

Whistleblowing Policy

Definition

‘Whistleblowing’ is the name given to the act of the disclosure of information to the relevant authority within an organisation by an individual who knows, or suspects, that another individual or group of individuals within that organisation is responsible for or has taken part in some wrongdoing.

Our commitment

Arborfield and Barkham Churches (ABCh - including St Bartholomew’s Arborfield, St James’ Barkham, Christ Church Wokingham, and Church at the Green) are committed to conducting our business with the highest possible standards of integrity and we expect all staff and volunteers to maintain these high standards. We recognise that clergy, lay staff and volunteers are often the first to become aware of or identify serious disclosures of public interest. Where such matters are raised with us, we are committed to following them up properly, in line with the procedures set out below.

If you have a concern

If you discover information which you believe shows serious malpractice, illegal actions, wrongdoing or unacceptable behaviours or practices by employees, volunteers or members of ABCh 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 one of the following, and could be about things that are happening now, have happened in the past, or are likely to happen in the future:

- 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

It could also be about something not included in the list above.

Who to report to

We hope that, in many cases, you will be able to raise any concerns with the appropriate group or church leader. Please feel free to speak to, or contact, any member of the ABCh staff team.

Any concerns or complaints about a staff member should be addressed to the Rector (or, during an interregnum, the senior member of the clergy team).

If you would like to speak to someone in leadership who is not a staff member, then please contact the Churchwardens (elected lay representatives) at the relevant church.

Concerns or complaints about the Rector should be addressed to the Archdeacon, Stephen Pullin (archdeacon.berkshire@oxford.anglican.org). Please see the Diocese of Oxford's website (www.oxford.anglican.org and search for 'whistleblowing') for further details of how to raise a concern.

Concerns which an individual considers cannot be raised through these channels can be directed to the following (with a request that the individual's identity is withheld from those in the parish):

- the Bishop of Reading, Rt Rev Mary Gregory (0118 984 1216) or
- the Bishop of Oxford, Rt Rev Dr Steven Croft (01865 208222; bishop.oxford@oxford.anglican.org) or,
- for safeguarding issues, the Diocesan Safeguarding Team (01865 208295, safeguardingreferrals@oxford.anglican.org) or, if it is urgent and out of hours, the Diocesan partners [thirtyone:eight](tel:+4420303033111) on +44 (0) 303 033 111.
- The Bishop of Ebbsfleet provides pastoral support to our church and if you would like a pastoral conversation about a concern, his office will be happy to put you in touch with one of his pastoral advisers. You should contact admin@bishopofebbsfleet.org in the first instance.

Completely anonymous disclosures are difficult to investigate, so it needs to be understood that ABCh cannot normally act on anonymous allegations or take formal action in the absence of reasonably substantiated concerns.

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.

Your concerns should be reported as quickly as possible so they can be investigated and any appropriate action taken. Those who raise issues under this provision must have a reasonable belief that it is well founded.

When reporting a disclosure, you should:

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

Following receipt of a disclosure made under this policy and dependent upon its nature, 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
- a combination of the above.

If an investigation is required, confidentiality will be maintained to the extent that this is appropriate and practical in the circumstances. The main exceptions are when the law requires disclosure, or when someone is at risk.

Issues will be investigated as soon as possible and action taken in line with our whistleblowing and disciplinary policies and procedures.

When the matter is investigated internally the investigation will aim to gather all relevant information including relevant documentary evidence or witness statements. The

timeframe of the investigation will be dependent upon the nature of the disclosure. Once the investigation is complete, you will be informed of the outcome in writing, subject to the normal rules on confidentiality of personal information. As already indicated above, if you do not wish to make the disclosure internally or are not satisfied with the outcome of the internal investigation, you should report it direct to the appropriate organisation or regulatory body with authority for that area.

Frivolous, vexatious, malicious, and persistent complaints

We recognise that, sadly, not all complaints are genuine or well-founded.

Frivolous and vexatious complaints include those that are intended only to harass, annoy or frustrate those who are complained about or the institution in which they work.

Malicious complaints are intended and deliberately designed to cause real harm to those who are complained about.

We also recognise that, occasionally and sadly, complainants may be unable to view any perspective other than their own, and so can hold an exaggerated evaluation of the loss that they have suffered and so can reject all but their own estimation of a just settlement. They can be persistent, demanding, rude and frequently threatening.

Persistent complainants can disrupt the work of whole institutions, squandering time, resources and energy, whilst causing severe psychological and emotional harm to the targets of their complaints.

If those who receive complaints have good reason to deem them as frivolous, vexatious, malicious or persistent, these complaints will be disregarded. Appropriate action will be taken if malicious allegations are made.

Any other concerns

If you have any other concerns or questions about the work of ABCh that are not covered by the safeguarding or whistleblowing sections above, please let us know by talking to a member of staff, emailing us on office@abch.org.uk, or calling us on 0118 976 0285.

We appreciate your help in bringing matters to our attention. Thank you.

Display

This policy will be disseminated to the congregations. It will also be available on the church website and a physical copy should also be available in our church buildings and the other places where our churches meet