

St Mary's Handsworth

Parish safeguarding policy for the protection of children and vulnerable adults

adopted by the Parochial Church Council

on

13th April 2015

I. Introduction

In response to the Children's Act 1989, subsequent government papers, the House of Bishops' Report *Protecting All God's Children* (2004), the Diocese of Birmingham's policy document *God's children: our Diocese* (2005 with amendments), and most recently government and diocesan procedures on the safeguarding of vulnerable adults, the Parochial Church Council (PCC) of St Mary's, Handsworth; the Church of the Epiphany, Handsworth Wood, and St Mary's Church Hall Charity (Regd. No. LA/603/840) have adopted the following policy to protect children, vulnerable adults, and those who care for them within the context of our church life.

The Children's Act 1989 states that the welfare of the child is the paramount consideration for all organisations providing services for children. In the light of this, the PCC endorses the Diocesan statement of values, namely:

- a. The welfare of children will be given first priority.
- b. The spiritual welfare of children will be seen as particularly important.
- c. Well-informed, professional standards of care will be demonstrated.
- d. The procedures to protect children will be open and made clear to all.
- e. The welfare of children will have priority over the interests of the establishment.

The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) helps organisations make safer recruitment and deployment decisions and prevent unsuitable people from working with vulnerable groups, including children. It was established under the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 and replaces the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA). As a Regulated Activity Provider the PCC is committed to safe recruiting and continuing vigilance for the safety and protection of vulnerable people in our community.

The PCC undertakes to review this policy whenever it appears necessary, and in particular in response to revisions to the Diocesan policy or new government legislation.

2. Safeguarding Adults

1. We recognize that everyone has different levels of vulnerability and that each of us may be regarded as vulnerable at some time in our lives.
2. As members of this parish we commit ourselves to respectful pastoral care for all adults to whom we minister.
3. We commit ourselves to the safeguarding of people who may be vulnerable, ensuring their well-being in the life of this church.
4. We commit ourselves to promoting safe practice by those in positions of trust.
5. The parish commits itself to promoting the inclusion and empowerment of people who may be vulnerable.
6. It is the responsibility of each of us to prevent the physical, emotional, sexual, financial and spiritual abuse of vulnerable people and to report any such abuse that we discover or suspect.
7. We undertake to exercise proper care in the appointment and selection of those who will work with people who may be vulnerable.
8. The parish is committed to supporting, training and regularly reviewing those who undertake work amongst people who may be vulnerable.
9. The parish will follow guidelines issued by the House of Bishops and the Diocese of Birmingham.
10. Each person who works with vulnerable people will agree to abide by these recommendations and the guidelines established by this church.

3. Recognition of abuse

Children may suffer from one or a combination of categories of abuse. The government guidelines *Working together to safeguard children* (1999, updated 2013) identifies four categories: physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect. In addition, the Department of Health's document *No Secrets* (2000) defines mistreatment as "a violation of an individual's human and civil rights by any other person or persons." Mistreatment covers abuse, bullying and harassment.

Concerns about the wellbeing of a child or adult may come from a number of sources:

- From the person him/herself.
- From a family member or other adult.
- From someone who has abused.
- From someone who has been abused.
- From a teacher, health visitor, or other professional.

In addition, there are various ways in which a child or adult may give signals that possible abuse is taking place: visual, behavioural, verbal, or a combination of these. The Diocesan policy gives examples of how these signals may be manifested. For example,

- visual signals might include a child looking thin, pale, tired and poorly cared for. There may be repeated signs of bruising or marks which are quite different from the usual childhood bruises and cuts.
- behavioural signs may include a sudden change in temperament. A cheerful and outgoing child might become withdrawn and depressed. A child might become naughty or disruptive, and may lie, steal and be destructive. A child may be fearful of adults.
- verbal signs may include inappropriate explanations for bruises or burn marks, dropping hints about abuse, or the confiding of a story about abuse. A sign might also be the use of sexually explicit language and behaviour which would not normally be expected at the age and stage of development of the child.

Some of these signs may also apply to adult 'survivors' of abuse.

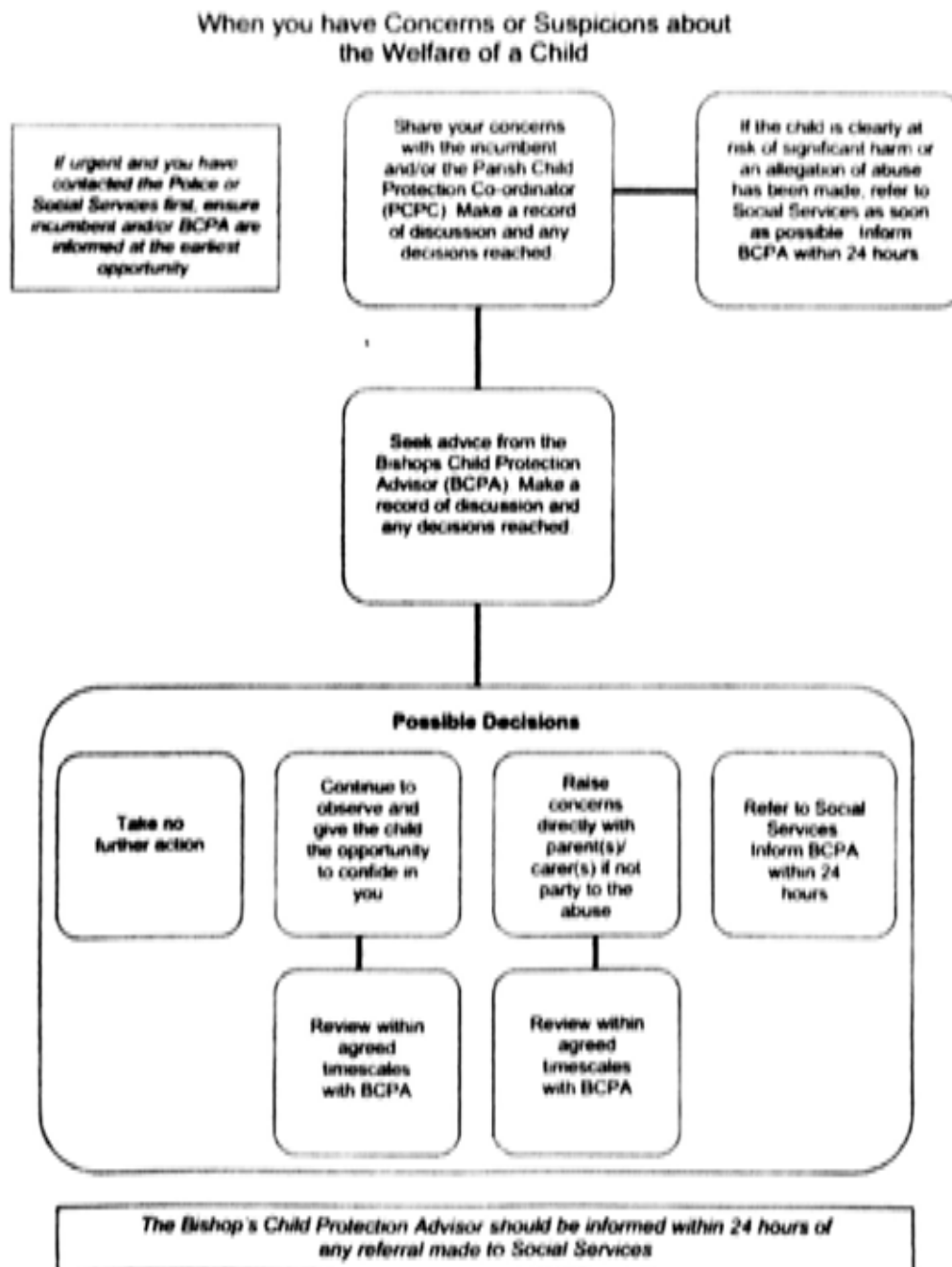
Concerns about the safety of children or adults can therefore come to light in a number of ways. They should be taken seriously and the appropriate procedures should be followed.

4. Taking action: disclosure, concerns or suspicions

Who reports and to whom?

In the majority of cases, any concerns should be brought to the attention of the parish priest or the Parish Child Protection Coordinator or Church Warden as soon as possible. If suspicions are raised about the clergy or some other circumstances, it may be appropriate to raise the issue with the Area Dean or the Archdeacon.

Below is a flowchart from the Diocesan policy indicating correct procedure.



Confidentiality

In all areas of Child Protection, the highest degree of confidentiality must be maintained at all times, and information only passed to others who need to know in order to protect children from significant harm. This personal information is exempt from the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Children or adults who disclose significant harm will need to know that the information will be passed to a statutory agency, usually the Social Services Department, so that it can be properly investigated and help obtained. This will also be necessary where significant harm is suspected.

However, it should be noted that any disclosure (by either a victim or perpetrator) made during the ministry of reconciliation (sacramental confession) will not be revealed to any other person. This is in accordance to the unrepealed proviso to Canon 113 of the Code of 1603 in the Canons of the Church of England. Should such a disclosure be made in a confession, advice is available to the clergy elsewhere.

In general it is advisable, but not always possible, to seek to establish agreement from a parent with parental responsibility before making a referral to an agency such as Social Services. In addition, if the child or young person is of sufficient age and/or understanding it would be desirable to inform him/her of such a referral. However, there are some situations where it may not be in the child's best interests to attempt to seek such agreement, or even to inform the parent/carer.

When a decision is made to disclose information to Social Services without parental consent then the justification for this should be recorded in writing.

Record Keeping

If a child or friend of the child tells that abuse has taken place, this must be taken seriously. Having reassured the child that they have been right to tell you, you should immediately record the exact details of this conversation – what the child said – what you said. Whilst it is not always possible or appropriate to record what a child is saying as they are talking, a written record of the conversation should be made as soon as possible after the conversation has finished. If it is necessary to make initial notes on a piece of rough paper, then these should be retained along with the formal written record completed at a later time. Further guidance on recording details of such conversations can be found in Section 3.2 of the Diocesan policy.

If there is immediate danger to the child, or if Social Services cannot be contacted, you must inform the police.

Support of workers

We recognize that everyone involved in allegations on a child protection matter needs support. Sometimes it may be appropriate for that support to be arranged outside the parish. The parish priest, in consultation with the Diocesan authorities, will try to arrange for appropriate pastoral care for all parties.

Further guidance

Further guidance is available in the Department for Education booklet *What To Do If You're Worried a Child Is being Abused* (published 2006).

5. Working with children and young people

The PCC endorses the summary of 'good working practice' for those working with children which is published in the Diocesan policy.

- Treat all children and young people with dignity and respect.
- Respect personal privacy.
- Be sensitive to others.
- Be sensitive to a child's wish to opt out of an activity.
- Provide access for young people to talk to appropriate others about their problems.
- Follow accepted guidelines relating to contact with children and young people.
- Challenge unacceptable behaviour, e.g. bullying.
- Plan activities appropriately.
- Do not rely on your good name to protect you.
- Provide an example for others to follow.
- Do not show favouritism to any individual.
- Remember that your actions may be misinterpreted by others.
- Regularly review your work with others.
- Never exaggerate or trivialise child abuse issues.
- Seek support, i.e. don't try to deal with everything on your own.
- Be aware of inappropriate physical contact.

Always respond to a child who is telling you anything. If it is possible, try to have another adult present whilst the child speaks, but do not prevent the child from speaking if this is not a possibility or if it would inhibit the child. Never promise a child confidentiality since this cannot be guaranteed.

The Diocese provides training and resources for those who work with children and the PCC will support anyone who wishes to undergo training. The leaders of all children's groups within the church must be familiar with this policy. External organisations which lead children's activities in the Church Hall should follow this policy if they have not adopted a comprehensive policy of their own (e.g. The Scout Association's Child Protection policy, known as the *Young People First* policy). Additional copies of this policy are available on request from the parish priest or Parish Child Protection Coordinator.

6. Perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse

The Church recognizes its duty of pastoral care towards perpetrators of abuse. However, the PCC has a duty and responsibility to take action if information comes to light within the parish which raises the possibility that a risk exists that a child may be abused. Thus, when there is knowledge or suspicion that a church member may have convictions for sexual offences against children, or may have a propensity to abuse children, guidance must be sought as to how to respond to such information or rumour.

If a known abuser is in the congregation then the parish priest will inform the Bishop's Child Protection Advisor and seek guidance. The parish priest will facilitate a risk assessment if necessary and coordinate a meeting with key personnel in the parish if appropriate. Further guidance on what to do if a perpetrator seeks to join a parish can be found in the Diocesan policy.

7. The Role of the Church

It is expected that every member of the Church community will take an active and responsible role in protecting children and vulnerable adults, and it is the duty of all to be vigilant for signs of abuse. However, within the Church hierarchy key tasks are delegated to certain individuals.

- **Bishop's Child Protection Adviser.** The BCPA has the overall task of promoting good practice in all aspects of child protection within the Diocese. The BCPA will provide guidance and support, and attend strategy meetings with statutory agencies when necessary.
- **Parish Child Protection Coordinator.** The PCPC has an essential role in a parish in relation to child protection. The coordinator should be a lay person interested in taking best care of children and young people and those working directly with them. The PCPC should have some understanding of child protection issues. The PCPC will have the role of parish representative on all matters relating to the protection of children and young people and to help the parish develop a culture of 'informed vigilance'. The PCPC will be notified to the Bishop's Adviser for Children's Ministry and will be kept informed of developments and training events regarding child protection. The PCPC will be known to the congregation and is responsible to the parish priest and the PCC.
- **The Parish Priest.** The parish priest has overall responsibility for overseeing child protection policy within the parish and, along with the PCPC, should ensure that good practice is maintained in all areas of church life. In most circumstances child protection issues will go 'through' the parish priest, even if those issues are not initially raised with him/her. In this parish only the parish priest is able to verify documents for DBS checks.
- **The Parish Children's Advocate.** The PCA should be someone on the PCC who can be a voice and speak on behalf of children in the parish. The person appointed will represent the children's views and needs with regard to ministry, mission, worship and their pastoral care. The PCA should be known to the children of the parish. It is possible, though not always desirable, for the Parish Child Protection Coordinator also to be the Parish Children's Advocate.
- **Parish Lead Person for safeguarding vulnerable adults.** The PCC may appoint a person or persons for advocacy at PCC and other meetings with regard to the concerns and views of those who are vulnerable, for checking that the PCC policy is being followed in the activities of the church, and for listening to concerns about their care raised by adults who are vulnerable. Diocesan training is available for a Parish Lead Person. If no Parish Lead Person is appointed then responsibility rests with the parish priest.

8. Health and Safety

The PCC is committed to good working practice on health and safety issues. The PCC has public liability insurance through Ecclesiastical Insurance.

Accident Books are maintained in Church and in the Church Hall. Entries made in either accident book should be detached from the book along the perforated strips and passed to the parish priest as soon as possible. Accidents resulting from anything other than personal negligence will be discussed by the PCC.

Other organisations using the Church or Church Hall will have access to a copy of this policy. Individuals who hire the Church Hall will be asked to take personal responsibility for the welfare of any children in their care. Organisations which work with children and which hire the Church Hall will be expected not only to be familiar with this policy, but also to work in accordance with any government guidelines which may be relevant to their activities.

In addition to this policy, Church groups and outside groups which work with children either in Church or the Church Hall will be encouraged to undertake regular health and safety assessments and also risk assessments for the activities they undertake. Any risk assessments undertaken should be made available to the PCC.

Recommended staffing levels are given in the Diocesan policy. The number of staff varies depending on the number and the age of the children involved.

This policy will be on display in St Mary's Church, the Church of the Epiphany and the Church Hall. Additional copies are available on request from the parish priest or Parish Child Protection Coordinator. In addition, alongside this policy will be displayed the telephone number for Childline, and also a statement that illegal drugs will not be tolerated.

9. Safe Recruiting

All individuals undertaking a role within the church involving the care and supervision of children will be required to complete a House of Bishops' *Confidential Declaration* and to seek an enhanced check from the Disclosure and Barring Service. Other individuals holding prominent and public positions within the church (such as the churchwardens and the organist) will also be required to complete a *Confidential Declaration* and seek a DBS check. In most cases two references will also be required for each individual. The parish priest will be responsible for interviewing individuals and explaining the reasons for seeking a DBS check, and also for checking personal documents to verify identity for the check.

It is considered good practice by the Diocese that DBS checks are renewed every five years.

If as part of this procedure concerns of any nature are raised relating to child protection issues then the parish priest will immediately seek the advice of the Archdeacon and the Bishop's Child Protection Advisor. The parish priest will act in accordance with any advice received.

References, the *Confidential Declaration*, and the results of any DBS checked will be stored securely by the parish priest and remain confidential from any other person in the parish.

During a vacancy in the parish, the role of the parish priest is taken by the Area Dean or, exceptionally, by the Archdeacon. During a vacancy any confidential files are given into the care of the Area Dean until a new parish priest is appointed.

Recommended guidance for safe recruiting is available in a document from the Children's Workforce Development Council entitled *Recruiting Safely* (published 2009).