

Responding to Safeguarding Allegations in the Parish of St Mary the Virgin, Stopham: Parish Policy and Guidance

- St Mary the Virgin Church, Stopham recognises that in all matters that involve allegations that someone has, or may have, caused harm to another person, whether child or adult, the welfare of the alleged victim is paramount and is our primary concern. No other consideration, however legitimate or important, can outweigh this primary responsibility.
- We recognise that all allegations that someone may have harmed a child or adult must be taken seriously. In all but the most exceptional circumstances, this will mean letting a safeguarding specialist know about the allegation.
- We recognise that it is not our responsibility to investigate allegations, nor would it be appropriate for us to do so. Our responsibility is to pass allegations on to the person/people who can respond appropriately.
- In the first instance, this will normally involve informing the priest-in-charge and the parish safeguarding officer (unless the allegation is about them).
- We will inform the Diocesan Safeguarding Team upon becoming aware of any allegation that someone in our church community has harmed, or may have harmed, a child or adult (this will normally be done by the priest-in-charge and/or the parish safeguarding officer)
- We recognise that any allegation that a person in a position of responsibility for children (paid or voluntary) has behaved in such a way that indicates they may present a risk to children, will be referred by the Diocesan Safeguarding Team to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). If the alleged behaviour is of a criminal nature, the police will always be involved.
- We recognise that any allegation that a person in a position of responsibility for adults (paid or voluntary) has behaved in such a way that indicates they may present a risk to adults, will be referred by the Diocesan Safeguarding Team with the local Adults Services team manager. If the alleged behaviour is of a criminal nature, the police will always be involved. (The issue of consent are more complex with harm to adults: this will be discussed with the Diocesan Safeguarding Team in individual cases).
- We recognise that human behaviour is complex and many-layered, and that any individual may have motives or intentions that are not apparent, even to those who believe they know them well. Practically speaking, this means that we will commit to ensuring that any allegation that a person has harmed, or may have harmed, a child or adult will be taken seriously as per the above points, even when that person is a highly respected individual whose integrity appears to be without question.
- We recognise that the best way to identify any false or malicious allegation is to treat all allegations the same. A transparent, fair and accountable process that is consistently applied is best for all involved, including those against whom allegations are made.
- We recognise that all involved in situations where allegations are made require pastoral support. In particular, the person making the allegation and their family, and the person against whom the allegation is made and their family, will require skilled and careful pastoral support. Providing that support may be complex, and we recognise and commit to working with the wider Diocese should this situation arise.
- We commit to implementing the advice received or any outcome arising from the above process.