

SAFEGUARDING COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

The Diocese of Oxford 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, Area Dean, Archdeacon, Bishop, Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) or another appropriate person who will refer your concern/s to the Head of Safeguarding within 24 hours, seeking guidance in line with the House of Bishops' Practice Guidance.

OUR COMMITMENT

The Diocese of Oxford 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. In order to mitigate against any potential risk to others, we work with parishes to have in place sensible safeguarding agreements with those individuals at all times so whilst they are exercising their right to worshipping, 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 dealt with;
- 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 Oxford.
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. 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.
4. The overall responsibility for this procedure and its implementation lies with the Diocese of Oxford, through the Diocesan Safeguarding Panel (DSP), who will receive an annual report of any concerns received, the outcomes and lessons learned.

Whistleblowing

5. 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.
6. Such matters should be reported to the Diocesan Secretary or the Director of People and will be dealt with under the Whistleblowing Policy.
7. The Diocese has separate [whistleblowing policies for clergy and employees of Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance](#) (ODBF). Any whistleblowing that relates to parish employees and volunteers should be addressed to that parish in line with their local procedures.
8. Protect (previously named Public Concern at Work) operates a confidential advice line that covers protection of whistle-blowers. Their contact details are:
Advice Line: <https://protect-advice.org.uk/contact-protect-advice-line/>
and website: <https://protect-advice.org.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 your 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 [Policies, Procedures and Safeguarding](#) and as appropriate, use the Clergy Discipline Measure, further details of which can be found at [Clergy Discipline | The Church of England](#).

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 should be made to the Head of Safeguarding. If the complaint concerns the actions of the Head of Safeguarding in handling a safeguarding matter or other inappropriate action/s, then the complaint should be addressed to the Director of People who is also the Complaints Manager for the Diocese of Oxford. This can be in writing (letter or email) or by telephone. All telephone conversations will be recorded in writing and shared with the complainant to ensure accuracy. Please follow the link here to access the contact details for the above roles [Contact us - Diocese of Oxford](#).

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 desired outcome
- Contact information of the complainant

The Head of Safeguarding 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 Head of Safeguarding 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;
- 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.

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

If necessary, they will determine subsequent actions and where necessary, 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 Director of People (when Director of People has been involved in stage one, then the complainant must inform the Diocesan Secretary) of their decision to initiate stage two.

The Director of People (or the Diocesan Secretary when relevant) 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. All conversations will be recorded in writing and shared with the complainant for accuracy;
- discuss with the Head of Safeguarding and the Diocesan Safeguarding Team (where appropriate) and consider 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.

The reply to the complainant within four weeks, where possible, will inform 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. This will be the final stage.

Monitoring complaints and lessons learned

The Director of People will ensure that a 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 DSP so that any trends or further actions deemed necessary can be considered.

Referral of serious concerns to the Charity Commission

If you do not feel that the resolution of your complaint has resolved your concerns and the issues of concern pose a risk of significant harm to the beneficiaries, assets, services or reputation of the Diocese of Oxford, you may refer your complaint 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>.