Thank you for the invitation to join you today at the launch of this new handbook.

Congratulations to those who have worked on its development because it is a very important resource to help chapels and churches to fulfil their responsibility to society in a real and contemporary way

My every day role involves promoting and ensuring high standards of practice for people working across the care sector in Wales so that there is confidence in the suitability and safety of those workers. Workers who are often working alongside people at some of the most challenging times in their lives

Although we have a national role and lead, we cannot achieve this on our own. Only by working in partnership with others who share the same mindset can change happen. It means that we must review, modify and renew our work regularly.

 I see some similarities between this work and the work that the Panel has done to define, interpret and promote an understanding of the responsibility of chapels and churches for the welfare and safety of their members, and to be honest the residents of the wider society.

Across Wales there are examples of chapels and churches who genuinely serve their community. They have an important role to support and advocate on behalf of children and vulnerable people in our communities.

 There is a new realisation, and I don’t think it’s just because of lack of money, that supporting each other, so that we can continue to participate in our community, regardless of our circumstances, is the responsibility of us all. Similarly we all have a responsibility to make sure that children or vulnerable people are not being abused, neglected or wronged and indeed we all have a responsibility for their welfare.

This is the responsibility of us all but leaders and members of churches have a greater responsibility somehow. Declaring our beliefs are useless if we are not actually working proactively on behalf of the weakest in our communities.

Some of our own members or those who come into contact with the churches or chapels are vulnerable, are being let down or are exposed to harm. Leaders and members of the churches and chapels encounter people through their pastoral caring role who are vulnerable and exposed to harm.

 It is important that we understand our responsibilities towards the safety of children and vulnerable people.

 Firstly there is a responsibility to ensure that everyone working in the name of church with children and vulnerable people is suitable and safe. And secondly it's crucial that everyone who is involved with children or vulnerable people knows how to deal with situations when there are signs of harm. That's why the handbook is so important.

Turning to the social work and social care field for two minutes again. Unfortunately, too often, the only stories that reach the press and media are about failings. Sometimes things go wrong - circumstances where people are not treated with respect and dignity or are being abused by the very people who have been entrusted with their care. When that happens it both surprises and incenses us. It almost hurts inside because it’s abhorrent. The idea that children and people who are vulnerable have been let down by those should to be on their side and protecting them.

 In such circumstances there are two things that often shock. One, that people are misusing their power and taking advantage of children or vulnerable people; secondly, that there are other people around them who might have noticed or have suspected but didn’t step in. Either they chose to ignore it or worse accept it.

 Can you see that all this is very similar to the expectations of people who lead, or who are employed or volunteer in our churches or in the name of churches. They are in situations where people trust them and therefore it is vital that they have a clear understanding of their responsibility. A duty of care.

This duty is far reaching and includes:

• A clear safeguarding policy and procedure - that is simply a declaration of intent that is accessible to everyone.

• Training and raising awareness of how to recognise signs of abuse or harm and also how to respond.

 • A safe recruitment procedure for people who work with children or vulnerable people including ministers and leaders. Part of this is to ensure that there is appropriate information about the background of individuals - any refusal to cooperate with these checks and requirements should be a concern. I can’t believe on what basis anyone would refuse. Nobody is above the need for giving assurances about their safety and suitability to work with children and vulnerable people.

* A clear code of practice concerning making and dealing with complaints.
* Consideration of how you can support children or vulnerable people.

I remember being in a meeting a few years ago with the bishops of churches in Wales and had an honest discussion about the uncertainty of knowing how to deal with dementia - fear, avoid, ignore. At the end of the day we cannot ignore mental illness or dementia more than the reality of the fact that people around us are being harmed and abused. We must learn how to respond appropriately. I know that this is a slightly different subject but some very interesting developments are happening in efforts to create towns and cities that are "Dementia friendly". There is much to learn from these!

 We've moved on from the time we launched “For the Sake of Our Children”, when there was some concern that the chapels were going overboard. Now, hopefully there is a better understanding of the responsibility – as I said earlier - the responsibility to make sure that everyone who works in the name of chapels and churches is safe and suitable. No Messing! Also we need to ensure that we understand our responsibility for each other and those in our communities - that means an awareness of what the characteristics of vulnerable people are, how children and people are harmed and how we should respond.

 Church and chapel are not just places to attend on Sundays, they are societies based on the principles of love and care for all men – both the members of the church and the people who live in our communities.

So we should see the Handbook as a resource that reminds and equips us to be more effective citizens who live and practice our principles.

**Rhian Huws Williams**

**Chief Executive of the Care Council for Wales**

**January 18, 2014**