



The following policy was agreed at the Parochial Church Council (PCC) meeting held on:

Whistleblowing policy

Hughenden Parish Church is committed to being open, honest and accountable. We encourage a free and open culture in dealings between office holders, employees, workers and volunteers in the church. Tackling problems is vitally important to maintaining the good health and wellbeing of our church and achieving its charitable aims.

This policy aims to help office holders, employees, workers and volunteers in the Church to raise any **serious concerns** they have about something taking place in the church with confidence, and without having to worry about being victimised, discriminated against or disadvantaged in any way as a result.

This policy is written in the context of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (the "Act") and other legislation which protects employees and workers who 'blow the whistle' on malpractices within their organisation.

Although it was not previously thought that statutory protection under the Act extended to office holders or volunteers, in a recent judgment,¹ the Supreme Court decided that judicial officers can seek the protection of whistleblowing legislation. The position regarding clergy has not been tested but, taking a cautious approach, this policy assumes that the courts would afford the same protection to clergy office holders.

In addition, as it is considered best practice for charities to choose to extend similar protections to volunteers, we have chosen to extend the same protection to volunteers in so far as is possible and to treat all individuals who make a disclosure in the spirit of the Act.

1. Who does this policy apply to?

This policy applies to everyone who works for and in or volunteers in our church. This means employees, workers, office holders, volunteers, interns and contractors.

2. What is whistleblowing?

'Whistleblowing' refers to the internal or external disclosure of malpractice and serious suspected wrongdoing as well as illegal acts, or omissions, at work. It covers, for example, how we raise funds, how we commission work or make payments and where there has been a breach of a legal, statutory or regulatory requirement or unethical behaviour.

3. What types of concerns are covered by this policy?

To use this whistleblowing policy and be legally protected under the Act, you must make a disclosure about a serious concern. This is known under the Act as a 'qualifying disclosure'. This means you have information and reasonably believe that one or more of the following matters is happening, has taken place, or is likely to happen in the future:

- (a) a criminal offence (including fraudulent and corrupt behaviour, e.g. theft, fraud or malpractice)

- (b) a miscarriage of justice
- (c) an act creating risk to health and safety
- (d) an act causing damage to the environment
- (e) a breach of any other legal obligation, or
- (f) concealment of any of the above

You do not need to have proof that such an act is being, has been, or is likely to be, committed. You do, however, **need to hold a reasonable belief** of such an action has been, is being or is likely to be carried out.

If you feel unable to whistleblow internally, the matter may be reported directly to the relevant regulator, such as the Charity Commission (from the point at which the Church is registered with the Charity Commission) or Church Commissioners.

4. What concerns cannot be raised as whistleblowing under this policy?

This whistleblowing policy does not apply to:

Safeguarding concerns: For safeguarding concerns please contact one of the people listed in the safeguarding contacts section of our website.

- **Concerns about other organisations:** If you have concerns about the behaviour of another Church of England organisation, you should raise them through that organisation, following any whistleblowing procedures it has.
- **Employment-related concerns:** This policy does not deal with any complaints employees may have about their own employment position.

5. How to raise a concern

You should raise your whistleblowing concern as soon as possible. This will make it easier to act and to enable any problems to be resolved or reported quickly.

You can make your disclosure orally, but written disclosures are preferable as these will make the process more efficient and effective. In your disclosure, you should:

- (a) provide any relevant context/background, including relevant dates, venues, names etc.
- (b) state clearly the reason why the situation causes concern.

You must say that you are raising your concern using the whistleblowing policy and whether you wish your identity to be kept confidential. While we will make every effort to deal with your case confidentially, depending on the circumstances of the case, this may not always be possible (e.g. if the police are involved). Where this is the case, you will be informed and the reasons why it was not possible. We prefer non-anonymous disclosures, as anonymity often makes it difficult to properly investigate concerns, protect employees or give feedback on outcomes.

The vicar is our **designated Whistleblowing Officer**, and you should report your concern to him in the first instance at:

keithth vicar@gmail.com

If the matter concerns the Whistleblowing Officer, it should be raised with area bishop or the archdeacon at:

bishopbucks@oxford.anglican.org

archdeacon.buckinghamshire@oxford.anglican.org

If you are unsure whether to use this procedure, or you want independent advice at any stage,

you should contact your trade union or an independent organisation such as Protect.

6. Protecting the individual raising the concern

If you raise a concern which you believe to be true, the Church will take appropriate action to protect you from any harassment, victimisation or bullying. Employees and workers who raise a genuine concern under this policy will not be at risk of losing their job, nor will it influence any unrelated disciplinary action or redundancy procedures.

The matter will be treated confidentially but if the concern cannot be resolved without revealing your identity, the officer dealing with the matter will discuss with you whether and how to proceed. You should note that you will not be protected from the consequences of making a disclosure if, by doing so, you commit a criminal offence.

7. How will the Church deal with the concern?

How the concern will be dealt with will depend on what it involves. It is likely that further enquiries and/or investigation will be necessary. The concern may be investigated by the Whistleblowing or other designated officer, through the disciplinary process or it may be referred to the police, Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser, a regulator, other agencies, an external auditor or an independent investigator.

Typically, the matters raised may result in one or more of the following:

- (a) no action required
- (b) action being taken under another policy or procedure
- (c) an internal investigation under this policy
- (d) a referral to the police or other relevant statutory body
- (e) referral to the Church Commissioners
- (f) a referral to the church's external auditors
- (g) a Serious Incident Report being made to the Charity Commission (from the point at which the Church is registered with the Charity Commission)
- (h) an independent enquiry.

It may be necessary for you to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings.

The Whistleblowing or other officer will give you feedback on the progress and outcome of any investigation, wherever possible.

8. Allegations that are malicious or known to the individual making them to be false

If it is found that you have knowingly or maliciously made an untrue allegation or you are involved in any way in the malpractice, wrongdoing or illegal acts or omissions, the Church will take appropriate action in accordance with the appropriate policy.

If the suspicions are not confirmed by an investigation, the matter will be closed and a record retained. Any person raising a concern under this policy will not suffer any detriment for raising the concern unless they are found to have made a malicious allegation or otherwise found to have been involved in the activity subject of the concern.

9. Confidentiality: Every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality regarding all those involved in the concern, including the person or persons alleged to have done wrong.

10. Review

This policy is reviewed every three years.