent, carer, elderly person or adult, you may need to consider what help can be provided by mental health services and specialist mental health voluntary organisations. But you may also need to consider bringing the situation to the attention of the Safeguarding Lead with designated responsibility for the activity and or organisation, and if needs be, the MU Designated Safeguarding Lead for Southwark Diocese, as the safety of adults, carers, and any children in a family may be compromised.

WHAT KIND OF SAFEGUARDING CONCERNS MIGHT MOTHERS' UNION ENCOUNTER?

It is important to remember that children who are abused often experience more than one type of abuse over a period of time. This is also often the case with adults who are at risk of harm.

Children and adults who experience abuse may be afraid to tell anybody about the abuse. They may struggle with feelings of guilt, shame or confusion – particularly if the abuser is a parent in the case of a child, caregiver or other close family member or friend. Many of the signs that a child or adult is being abused are the same regardless of the type of abuse.

For the purposes of this Policy, it is considered important to concentrate on providing information that is relevant and proportionate to the needs of those working and volunteering for Mothers' Union. You are not expected to be experts in safeguarding adults and child protection, but it is important to be aware of the signs that may indicate a child or adult is at risk of harm.

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Neglect of adults: It is probable that a significant number of adults, parents and families who engage with our projects and activities may well experience financial difficulties, which can in turn lead to anxiety and stress. This can materialise in adults and parents neglecting their own health and welfare by, for example not eating meals, lack of heating in the home, inadequate winter clothing, lack of selfcare.

Of equal importance is the ability for those working in our family projects to recognise when children are not being cared for as well as they might be. This could be because of a family's financial difficulties, but it could also be due to more systemic problems associated with neglect.

Neglect of children: Neglect is the most common type of child abuse, and often happens at the same time as other types of abuse. It can be defined as not meeting a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs. This can result in serious damage to their health and development. Neglect may involve a parent or carer not:

- providing adequate food, clothing or shelter
- supervising a child or keeping them safe from harm or danger (including leaving them with unsuitable carers) making sure the child receives appropriate health care, including dental care
- making sure the child receives a suitable education
- meeting the child's basic emotional needs – this is known as emotional neglect

RESPONSIBILITIES

It is important to remember that the vast majority of people who work with children and adults do not seek to do them harm. There are, however, some who have a different motivation for being involved with children, and adults who may be at risk of harm. It is for this reason that it is important for those working with children, families and adults are aware of Mothers' Union safeguarding policies and procedures, and have undertaken safeguarding training to ensure an understanding and awareness of how best children, families and adults can be protected, and their wellbeing promoted. This can only be achieved if everyone plays their part and recognises that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

Whatever the situation you find yourself in, it is not your responsibility to investigate a safeguarding incident or concern about a child or adult. That is the job of statutory Children and Adult Social Care Services and where appropriate the Police. What is most important is that you do not keep any such concerns to yourself but pass on information to the Safeguarding Lead with designated responsibility for the activity and or organisation, and if needs be, the MU Designated Safeguarding Lead for Southwark Diocese.

It is of the utmost importance that all those working and volunteering for Mothers' Union attend safeguarding training and adhere to this Policy and Procedure. By doing so, your awareness of safeguarding concerns will be enhanced, your confidence increased in recognising when a child or adult might be subject to abuse and/or neglect and your

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knowledge heightened of what to do should such a situation arise. Training is available from Mary Sumner House for Diocesan officers and also from the Church of England and Southwark Diocesan Safeguarding team.

In addition, awareness of and adherence to the Code of Conduct, (see Appendix 1) are central to maintaining a safe, secure environment where adults, parents, children, staff and volunteers are treated with respect.

If you encounter any of the above concerns, it is your responsibility to ensure that you do not keep this information to yourself but bring it to the attention of the Safeguarding Lead with designated responsibility for the activity and or organisation in which the activity takes place, and if needs be, the MU Designated Safeguarding Lead for Southwark Diocese.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead

The purpose of the MU Designated Safeguarding Lead is to ensure that there is a single point of contact in the diocese to offer advice, record, report and refer safeguarding concerns and to support staff and volunteers if/when such issues arise. The Designated Safeguarding Lead will have experience and knowledge of safeguarding children and adults and will have attended safeguarding training provided by Mothers' Union (from the Safeguarding Lead, for Britain, Mary Sumner House) to enable them to meet the requirements of the role.

It may be possible through discussion between you, the relevant designated Safeguarding Lead and the parent/carer to ascertain whether a family is for example, experiencing financial difficulties and it is for this reason that a child or adult is hungry, inadequately clothed or facing possible homelessness. In such a situation a family should be referred to appropriate agencies/organisations to receive help and support.

Where there are more complex concerns and it is a specific MU activity, the advice of the Safeguarding Lead for Britain should be sought. contact details: Email: safeguarding@mothersunion.org or Tel: 07795973622

It is not your responsibility to investigate a situation where a child and/or adult is being neglected. That is the job of local authority statutory Children and Adult Care Services Education and Health Service professionals. If necessary, the Designated Safeguarding Lead and/or the Safeguarding Lead will make the referral to the appropriate statutory agency.

PROCEDURES

What to do if you witness abusive behaviour towards a child or receive a disclosure of abuse?

Witnessing abusive behaviour towards a child: If you see a child being abused your first concern must be for the safety of the child, and act as follows:

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- If a child is in immediate danger, call the emergency services: Police, ambulance, fire brigade 999
- If it is safe to intervene and you have others to assist, (a colleague) then take action to ameliorate the situation and remove the child from harm
- Ensure the child is in a safe place
- Try to stay calm and do not engage in confrontational behaviour with the parent or carer
- Immediately contact your Designated Safeguarding Lead and/or the Safeguarding Lead for Britain to inform them of the situation and seek advice.
- Always, sign, date and specify the time of the incident on the form.
- The SCIR Form needs to be completed within 24 hours or 48 hours at the latest, and sent to the Designated Safeguarding Lead, copying in the Safeguarding Lead for Britain.
- If the incident concerns the Designated Safeguarding Lead, immediately inform the Safeguarding Lead for Britain.
- The Diocesan Designated Safeguarding Adviser (DSA) or equivalent in Wales, Scotland, should be informed of any safeguarding concerns, using the completed SCIR form.
- The Safeguarding Lead for Britain, in discussion with the Designated Safeguarding Lead will decide if the safeguarding threshold is met to send a copy of the SCIR Form to the local authority children's services department.
- Remember: you can always seek advice from Safeguarding Lead for Britain. Do not hesitate to contact her on 07795973622 and/or email: safeguarding@mothersunion.org

If you are affected by what you have witnessed do not keep this to yourself, speak to your project/activity lead.

Receiving a Disclosure: If you receive a disclosure of abuse from a child:

- Ensure you and the child are in a safe place
- Listen carefully
- Do not interrupt or ask leading questions
- Do not promise to keep the information secret
- Explain that you will need to pass the information on, to make sure they are protected, and in case another child might be at risk
- Make a careful, factual note of what is disclosed
- Always: record the time of the incident, date and sign the form
- Complete a SCIR form and send it to your Designated Safeguarding Lead, copying in the Safeguarding Lead for Britain, within 24 hours, if possible but no longer than 48 hours
- Following discussion with the Designated Safeguarding Lead and the Safeguarding Lead for Britain a decision will be made if the safeguarding threshold is met to make a referral to the local authority

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- If the disclosure concerns the Designated Safeguarding Lead, immediately contact the Safeguarding Lead for Britain
- If you are affected by what you have witnessed do not keep this to yourself, speak to your project/activity lead.

Further Action to Take: Once the child is safe, write down an account of what you saw, using the Safeguarding Concern/ **Incident Referral (SCIR) Form, which can be found in Appendix 4.**

Complete a factual account of the incident and provide as much detail as possible.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND SECURITY OF RECORDS:

All records will be kept in a locked and secure place and passed to relevant agencies by the Designated Safeguarding Lead or the Safeguarding Lead for Britain. All electronic records will be kept secure and where necessary 'password' protected. Access to such information will be limited to those who 'need to know', i.e. the Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead, the Safeguarding Lead for Britain, Mothers' Union CEO, the Trustee with responsibility for safeguarding and the Director of Communications MSH.

The Data Protection Act, 2018 (General Data Protection Regulation GDPR), England, Wales and Scotland

The Data Protection Act, 2018/GDPR EU 2016/679 requires that everyone responsible for using personal data has to follow strict rules called 'data protection' principles. They must make sure the information is:

- used fairly, lawfully and transparently
- used for specified, explicit purposes
- used in a way that is adequate, relevant and limited to only what is necessary
- accurate and, where necessary, kept up to date
- kept for no longer than is necessary
- handled in a way that ensures appropriate security, including protection against unlawful or unauthorised processing, access, loss, destruction or damage

In cases of safeguarding children and adults at risk, organisations do not have to tell the subject that they are processing their data, for instance if it will cause them harm or prevent a referral, nor give them access to their data, nor delete their data if requested to. This is in Schedule 3, Parts 1 and 5 of the Data Protection Act 2018.

The Data Controller for Mothers' Union in Britain, at Mary Sumner House is the Director of Finance. Advice concerning all data protection questions/requests for information involving Mary Sumner House should be directed to him. Information requests /data protection issues arising in provinces and dioceses should be directed to the appropriate Mothers' Union Diocesan Data Controller.

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SAFER RECRUITMENT

Safer recruitment of staff is not solely dependent on DBS disclosures in England and Wales, and the equivalent vetting procedures in Scotland. Having a wide range of safer recruitment practices in place will discourage those who have the potential to cause harm from seeking to work or volunteer for Mothers' Union. This includes being curious about unexplained gaps in employment and ensuring that questions posed in reference requests are answered appropriately.

It is therefore important that all reasonable steps are taken to make sure that those who are recruited to work in projects and activities are suitable and appropriate.

It is vital that staff and volunteers are competent to carry out their responsibilities for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, and in creating an environment where anyone feels able to raise a concern and feels supported in their role.

It is essential that:

- Mothers' Union staff and volunteer role descriptions and application forms are used when seeking to recruit and appoint to posts
- The role takes account of what level of DBS or equivalent disclosure is required
- The role takes account of information disclosed on the Self-declaration form
- Two references for volunteers are requested, which include questions about their suitability and ability to work with families, children and/or adults who are at risk.
- Proof of ID and qualifications may be required when appointing staff and volunteers
- During interview ask about the applicant's motivation to work for Mother's Union and emphasise Mothers' Union commitment to ensuring a safe environment for all those working and volunteering for the organisation

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Mothers' Union believes that all activities should take place in a safe environment and that it is our responsibility to ensure that the premises and equipment being used for Mothers' Union activities are appropriate. This includes safety, health and hygiene issues, fire evacuation and transport. Mothers' Union will ensure (where appropriate in negotiation with an external agency, e.g. parish/church hall) that a correctly stocked first aid box will be available at all times. An accident/incident log book will be kept by all Mothers' Union projects/activities or, where more appropriate, the external agency. Mothers' Union will support staff and volunteers in gaining first aid qualifications.

RISK ASSESSMENT

A full risk assessment should be carried out for each activity (where relevant in collaboration with an external agency). This will cover health and safety and safeguarding issues and

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clearly identify responsibility. All staff and volunteers involved in the activities will be given copies of the risk assessment and made aware of any issues and their own responsibility.

CONSENT FOR PHOTOGRAPHS/IMAGES TO BE USED TO PROMOTE THE WORK OF MOTHERS' UNION

Before any photographs or videos can be taken with the intention of use by Mothers' Union, the consent of the adult, and or the parent/carer of a child, or where appropriate a young person themselves, if over 18, must be obtained. The purpose of using the photograph/video must be explained, and informed consent must be obtained from the subject. This is because if a photograph or video is to be used by or to promote the work of Mothers' Union, any risk to an adult or child needs to be taken into consideration. For example, if a parent has been subject to domestic abuse and their whereabouts, and that of their child/children needs to remain confidential, any information which may reveal their location cannot be put into the public domain.

The consent form and accompanying guidance must be used before any photographs or videos can be taken, displayed or uploaded onto the internet. (See Appendix 5).

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR ALL THOSE INVOLVED WITH MOTHERS' UNION

The Mothers' Union Code of Conduct for Staff, Volunteers and Trustees can be found at Appendix 1 and is required to be read, signed and adhered to by all those engaged in Mothers' Union activities.

BULLYING AND DISCRIMINATORY BEHAVIOUR

Mothers' Union will not tolerate bullying or discriminatory behaviour by trustees, staff, volunteers, participants in programmes/projects or contractors who provide services to Mothers' Union. This includes discrimination on the grounds of age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, race including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief.

Mothers' Union takes its responsibility seriously to ensure that all those engaged in our programmes and activities do not experience discriminatory behaviour. Where discrimination occurs, it can have a profound impact on the health and wellbeing of the person subject to such behaviour and will be considered as a safeguarding concern.

Bullying and harassment: is behaviour that makes someone feel intimidated or offended, and will not be tolerated by Mothers' Union in any form. Such behaviour can include spreading malicious rumours, unfair treatment, picking on or regularly undermining someone and denying someone's training or promotion opportunities. It can happen face-to-face, by letter, by email, by phone and by the use of social media.

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If a person experiences bullying behaviour where they work or volunteer, it can affect their health and wellbeing. It can lead to a decision to resign from their post, and in extreme cases, can result in self-harming behaviours on the part of the person being bullied.

Mothers' Union considers the welfare of our trustees, staff, volunteers and those using our services to be of paramount importance. Bullying behaviour on the part of anyone involved with the Mothers' Union will be taken extremely seriously. It can be reported to the Safeguarding Lead with designated responsibility for the activity and or organisation, and if needs be, the MU Designated Safeguarding Lead for Southwark Diocese. All disclosures and discussions will be treated confidentially.

LONE WORKING: LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

In most situations it is best practice to have at least two people present in activities involving children or adults who are vulnerable/at risk. This is to ensure that if an incident occurs or a concern arises, for example an emergency medical situation, there is another person available.

Sometimes it may be appropriate or necessary for a volunteer to have one-to-one contact with a child or supervise a small group of children on their own. This could happen, for example if a child or young person, or adult asks to speak to you alone. In these instances, always make sure that you inform your line manager or a colleague what is happening, and if necessary, seek their agreement.

If you have any concerns for your safety about being alone with a parent/carer or adult always let your line manager and/or the Designated Safeguarding Lead know. **Do not put your own safety at risk.**

Inappropriate, abusive behaviour towards children and adults is difficult, and at times can be traumatic to witness and to hear accounts of. This Policy and Procedure, in addition to the safeguarding training you have undertaken will enable you to recognise a safeguarding concern and to know what action to take. However, if you have been affected by what you have seen or heard you can speak to your line manager, the Safeguarding Lead with designated responsibility for the activity and or organisation, and if needs be, the MU Designated Safeguarding Lead for Southwark Diocese.

Any such discussions will be confidential and will seek to offer a sympathetic listening forum to reflect on what has happened, its outcome and the impact on those involved.

REVIEW AND APPROVAL

This policy will be reviewed annually in line with the Central MU advice. The policy will be reviewed and authorised by the Trustees of Southwark Diocese, Mothers' Union.

Failure to comply with this policy might jeopardise the reputation of the MU and place vulnerable children and adults at risk.