

Press release: Charity Commission announces suite of steps on safeguarding

The Charity Commission has announced a suite of measures to help ensure charities learn the wider lessons from recent safeguarding revelations involving Oxfam and other charities, and to strengthen public trust and confidence in charities.

Summit on safeguarding in UK charities

The Secretary of State for International Development has already announced a joint DfID/Charity Commission safeguarding summit with charities and umbrella bodies working internationally.

As the Commission has consistently made clear, the need to strengthen and assure safeguarding is not limited to charities working internationally. The Charity Commission is therefore announcing today a second summit for charities and umbrella bodies working in the UK, to be co-chaired by the Minister for Civil Society, Tracey Crouch MP.

The summit will be an opportunity to reaffirm how vital it is that safeguarding is a key governance priority for charities, and to:

- establish a shared understanding of the safeguarding challenges facing charities working in the UK and emphasise the importance of maintaining public trust in the sector
- hear the sector's ideas for solutions and what actions they are taking and will take
- agree and commit to actions jointly and individually to strengthen the safeguarding capability and capacity of charities working across the UK

Both summits will involve charity regulators in Scotland and Northern Ireland to ensure a coordinated approach across borders.

Helen Stephenson CBE, Chief Executive of the Charity Commission said:

The Commission's actions and messages over the past few years demonstrate the top priority we expect charities to give to safeguarding, and the priority we place on ensuring trustees meet their legal duties, and public expectations, around this.

But recent revelations have shocked us all and brought a new focus on how charities deal with these issues. We want to do everything we can, using our authority as regulator, to ensure that safeguarding is prioritised in all charities – not just those

working with groups traditionally considered at risk. That's what these two summits are about.

At the heart of all this lies culture, governance and leadership in charities. Policies, procedures and formal systems – vital as they are – do not alone prevent safeguarding incidents, or ensure charities respond appropriately when incidents occur. The public rightly expect charities to be safe places, and for charity leaders to ensure their organisation lives its values, in everything they do.

New Charity Commission taskforce to handle the recent increase in safeguarding incident reports

The Commission is establishing a taskforce, including staff from across the Commission, to deal with the increased volume of safeguarding serious incident reports which it is already experiencing since the Oxfam story first appeared. The team will also undertake proactive work to ensure prompt and full reporting of serious safeguarding incidents, and give advice to charities reporting safeguarding incidents on appropriate actions. In addition the team will undertake a 'deep dive' of existing serious incident reporting records to ensure any gaps in full and frank disclosure are identified and necessary follow up actions, for charities or the regulator, have been completed. We will intervene in serious cases where we are concerned that trustees are not fulfilling their legal duties.

It is also reissuing its previous alert to all charities emphasising the importance of full and frank disclosure.

Helen Stephenson said:

Following alerts we issued in December 2017, and the recent public concerns following the events with Oxfam, we are already seeing increased reporting by charities, including historic incidents. While I am confident of the Commission's record on tackling issues which have been fully and frankly reported, I want to be 100% certain that we have done everything in our power to ensure reports we received, including those which we have cause to believe may be incomplete or inadequate, were properly handled, ensure follow up and to give regulatory advice to charities on the right actions to take. The team's work will reassure us, and the public, that charities have and are being transparent and open with the regulator, and that we are holding charities properly to account. It goes without saying that we will deal swiftly and robustly with concerns that this work discovers.

Additional safeguarding expertise

In addition to its existing engagement with various safeguarding experts in charities and across partner agencies, the regulator will also use independent experts on safeguarding, both in the international context and in the UK, to advise and support the work of the taskforce, the investigations team leading the Oxfam inquiry, and the two charity summits.

The Commission continues to work closely with other government departments, including DfID, law enforcement, the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), and other agencies with specific safeguarding responsibilities such as the Care Quality Commission and social services, to ensure each accesses the right expertise and shares information appropriately, in order to strengthen the work across government to identify and respond to concerns about safeguarding in charities.

Communication with informants

Helen Stephenson has also said she wants the organisation to review the way in which it communicates with informants who raise serious regulatory concerns that result in regulatory action.

She said:

It has become clear to me over the past week or so that whistle-blowers who come to us with serious concerns about charities are not always made aware of the difference their reports have made. That can't be right. People who make what is often a brave decision to come to the regulator with important information, should, where appropriate, be reassured that we have acted on their concerns. So I want us to look carefully at the way in which we communicate with those who bring vital information to us that leads to serious regulatory action.

Key recent work on safeguarding by regulator

- [Annual report on compliance case work](#) published in February 2018 – report highlights growing case work involving safeguarding issues, and reminds charities to prioritise safeguarding in their charities.
- [Safeguarding strategy](#) updated in December 2017: the new strategy makes clear that safeguarding is a key governance priority for all charities, not just those working with groups traditionally considered vulnerable. It also says charities must “provide a safe and trusted environment which safeguards anyone who comes into contact with it including beneficiaries, staff and volunteers”.
- [Safeguarding alert](#) issued in December 2017 warning charities to a) report incidents now if they have failed to in the past and b) review their safeguarding policy and procedures if they have not done so in the last 12 months. The Commission will reissue that alert to all charities

emphasising the importance of full and frank disclosure.

- [Safeguarding alert](#) issued in October 2017 to newly registered veterans charities, following a proactive case-working project which highlighted concerns around safeguarding in some newly registered military charities.
- [Guidance on reporting serious incidents](#) – updated in September 2017. This followed a consultation with charities. In publishing the new guidance, the Commission highlighted its concerns that charities continue to underreport incidents.

Ends

Notes to editors

1. The Charity Commission is the regulator of charities in England and Wales.
2. On 15 February 2018, the Commission set out the [scope of its inquiry into Oxfam](#).
3. Reports detailing the [conclusions and outcomes of the Commission's case work](#) can be found on GOV.UK.
4. On February 12, the Secretary of State for International Development [issued a statement setting out a series of measures to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse](#), and wrote to UK charities working overseas funded by the Department, calling on them to step up and do more on these issues. Yesterday (16 February) she issued a further statement which is available on [GOV.UK](#). Contact details: 020 7023 0600.