

# Reporting concerns, complaints or whistleblowing



We believe that each and every person matters to God, as people made in His image. We are committed to reflecting God's character in maintaining the highest possible Biblical standards of integrity and accountability in the work we do.

Everyone serving at St Peter's is expected to conduct themselves in keeping with these high standards and to treat others with dignity and respect. Whether you are a member of the public, or are a member of the church, we invite you to report any concerns you may have about the behaviour of St Peter's staff or volunteers.

## **Safeguarding**

As a church we are committed to the protection of the vulnerable and marginalised. We are committed to caring well for all children and adults and to the safeguarding and protection of all children, young people and adults when they are vulnerable. Any allegation or concern regarding the abuse of a child or a vulnerable adult must be treated seriously and reported as soon as possible. A concern can arise when you observe or suspect abusive behaviour, when an allegation is made or disclosed, or where there are indicators (signs and symptoms) of suspected abuse on the victim.

There are two ways for you to report a safeguarding concern:

Directly to our Safeguarding Officer:

### **Sara King**

*Parish Safeguarding Officer*

Email [sarakingsgo@outlook.com](mailto:sarakingsgo@outlook.com) or contact via the St Peter's Welcome Desk

Or to the Diocesan Safeguarding Team:

### **Danielle Law and Amanda Goh**

*Diocese of Chelmsford Safeguarding Advisors*

01245 294444

[safeguarding@chelmsford.anglican.org](mailto:safeguarding@chelmsford.anglican.org)

All concerns raised will be investigated thoroughly and action taken in line with St Peter's safeguarding policies and procedures.

## **Whistleblowing**

If you discover information which you believe shows serious malpractice, illegal actions, wrongdoing or unacceptable behaviours or practices by St Peter's employees, volunteers or members, we ask you to report it.

Legislation protects those who raise legitimate concerns. No one who makes a report in good faith will be victimised for doing so. Your concern could be about things that are happening now, have happened in the past, or are likely to happen in the future. It could be about one of the following (or something not included in this list):

- A criminal offence
- The breach of a legal obligation
- A miscarriage of justice
- A danger to the health and safety of any individual
- Damage to the environment
- Deliberate concealment of information related to any of the above.

### **To report a whistleblowing concern:**

Talk to, or contact, a member of the Senior Leadership Team, the Vicar or the Church Wardens. Concerns or complaints about a staff member should be addressed to the Vicar in the first instance.

Concerns or complaints about the Vicar should be addressed either to the Church Wardens, or to: The Archdeacon of Barking (01708 474951; [a.barking@chelmsford.anglican.org](mailto:a.barking@chelmsford.anglican.org)). Please see the Diocese of Chelmsford Policy on Complaints for more information.

Issues will be investigated as soon as possible and action taken in line with our whistleblowing and disciplinary policies and procedures. The person raising a complaint or concern will be informed of the outcome subject to the normal rules on confidentiality of personal information.

### **Complaints**

We acknowledge that all people make mistakes, our God is full of grace and mercy to us and we should be willing to show that grace and mercy to each other, therefore a formal complaint should be a last resort. Our desire is that, whenever concerns are raised about the conduct of those involved in the ministry or activities of St Peter's, those with concerns will do all they can to seek an informal resolution, rather than escalating their concerns into a formal complaint.

However, we recognise that in some cases there will be no alternative but to make a formal complaint. This formal procedure should only be instigated when attempts to resolve the issue informally have failed or where, due to the nature of the complaints, it is not considered appropriate to do so. Our complaints policy sets out a procedure whereby anyone may raise a formal complaint against St Peter's, its activities or members of staff and it outlines the process that will be followed to achieve a resolution of the problem.

Anyone may make an informal or formal complaint against anyone involved in the ministry or activities of St Peter's, whether employed staff or volunteers.

If we receive a number of inter-related complaints or a number of people make the same complaint, we may decide to consolidate the investigation or to deal with the earliest complaint first. The approach will depend on the nature of the complaints and the timing of receipt of the complaints.

### **What types of complaints will be considered?**

St Peter's Church will consider complaints about:

- I. The application of our procedures or decisions which directly relate to the complainant.
- II. The conduct of our staff.
- III. The conduct of any individuals who we have appointed to serve on a voluntary basis in any of our groups, committees or other church activities.

We cannot consider:

- I. Complaints which are unrelated to the activities of St Peter's.
- II. Complaints about our decisions or procedures which do not relate directly to the complainant.

Where a complaint is raised which does not comply with these requirements, we will inform the complainant why the decision has been made not to consider it, and will also send a copy of this complaints procedure.

### **How to make a complaint**

A complaint must be made in writing and must set out as much as possible of the following information:

- I. The event/actions you are complaining about;
- II. Who was involved;
- III. When and where the events took place;
- IV. Full details of the complaint, including any evidence you have of what took place;
- V. Details of what you have done to try to raise your concerns and any response you have received;
- VI. What you consider would resolve your concerns;
- VII. Details of who else you have reported the matter to;
- VIII. Any additional information.

### **In all cases**

We cannot guarantee that your complaint will be dealt with unless you provide as much as possible of the information set out above. Any supporting documentation that exists should also be enclosed.

Please note that we strongly advise against the use of public forums, social media and general gossip or negative comments with others regarding your complaint, as this may impact the complaints procedure.

We also strongly advise that you should avoid any ongoing discussion or correspondence with the person you have complained about relating to your complaints without the consent of the investigator.

### **Where to send a complaint**

The complaint should be clearly marked "Formal Complaint" and sent to the Vicar Rob Hudson (rob.hudson@stpetersharoldwood.org). If the complaint relates to the actions of the Vicar, it should be sent directly to a Church Warden via a letter in their pigeon-hole.

### **Handling the complaint**

The complaint will be acknowledged in writing or by email within 5 working days. In that time, an investigator will be appointed to look into your complaint. Depending on the nature and scope of the complaint this might be someone from within St Peter's Church, or from an independent external body. You will be told who has been appointed to investigate. The complaint will then be reviewed by the investigator.

The person investigating will seek to:

- I. Establish what has happened and when it happened and who else was involved;
- II. Contact or meet with the complainant if there is a need for clarification regarding the complaint or any further information is required;
- III. Following the initial information and any discussions with the complainant, unless prevented by law or because it would prejudice any further investigation, those complained about will be informed of the nature of any allegations, regardless of whether any further action or investigation is required;
- IV. Interview those involved and those complained about, where necessary to understand their account of events;
- V. Keep notes of all investigatory interviews.

Once the investigation is concluded the investigator will decide whether the complaint is well founded and send the complainant their decision. Where any aspect of the complaints are upheld, the investigator should

also specify the actions suggested to remedy the situation. The details and records of any complaint will be securely held by St Peter's for a period of 6 years after its conclusion.

If the complaint is against a member of staff and if the person investigating concludes that the evidence suggests that conduct worthy of disciplinary action may have taken place, the issue will be dealt with under the staff disciplinary processes.

### **For complaints against a church member**

If the person investigating concludes that the evidence suggests that misconduct may have taken place, the issue will be referred to a panel of three members of the PCC or SLT unconnected with the matter under investigation to consider the evidence and to come to a decision, within 30 days.

If it would be impossible for PCC or SLT members to reasonably be considered independent, one or more of them could be replaced with suitable individuals either from within St Peter's or from an independent, external body. This may change the timescale for coming to a decision.

The panel may choose to invite the complainant or the person complained about to address the panel, but are not required to do so. Such a decision will be communicated to the complainant and to the person complained about within 5 days of the panel's decision. The panel will also inform the Charities Commission if circumstances require.

### **Timescales**

We will endeavour to keep the complainant informed throughout the process, including expected timescales. It is worth noting that the more complex the complaint, the longer the timescale is likely to be, especially if the complaint has to be referred to any external bodies (including police and Diocesan Safeguarding Officers).

### **What if you are unhappy with the outcome of the investigation?**

You will have the right to appeal any decision on a complaint on these issues. Written notice of intention to appeal should be made within 14 days of the date the outcome of your complaint was sent to you. The appeal itself should be made within a further 14 days. The appeal should be in writing and must be sent to the Vicar or Church Wardens, who will arrange for your appeal to be considered by someone other than the person who took the initial decision (where possible).

The appeal must set out:

- I. Your grounds of appeal; and
- II. What you consider would resolve your concerns.

### **Vexatious Complaints**

If the panel concludes that a complaint has been made vexatiously or in bad faith, St Peter's reserves the right to take appropriate further action. In such cases, we would inform the complainant that this is how the complaints are being seen, along with the reasons why.

### **Confidentiality**

The fact of and content of your complaint will be kept confidential save in so far as is necessary in order for us to properly investigate the complaint and reach a decision relating to it. Please note that we expect you to maintain reasonable confidentiality as to the nature and content of your complaint so that the investigator is able to work without obstruction. If you, or others, make public statements, contact the press, or use social media forums to complain about the situation or our handling of it under these processes, we reserve the right to respond publicly to any allegations or statements. Under such circumstances we will consider that you have chosen not to view your complaint as confidential.

### **Further Complaints**

As a registered charity, St Peter's is accountable to the Charity Commission for England and Wales. Serious complaints can therefore be made to the Charity Commission where appropriate (<https://forms.charitycommission.gov.uk/raising-concerns/>).

If your complaint regards our charitable fundraising, and you feel the complaint has not been resolved or dealt appropriately by us, you can contact The Fundraising Regulator (further details are available on their website <https://www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/>).

### **Any other concerns**

If you have any other concerns or questions about the work of St Peter's not covered by the safeguarding, whistleblowing or complaints sections above, please let us know by talking to a member of staff, emailing the Church Centre Manager on [emily.agnew@stpetersharoldwood.org](mailto:emily.agnew@stpetersharoldwood.org) or calling us on 01708 342080.