



Whistleblowing Policy and Procedures

Whistleblowing Policy and Procedures

1. Introduction

1.1 **Godfirst Church Cheltenham** is committed to openness and accountability. In line with this commitment, we expect employees, volunteers, third parties or those contracted to provide services to the Church who have serious concerns about any aspect of our work, to come forward and voice those concerns with the knowledge that, if made in good faith, their action will be viewed positively. This will assist us in addressing the concerns and thereby avoid more serious regulatory breaches or reputational damage.

1.2 Aims of the Policy:

- To encourage Whistleblowers to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible, in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously, investigated as appropriate and their confidentiality respected.
- To provide Whistleblowers with guidance as to how to raise their concerns.
- To reassure Whistleblowers that they can raise concerns without fear of reprisals, even if their concern turns out to be mistaken.

2. Definitions

Public Interest Disclosure: The Public Disclosure Act of 1998 applies to individuals raising genuine concerns relating to some actual or potential danger, fraud, illegal or unethical conduct. The Act provides legal protection to prevent individuals being penalised as a result of making a qualifying disclosure.

Qualifying Disclosure: A Qualifying Disclosure is one in which the reasonable belief of the person making the disclosure, is in the public interest to disclose.

Whistleblower: An individual who raises a qualifying disclosure under this policy.

Whistleblowing: An incident where an individual discloses an alleged wrongdoing under this policy.

Wrongdoing: This includes improper, illegal, or negligent behaviour and should be the underlying consideration when investigating allegations raised.

3. Scope of this Policy

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3.1 The Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure gives staff, volunteers and third parties a clear procedure on how to raise any concerns which do not fall under the remit of the Church Complaints or Grievance policies and procedures. Whistleblowing is not the same as a complaint. It is about raising concerns regarding malpractice or wrongdoing within the Church.

3.2 The Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure may not be used to re-open or review a matter already decided under other policies and procedures.

3.3 The concerns covered by the Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure are:

- actual or suspected criminal offences
- failure to comply with legal obligations
- serious health and safety risks
- damage to the environment
- financial malpractice, impropriety, or fraud
- professional malpractice
- deliberate suppression, aiding, abetting or concealment of any of the above
- other illegal behaviour or serious malpractice which cannot be raised under safeguarding or an alternative policy

4. How to raise a concern

4.1 Are you an employee or volunteer of the Church?

If you are an employee in the first instance, please contact the Senior Pastor to raise your concern. If you are a volunteer in the first instance, please contact the Associate Pastor. If the concerns relate to the Senior Pastor, the concerns should be taken to a Trustee. If the concerns relate to the Associate Pastor, the concerns should be taken to the Senior Pastor.

4.2 Are you a third party to the Church?

In the first instance, please contact your key connection at the Church. If this is not possible, please contact the Church Administrator who will support and guide you through the process.

4.3 In either of the above circumstances Whistleblowers should provide a description of the concerns including where possible, precise information such as dates, names of those involved, meetings or correspondence which have taken place and reference to relevant documents or policies.

4.4 All concerns will be acknowledged, with 14 days, recorded, reviewed and where appropriate investigated.

5. What will happen next?

5.1 A meeting will be arranged to discuss your concerns and you may bring someone with you to this meeting, as long as that person is willing to maintain the confidentiality of your disclosure and any subsequent investigation. The Investigating Officer will be accompanied by a Trustee who will act as a witness to the interview.

5.2 Feedback will then be given as to whether the concern falls within the scope of this policy and how we plan to deal with the matter

5.3 If there is a cause for concern, the designated person will arrange for an investigation. The designated person may appoint another person(s) to undertake the investigation on his/her behalf.

5.4 Where there are existing procedures or policies in place for the investigation of certain allegations, for example those covered by our Fraud and Corruption Policy, the matter will be dealt with in line with that policy. Where there are no existing procedures nor policies in place, the concern will be taken to the Trustees for further consideration, if required they will endeavour to consult a relevant professional organisation to seek advice.

6. Process

6.1 Once a disclosure has been made **Godfirst Church Cheltenham** will,

6.1.1 Make a record of its receipt, and acknowledge this within 14 days.

6.1.2 Carry out a preliminary review as to whether the disclosure falls under the scope of this policy and whether there is prima facie evidence to suggest that it should be investigated and if so, appoint a person to act as the investigating officer.

6.2 Following the preliminary review, the investigating officer will make a preliminary decision and notify the Whistleblower, where it is possible and appropriate to do so, which of the following is applicable:

6.2.1 The disclosure will be investigated formally, or

6.2.2 The disclosure has been investigated and relevant action taken, or

6.2.3 The disclosure has been drawn to the attention of the person who has the authority to act on the matter, or

6.2.4 The disclosure has been dismissed as there are no ground for investigation.

6.3 Where the initial investigation identifies that a formal investigation is required then,

6.3.1 An investigation will be carried out by someone with relevant experience and as speedily as possible, depending on the complexity of the investigation.

6.3.2 The person(s) subject of the disclosure will be informed and advised of any supporting evidence and will have the right to respond during interview.

6.3.3 After the interview the investigator will report their findings with recommendations of further steps to be taken. All reports will be retained for a period of two years.

6.3.4 Consideration will be given as to whether the incident should be reported to the Charity Commission

6.3.5 The Whistleblower will be informed of the progress and timescales of the investigation, where it is appropriate. All information must be kept confidential by the Whistleblower.

6.3.6 If the disclosure is deemed to be malicious or made for personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken against the individual concerned if they are staff or volunteers.

7. If the Whistleblower is not satisfied

7.1 **Godfirst Church Cheltenham** will deal with all concerns raised fairly and in an appropriate manner.

7.2 The Whistleblower may not ask for a review of any decision but if they have concerns about the ways in which their concern has been handled, they may contact an independent Whistleblowing charity, using the details at the end of this Policy.

8. External Disclosures

8.1 This policy is designed to provide an internal mechanism for reporting any concerns r.e. wrongdoing at **Godfirst Church Cheltenham**. In most cases contacting anyone externally is likely to be unnecessary.

8.2 Nothing in this policy precludes an individual from reporting a suspected crime to the police nor is it intended to remove any rights under the Public Disclosure Act of 1998.

9. Confidentiality

9.1 Where possible, the identity of the Whistleblower will be protected. There may be circumstances, however, where it will not be possible to proceed without revealing the Whistleblower's identity, for example if the Whistleblower's evidence is needed in the investigatory process, at a disciplinary or court hearing. Should this be the case, the matter will be discussed with the Whistleblower at the earliest opportunity, and they will have the opportunity to withdraw the disclosure if by continuing with the investigation their identity would be revealed to the subject of the disclosure.

9.2 Note that the need for confidentiality may prevent the designated person from providing the specific details of the investigation or actions taken, to the Whistleblower.

9.3 The Whistleblower should treat any information about the investigation as confidential.

9.4 Concerns raised anonymously will be dealt with at the discretion of the charity

10. Protection of Whistleblowers

10.1 Individuals who raise genuinely held concerns in good faith under this procedure will not be dismissed or subjected to any detriment as a result of such action, even if they turn out to be mistaken. Detriment includes unwarranted disciplinary action or victimisation.

10.2 If a Whistleblower believes that he/she has suffered any such treatment because they have raised concerns under this policy, he/she should raise the matter with the Trustees in the first instance who will work with the interest of all parties to seek resolution, and this may include mediation and following the informal grievance procedure.

10.3 Any staff member/volunteer who victimises or retaliates against those who have raised concerns under this policy will be subject to disciplinary action.

11. Support and Advice

11.1 If a member of staff needs independent advice about a whistleblowing issue, they can contact <https://protect-advice.org.uk> the independent whistleblowing charity, for more information.

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11.2 If you are concerned about suspected wrongdoing, danger or risk to children at **Godfirst Church Cheltenham**, which affect the rights and interest of the children, you may wish to contact the Children's Commissioner. If this is a safeguarding concern please refer our Safeguarding Policy.