**Whistleblowing Policy**

The Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich (the ‘Diocese’) is committed to the highest possible standards of integrity and recognises that clergy, lay staff and volunteers are often the first to become aware of, or identify serious concerns. When such concerns arise, barriers to coming forward could be in relation to misplaced loyalty to colleagues or the Church, or fear of harassment or victimisation.

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (the ‘Act’) protects workers who raise concerns from victimisation or harassment. In accordance with the Act, the Diocese welcomes staff members who have serious concerns about any aspect of the Diocese’s work to come forward and voice those concerns, in confidence, within the Diocese.

The Church of England and our Diocese rely heavily upon the contribution of volunteers and recognise that they are in an important position to recognise and report concerns. While voluntary roles are not included within the Act, the Diocese encourages volunteers to use this process with the relevant principles of protection applied to them.

This policy is in place to ensure that an internal process is available to encourage and enable workers and volunteers to raise serious concerns which would not meet the criteria for a complaint; in confidence and without fear of reprisals; to ensure that the Diocese continues to provide the highest standards of integrity and accountability.

**Principles**

This policy is based on the following fundamental principles:

* All Office Holders, lay staff and volunteers have the right to raise concerns about perceived unacceptable practice or behaviour.
* All Office Holders and lay staff are responsible for raising concerns about unacceptable practice or behaviour, safeguarding concerns and any health and safety risks. We also invite volunteers to raise these matters.
* The Diocese does not tolerate victimisation or harassment and will take action to protect Office Holders, lay staff and volunteers when they raise a concern in good faith.
* The Diocese will endeavour to protect the identity of any individual who raises a whistleblowing concern and wishes to remain anonymous. However, in certain circumstances, such as any inquiry arising from the concern, the individual may be required to provide a signed statement. In certain circumstances the Diocese may have to disclose the identity of the individual without their consent, for example where there is risk to others involved. The reasons for this will be discussed with the individual.
* Office Holders, lay staff and volunteers who raise concerns will be given appropriate advice and support and kept informed in relation to the progress and outcome of any inquiries.
* Any malicious or vexatious allegations made by clergy or lay staff may lead to a disciplinary process for the individual concerned.

**How to raise a concern**

The Diocese recognises the difficulties in raising a concern about the behaviour of a colleague. However, raising the concern at an early stage may protect others, prevent the problem getting worse, and prevent individuals themselves becoming implicated

Office Holders, lay staff and volunteers are encouraged to raise concerns in cases where:

* the law may have been broken
* Diocesan policies and procedures may have been breached
* there are concerns of a safeguarding nature

**Special Note: Safeguarding**

The Diocese is committed to safeguarding the welfare and protection of children and adults ‘at risk’ of harm. Concerns about the welfare of children and adults ‘at risk’ of harm should be raised without delay to prevent any ongoing risk of harm.

If the individual who has a concern does not feel confident to report the matter within the diocese they are encouraged to refer directly to Customer First at Suffolk County Council or directly to Suffolk Police. Customer First is the first point of contact for social services in Suffolk dealing with enquiries and referrals about adults, children and mental health assessments.

See further information in the Diocesan Safeguarding Policy and Practice Guidance:

http://www.cofesuffolk.org/safeguarding

**Who to tell:**

* Office holders, lay staff and volunteers should raise concerns initially with their incumbent, Archdeacon, line manager, volunteer co-ordinator or Parish Safeguarding Officer, Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser or Bishop.
* Of course this is dependent upon the nature of the concerns and who might be involved.

Clergy, Lay staff and any volunteers may approach the following:

Anna Hughes - Diocesan Secretary

01473 298520 or 07961 116077

anna.hughes@cofesuffolk.org

Karen Galloway – Safeguarding Manager

01473 298545 or 07785 621319

karen.galloway@cofesuffolk.org

Clergy, Lay staff and volunteers can call, write to or arrange to meet with either of the above. In the case of a meeting the individual raising the concern may wish to invite a supporter.

**Written concerns should:**

* identify that it is a whistleblowing disclosure;
* detail the background and history of the concerns;
* give names, dates and places (where possible); and
* note the reasons why the individual is particularly concerned about the situation.

**What could happen?**

This will be dependent upon the nature of the concern. The matter may be:

* investigated internally
* referred to the Police and / or other statutory agencies;
* independently investigated
* referred for consideration under the Clergy Discipline Measure

or

* any combination of the above

**Anonymous Allegations**

The Diocese encourages staff, Office Holders and volunteers to identify themselves when reporting a concern. However, any anonymous concerns will be investigated as far as reasonably possible based upon the information provided.

Or contact:

Customer First at Suffolk County Council Social Care Services

0808 800 4005

customer.first@suffolk.gov.uk

Suffolk Police

dial 101 in non-urgent cases or 999 in an emergency

Independent, free, expert help and advice in relation to whistleblowing is also available from Public Concern at Work

0207 404 6609 or <http://www.pcaw.co.uk/>

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| Owner: | HR | Version: | 1.3 | Last amended: | 31/01/2020 |