

The PCC at St Mary's follows the Diocese of Guildford **Whistleblowing Protocol**.

Guildford Diocese ("the Diocese") recognises the importance of early identification of abuse or malpractice. Whistleblowing is an important early warning system. It is about revealing and raising concerns over misconduct or malpractice and parishes should have appropriate procedures in place to enable individuals to voice their concerns. In particular, whistleblowing is encouraged in the diocese in order that issues about safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and vulnerable adults are addressed.

It is often the case that a co-worker or co-volunteer may be the first to recognise that something is wrong but may not feel able to express concerns, feeling that this would be disloyal, or invite harassment or victimisation. These feelings, however natural, must never result in a child or adult continuing to be unnecessarily at risk.

In all cases of whistleblowing, if the concern about practice, performance or behaviour relates to safeguarding children or adults, it should be investigated immediately.

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 gives employees legal protection against being dismissed or penalised as a result of publicly disclosing certain serious concerns. Whilst the Act does not provide the same protection for volunteers, churches should adopt the same approach in their whistleblowing arrangements.

Procedure

Members of a congregation should be encouraged to acknowledge their individual responsibility to bring matters of unacceptable practice, performance or behaviour to the attention of the Incumbent, Churchwarden, or a member of the PCC. In the case of a safeguarding situation, the disclosure can also be made to the Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) or direct to the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser (DSA).

Where possible whistleblowers must be able to disclose information in confidence and remain anonymous.

No disciplinary action will be taken against whistleblowers in respect of disclosures made in good faith.

Response

All **Safeguarding** situations reported which involve a vulnerable person (children, young people or adults experiencing or at risk of harm) must be referred to the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser, (DSA.) If the concern or allegation is about the DSA then the matter must be referred to the Diocesan Safeguarding Lead. The referral can be made by the whistleblower or the individual receiving the information; the referral must be made as soon as practicable and at least within 24hrs.

In **non-safeguarding** situations, the disclosure will be followed up by the Church Leadership team, comprising, the Vicar and the Churchwardens and discussed with the Diocese for advice and guidance.

Having reviewed all relevant material the team will, as soon as reasonably practicable, determine the future involvement of the individual in the relevant activity.

At the conclusion, the individual against whom the allegation is made is entitled to appeal the decision; the appeal shall be in writing setting out the reason for the appeal and it shall be based on evidential or factual information.

In the case of an appeal being made, the Church Leadership Team will appoint a person outside of St Mary's Church to be part of the appeal process, to ensure fairness and transparency.

Safeguarding Disclosures

The Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser will join the Safeguarding Leadership team, comprising the Incumbent, Churchwardens and the Parish Safeguarding Officer, in assessing the information to determine if statutory or other key partners should be notified; this may require information gathering and/or investigation which will be conducted in accordance with the advice and guidance of key partners or the DSA as appropriate.

The **investigation** will be coordinated by the DSA with support from the Church Safeguarding Leadership team, in accordance with Diocesan policy and advice from key partners where appropriate. All relevant material and information will be obtained in order that the DSA can make a decision regarding the continued involvement of the individual in the relevant activity.

Having reviewed all relevant material the DSA will, as soon as reasonably practicable, determine the future involvement of the individual in the relevant activity.

At the conclusion of the investigative process the individual against whom the allegation was made is entitled to **appeal** the decision. The appeal must be made in writing, setting out the grounds for the appeal and based on evidential and factual information. The appeal will be considered by the Diocesan Safeguarding Panel. If the individual concerned is a paid employee a Human Resources Officer should be involved throughout the process of investigation and appeal.

This process does not exclude or override the employment rights of any individual.