

Raising Concerns (“Whistleblowing”) Policy

1. Introduction

Elmdon Church is committed to honesty and integrity in all church life, and we expect the highest standard of conduct from anyone who works for, or volunteers with, the church. We will treat seriously any concern reported to us about any suspected illegal or improper conduct, including “covering up”.

We encourage members of the congregation to acknowledge their individual responsibility to bring matters of unacceptable practice, performance or behaviour to the attention of the Rector, a churchwarden or a member of the Parochial Church Council (PCC).

The Public Interest Disclosure Act (1998) gives workers 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, we should adopt the same approach in their protection.

1.1 Who this policy applies to

This policy covers everyone who works for, or volunteers with, Elmdon Church. This means clergy, office holders, volunteers, employees and casual workers appointed by the PCC.

1.2 What is whistleblowing?

Whistleblowing is the reporting of suspected wrongdoing or dangers in relation to our activities. This includes bribery, fraud or other criminal activities; miscarriages of justice; serious health and safety risks; damage to the environment; bullying, harassment or abusive behaviour; and any breach of legal or professional obligations.

1.3 Aims of this policy

By this policy, we aim to encourage the raising of concerns in order to:

- prevent the problem worsening or widening
- protect or reduce risks to others
- prevent becoming implicated oneself

We also aim to reassure those who may be deterred from raising concerns for fear of:

- starting a chain of events which spirals out of control
- disrupting the work or project
- getting it wrong
- repercussions, or damaging careers or reputations
- not being believed

1.4 Types of concerns covered by this policy

Practices that could lead to raising a concern may include:

- bullying, harassment or abusive behaviour by a member of the clergy, or person in a position of responsibility (eg PCC member)
- financial malpractice
- behaviour inconsistent with the Church of England Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of Clergy

This list is not exhaustive.

Safeguarding concerns are not covered by this policy; instead, please see the safeguarding policy which is displayed on the noticeboard in the church building and on our website. All safeguarding concerns should be reported to the Parish Safeguarding Co-ordinator Lesley Huss, safeguarding@elmdonchurch.org, tel. 07790 725295, or directly to the Bishop's Safeguarding Advisor Steph Haynes, stephh@cofebirmingham.com, tel. 0121 426 0407 or 07342 993 844.

2. Procedure

2.1 How to raise a concern

- Report concerns, suspicions or uneasiness about the practice or behaviour of an individual as soon as possible.
- Inform the Rector, a churchwarden or member of the PCC; or, if the concern is about the Rector, you may contact the Archdeacon.
- Be specific about what practice is concerning, and what you have heard or observed.
- Ideally put your concerns in writing. Outline the background and history, and provide dates and times.
- Provide as many facts as possible; do not rely on rumour or opinion.
- If you want to raise your concern confidentially, we will make every effort to keep your identity secret, and only reveal it where necessary to those involved in investigating your concern.
- We encourage you to put your name to any disclosure; however, any concern raised anonymously will be considered at the discretion of the Rector (or Archdeacon), taking into account the seriousness of the issue raised, the credibility of the concern, and the likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources.

2.2 What happens next

- You are not expected to prove the truth of the concern or to investigate it.
- The person you reported the concern to will pass it to the Rector (unless the concern was about the Rector, when will be referred to the Archdeacon).
- Depending on availability and the nature of your concern, the Rector, a churchwarden or the lay chair of the PCC will arrange a meeting with you as soon as possible to discuss your concern.
- You may bring someone with you to any meetings under this policy. Your companion must respect the confidentiality of your disclosure and any subsequent investigation.

- Within the bounds of confidentiality, you will be given as much information as possible on the nature and progress of any enquiries.
- The Rector, churchwarden, lay chair of the PCC or Archdeacon will aim to ensure that you are not harassed or victimised.
- We encourage openness and will support those who raise genuine concerns under this policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken.
- Malicious allegations will be considered very seriously, and may result in disciplinary action in the case of a paid employee or office holder.

2.3 External disclosures

- The aim of this policy is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating and remedying any wrongdoing associated with church activities. In most cases you should not find it necessary to alert anyone externally.
- However in some circumstances it may be appropriate for you to report your concerns to an external body such as a regulator. We strongly encourage you to seek advice for reporting a concern to anyone external. The organisation Protect operates a confidential helpline, and their contact details are at the end of this policy.
- Nothing in this policy prevents you from reporting a suspected crime to the police, nor is it intended to remove any rights under the Public Disclosure Act of 1998.

3. Contacts

Rector	Revd Bekah Clark 0121 743 6336 or 07462 038151 revbekahclark@gmail.com
Churchwardens	Sue Kimber sue@elmdonchurch.org
Archdeacon	Ven. Phelim O'Hare phelim.ohare@cofebirmingham.com
Safeguarding Co-ordinator	Lesley Huss 07790 725295 safeguarding@elmdonchurch.org
Bishop's Safeguarding Advisor	Steph Haynes 0121 426 0407 or 07342 993 844 stephh@cofebirmingham.com
Protect	020 3117 2520 https://protect-advice.org.uk/contact-protect-advice-line