

SAFEGUARDING COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

The Diocese of Norwich takes seriously complaints about our work and quality of service in all aspects of safeguarding. We view complaints as an opportunity to learn more about what is happening at parish level and improve the way we handle any safeguarding concerns as part of our continuous support to the parishes.

If you are not satisfied with the service you have received, please follow the process below. Please note, however, this procedure is not intended to provide a process for the resolution of safeguarding concerns or allegations. These should be reported in the usual way to your incumbent, Rural Dean, Archdeacon, Bishop, Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) or another appropriate person who will refer your concern/s to the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser within 24 hours, seeking guidance in line with the House of Bishops' Practice Guidance.

OUR COMMITMENT

The Diocese of Norwich aims to ensure that all safeguarding concerns are dealt with professionally, in line with national legislation and all Church of England Safeguarding Practice Guidance that can be accessed by following this link [Policy and practice guidance | The Church of England](#)

We are committed to doing all that we reasonably can, to promote and maintain a safer Church by following safer practices and imbedding an open and transparent culture within our diocese. Based on our belief that safeguarding is everybody's business, we work alongside our parishes to ensure that safer recruitment practices are in place and all involved are aware of their responsibilities through regular training for all Church Officers, area meetings with parish safeguarding officers and other awareness raising, monitoring and peer learning activities.

We are also committed to responding promptly to every safeguarding concern or allegation ensuring that the needs of the victims and survivors of abuse are at the core of our response, whilst treating those who are the subject of safeguarding concerns with dignity and respect. Providing pastoral care and support as well as communicating regularly and clearly with all involved enhances our handling of the concerns as does our attention to any potential risk assessments for those who may pose a present risk to others.

We believe that our churches are open to all including those who might have been subject/s of safeguarding concerns or have committed offences in the past. They are also able to use this procedure if appropriate. In order to mitigate against any potential risk to others, we work with parishes to have sensible safeguarding agreements in place at all times with individuals about whom there are safeguarding concerns or who have committed offences in the past. This means that whilst they are exercising their right to worship the church remains

a safe place for all. Anyone who is not prepared to enter into such an agreement, unfortunately, will not be able to worship in our churches.

PROCEDURE

If you are not satisfied with the handling of a safeguarding concern or allegation, please follow the procedure below.

AIMS OF THE PROCEDURE

The procedure outlined below aims to:

- provide a fair procedure which is clear and easy to use
- be open and transparent about how complaints will be handled
- ensure that all complaints are investigated appropriately
- ensure that complaints are dealt with in a way that is timely and proportionate
- maintain confidentiality at all times
- ensure that lessons are learned so that safeguarding processes in the Diocese continuously improve

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Complaints

1. For the purposes of this procedure, a complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction or concern about the way in which a safeguarding matter has been dealt with by a Church Officer in the Diocese of Norwich.
2. The complainant must be the person directly affected by the issue or an interested party to the person affected (e.g. a close relative), and not an unrelated third party or wider observer.
3. A complaint must be made promptly and without undue delay.
4. All information will be handled sensitively, sharing information on a 'need to know' basis only and with due regard to our obligations under the General Data Protection Regulations.
5. The overall responsibility for this procedure and its implementation lies with the Diocese of Norwich, through the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel, who will receive an annual report of any concerns received, the outcomes and lessons learned.

Whistleblowing

6. Whistleblowing is the disclosure of information which relates to suspected wrongdoing or dangers at work, e.g. an officer of the diocese, breaking or proposing to break the law, acting dishonestly in any way, or otherwise seeking to cover up any wrongdoing.
7. Such matters should be reported to the Diocesan Secretary and will be dealt with under the Whistleblowing Policy.
8. The Diocese has a whistleblowing policy for clergy and employees of Norwich Diocesan Board of Finance (NDBF) [Complaints and Whistleblowing](#). Any whistleblowing that relates

to parish employees and volunteers should be addressed to that parish in line with their local procedures.

9. Public Concern at Work operates a confidential helpline that covers protection of whistleblowers. Their contact details are: Helpline: (020) 7404 6609; E-mail: whistle@pcaw.co.uk; Website: www.pcaw.co.uk

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

In many cases, a complaint is best resolved by the person responsible for the issue that is being complained about or at the closest level to the person/organisation being complained about.

For example, an issue relating to employees of a parish, would be handled by following the parish complaints or safeguarding policy and procedure. If the complaint relates to the conduct of a member of the clergy, then it would be appropriate to make use of the initial stage of the diocesan complaints procedure [Complaints and Whistleblowing](#) and as appropriate, use the Clergy Discipline Measure, further details of which can be found at [Clergy Discipline | The Church of England](#)

Complaints could be shared with the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer to receive a prompt outcome to the issues raised. The complaint will be recorded, and lessons learned could be shared within the team in a sensitive and confidential manner.

By raising an informal complaint, a complainant does not forfeit the right to escalate the complaint should they not be satisfied with the outcome.

We expect that all reasonable efforts will have been made to resolve a concern swiftly and informally if possible and appropriate. However, we appreciate that this may not always be possible or appropriate and therefore have the following process in order to deal formally with all complaints raised.

Stage One

In the first instance, the complaint about the handling of a safeguarding matter will be made to the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer (DSO) safeguarding@dioceseofnorwich.org Telephone - 01603 882345 Mobile – 07958 377079 or by post to the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer, Bishop's House, Norwich NR3 1SB

If the complaint concerns the actions of the DSO in handling a safeguarding matter or other inappropriate action/s, then the complaint should be addressed to the Complaints Administrator. This can be in writing to Complaints Administrator, Diocesan House, 109 Dereham Road, Easton, Norwich NR9 5ES or email to complaints@dioceseofnorwich.org Verbal complaints may be made in person or by telephoning 01603 880853 and asking to speak to or meet with the Complaints Administrator. The Diocesan Secretary will determine how the complaint should be investigated.

You may need to be prepared to share detailed information on:

- What the complaint is about

- The full name of the person who is complaining
- The full name(s) of the person(s) being complained about.
- The desired outcome
- Contact information of the complainant

All telephone conversations will be recorded in writing and shared with the complainant to ensure accuracy.

The Diocesan Safeguarding Officer (DSO) (or in the case of a complaint about the way a safeguarding matter has been handled by the DSO – the Diocesan Secretary or the person delegated to undertake the investigation) will confirm that they have received the complaint and that they will respond fully within two working weeks. A copy of this complaints procedure will be supplied.

Within this timescale, the DSO (or in the case of a complaint about the handling of a safeguarding matter by the DSO – the Diocesan Secretary or the person delegated to undertake the investigation) will do the following:

- make all necessary and appropriate enquiries to establish the substance of the complaint and any attempts already made to resolve the matter informally
- initiate further discussions or meetings with the complainant, if required, to fully understand their issue, seek clarity and be clear on what would constitute a resolution for them. A concise written summary will be provided to the complainant who will be asked to confirm its accuracy. This summary will then be provided to the person about whom the complaint is being made.
- speak with any other parties such as may be required, in order to ensure that they have the necessary information available to respond to the complaint. This will include a written response from the person about whom the complaint is being made.
- Prepare and provide a written response which refers to the original complaint, the response of the person being complained about and any brief reply thereto by the complainant.

If it is not possible to respond to the concerns within two working weeks, they will advise the complainant when a response can be expected.

If necessary, they will determine subsequent actions and where appropriate, arrange mediation between the parties concerned.

It is hoped that an acceptable resolution will be found and that the complaint can be resolved to the complainant's satisfaction at this level.

Stage Two

If the complainant is not happy with the proposed resolution of their complaint at stage one, then within two weeks of being notified of the proposed resolution they must inform the Diocesan Secretary in writing of their decision to initiate stage two at Diocesan House, 109 Dereham Road, Easton, Norwich NR9 5ES or email :

complaints@dioceseofnorwich.org

The Diocesan Secretary (or in the case of a complaint about the way a safeguarding matter has been handled by the DSO – the Independent Chair of the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel, or the person delegated to undertake the investigation) will:

- acknowledge receipt of the stage two complaint
- confirm when a response can be expected. The aim will be for complainants to receive a definitive reply within four working weeks. If this is not possible because, for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a further letter or email will be sent indicating when a full reply will be given.
- review all documentation and actions taken. Discuss with the complainant the situation from their perspective and why resolution could not be reached and hold a similar discussion with the person against whom the complaint is being made. All such conversations will be recorded in writing and shared with each side so far as is appropriate and fair and just.
- discuss with the Independent Chair what an appropriate response and resolution might be, including the appointment of an independent investigator to review the complaint.
- where necessary, take advice from the Diocesan Registrar and other legal and other professional advice such as may be required.

A written reply should be sent to the complainant within four weeks, where possible, informing them of the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action to be taken as a result of the complaint. A copy of this response will be provided for the person against whom the complaint has been made.

This will be the final stage.

Monitoring complaints and lessons learned

The person responding to the complaint should ensure that full records of the investigation are kept together with the records of the initial complaint.

These should include:

- A copy of the original complaint letter, email or written note and all subsequent responses thereto
- Details of how the complaint was investigated, identifying any documents or classes of documents read
- Written records of any interviews undertaken
- Results and conclusions of investigations
- Any action taken

The records should be passed to the Complaints Administrator at the conclusion of the investigation, who will record the outcome and any response from the complainant in the complaints log and file the records securely.

The Diocesan Secretary will ensure that a specific log is kept of all safeguarding complaints received, the timescale of the resolution process and the lessons learned.

The number, type and outcome of any complaints will be reported once a year to the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP) so that any trends or further actions deemed necessary can be considered.

Referral of serious concerns to the Charity Commission

If the complainant does not feel that the resolution of the complaint has resolved the concerns and the issues of concern pose a risk of significant harm to the beneficiaries, assets, services or reputation of the Diocese of Norwich, the complaint can be referred to the Charity Commission. Information about the kind of complaints the Commission will consider can be found on their website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-charities>

Note :

If the person investigating the complaint considers at any stage that the complaint is vexatious, frivolous, a repeat of a previous complaint or otherwise unreasonable, they may notify the complainant that the complaint will not be investigated or that the investigation will be terminated for that reason. The notification should be given within 10 working days of the last instance relied upon by the complainant and wherever possible should be discussed with the complainant first. The person investigating should ensure that all such decisions are recorded in the complaints log.

Updated January 2024