

Introduction

Hope Church recognises the importance of listening to all members of our church community, including those who find it hard to make their voices heard and those who hold contrary views to the church leadership. The trustees will proactively seek the views of all who engage with the church in a variety of ways; however, we also recognise the importance of responding well when concerns, criticisms or complaints are raised with us.

It is our hope that the majority of concerns that do not meet the statutory thresholds for referral to external agencies can be resolved informally through constructive discussion and in line with Matthew 18: 15-35, however, we recognise that for a variety of reasons, resolution via such dialogue will not always be possible or appropriate. This procedure seeks to establish a robust process for dealing with complaints or concerns that have not or cannot be resolved through informal discussion.

Use of informal discussion (as described above) is not a prerequisite for initiating the formal complaint process. Not all complaints will involve a safeguarding element. The same process will be followed for all complaints.

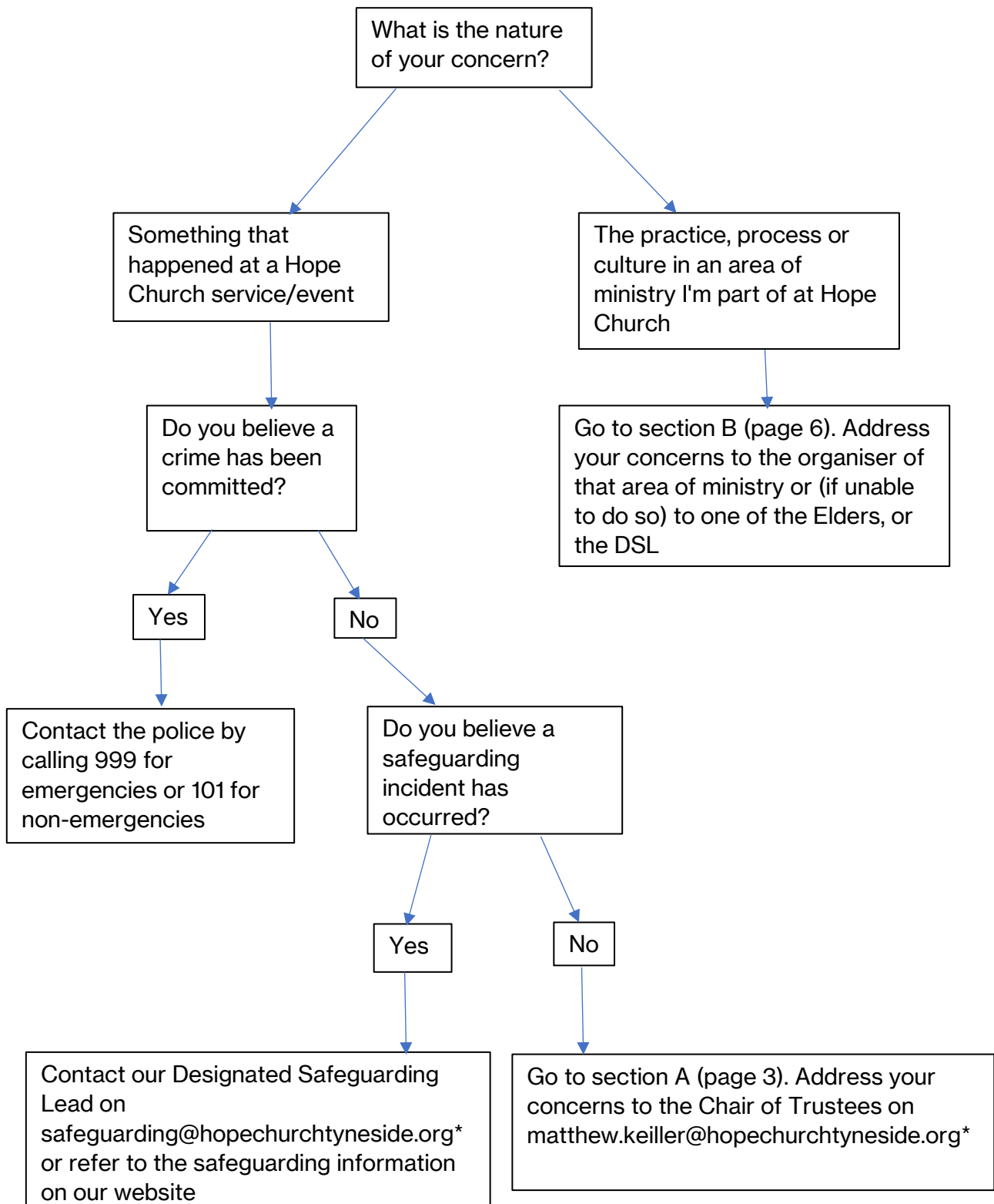
The following information forms sections 15 and 16 of our Safeguarding Policy. It is set out here to provide easier access to this information, in particular for those whose concerns do not include a safeguarding element. Section 15 is aimed at anyone who wishes to raise concerns about something that has taken place at a Hope Church service or event. Section 16 is primarily for staff or volunteers at Hope Church who have concerns about practice, process or culture in any of our areas of ministry.

If you believe your concerns may include a safeguarding element, please refer to the safeguarding information on our website or contact our Designated Safeguarding Lead (Jackie Mitchell) on safeguarding@hopechurchtyneside.org (please remember that e-mail is NOT secure so confidential or sensitive data should not be included).

If you believe that a crime has been committed, please do not follow this procedure, but contact the police.

PLEASE NOTE: Hope Church is the name of our church family, under which all our services and activities take place. The Walkergate Trust (registered charity 1182145) is the legal entity to which Hope Church belongs and represents Hope Church in legal and financial matters. For simplicity the name Hope Church has been used throughout this document; any reference to Hope Church in a formal or legal capacity can be understood to mean that The Walkergate Trust will be acting on behalf of the church family.

Whom should I contact to make a formal complaint?



* please remember that e-mail is NOT secure so confidential or sensitive data should not be included

SECTION A: Complaints and concerns (section 15 of Hope Church Safeguarding Policy)

Complaints log

15.1. Hope Church will maintain a log of all complaints (See appendix F of the Safeguarding Policy)

Anonymous complaints and media campaigns (including social media)

15.2. Complaints that are made anonymously cannot be handled in the usual way and will generally be filed without full investigation.

15.3. Complaints that request a level of confidentiality that would compromise the integrity of an investigation, or its outcome will not be investigated, but may be considered in general terms. They will generally be filed without full investigation

15.4. Hope Church will not be obliged to respond to complaints made in a public space such as social media or other online or in-print publications. All complaints should be addressed to Hope Church directly using this complaints process

15.5. Although anonymous complaints cannot, by definition, be handled in the usual way, Hope Church will:

15.5.1. Log the complaints

15.5.2. Seek to establish whether any pattern or consistency can be identified

15.5.3. Consider whether any form of investigation or action can and should be taken

External investigations

15.6. Concerns, complaints, and allegations will generally be investigated internally

15.7. In exceptional circumstances such as where Hope Church has concerns about the independence or competence of staff, or their capacity to conduct a timely investigation, we will consider whether it is appropriate to involve an independent external individual or organisation to assist with the investigation

15.8. Unless directed by a statutory or regulatory body to involve an independent, external body, Hope Church will make such decisions. Advice can be sought from CSS or other sources, including appropriate AMiE personnel, but this decision rests solely in the hands of Hope Church.

Making a complaint

15.9. Complaints should be addressed to the Chair of Trustees, Matthew Keiller, on matthew.keiller@hopechurchtyneside.org (please remember that e-mail is NOT secure so confidential or sensitive data should not be included).

15.10. The details will be entered into the complaints log and progress to conclusion will be tracked

15.11. The Chair of Trustees will inform the other Trustees and initial plan of action will be developed

15.12. Consideration will be given to whether a Serious Incident Report to the appropriate charity regulator is required

15.13. An Investigating Officer(s) will be identified

Preliminary actions

15.14. The Trustees or the Investigating Officer may consult with CSS, who will provide independent support and advice to ensure transparency

15.15. The Investigating Officer will acknowledge receipt of the complaint and will notify the complainants of the initial plan of action which will include:

15.15.1. Discussing the complaint with the complainants to confirm and clarify the details of the complaint

15.15.2. Details of the complaint process and of key contacts will be provided to the complainants

15.15.3. The Investigating Officer will establish whether the complainants wish to start the process at stage 1 (informal resolution) or stage 2 (formal investigation)

15.15.4. A detailed investigation plan will be developed by the Investigating Officer and signed off by the Trustees

Stage 1 - Informal resolution

15.16. Where possible, Hope Church prefers to commence at this stage; believing this to be best aligned to the biblical principles, however, this will be a decision for the complainants, and if they request commencement at stage 2, that decision will be fully respected by the church

15.17. The Investigating Officer, supported by a note-taker if required will arrange to discuss the matter with the complainants

15.18. The aim at this stage is to establish whether agreement can be reached about action that is required

15.19. Hope Church will make a written record of the discussion that includes:

15.19.1. The key points discussed, and views expressed

15.19.2. Areas of agreement

15.19.3. Areas of disagreement

15.19.4. Conclusions and actions agreed

15.20. A copy of the written record of the meeting will be provided to the complainants who will have opportunity to request amendments or clarification

15.21. Once agreed, the complainants will be asked to confirm the accuracy of the notes of the discussion

If resolution has been agreed

15.22. Once Hope Church have completed the agreed actions, they will notify the complainants of the action taken

15.23. The complainants will be asked to confirm that they are happy that the matter has been addressed

15.24. The complaints log will be updated, and the notes will be stored securely

If resolution has not been agreed

15.25. A record of the closing position of the informal stage will be agreed between these complainants and the Investigating Officer. This will include any progress made and actions agreed / completed and the issues that could not be resolved

15.26. The closing report will be signed off by the Trustees, who will escalate the matter to the formal stage

Stage 2 - Formal investigation

15.27. Complaints at the formal stage will be reviewed by the Trustees to establish whether there are sufficient grounds for a full investigation

15.28. If a full investigation is required / justified, this will be agreed and authorised

15.29. The "Investigating Officer" for this stage will be agreed, if different from 15.13.

15.30. An investigation plan will be developed and communicated to the complainants

15.31. The matter will be thoroughly investigated, and a final (Stage 2) report will be delivered to the Trustees for sign off

15.32. Once signed off, the outcome will be communicated to the complainants

15.32.1. The complainants will be notified of their right of appeal and of the process and timescales for doing so

15.33. All records will be stored confidentially

Stage 3 - Appeal

15.34. If the complainants believe that the process or findings of the formal investigation is incorrect, they can raise their concerns using the appeal process

15.35. The complainant must clearly outline the basis of the appeal and the justification for appealing the process and / or outcome.

15.36. The Trustees will consider the grounds of appeal and decide whether the appeal is justified

15.37. The appeal will be conducted by a suitably skilled individual(s) who were not part of the stage 2 investigation (excluding the sign off process) and who are not involved in the complaint

15.38. An appeal report will be produced and submitted to the trustees (or the subgroup thereof) for final sign-off

15.39. The complainants will be notified of the outcome of the appeal and their options of further action (e.g., referral to the Charity regulator, the police, or the Local Authority etc) will be provided.

15.40. The process will be reviewed to identify lessons that can be learned

SECTION B: Concerns about practice and whistleblowing (section 16 of Hope Church Safeguarding Policy)

Hope Church strives to create an environment that is open, transparent, and accountable. We want to listen and respond well to any concerns raised by our staff and volunteers.

16.1. Staff and volunteers are encouraged to raise concerns about process, practice, or culture with the ministry team leader

16.1.1. If they do not feel able to do so, or if they feel that concerns raised have not been given due consideration, they can be raised with the Designated Safeguarding Lead, or with one of the Elders

16.2. The concerns will be carefully considered, and a formal response will be provided to the individual explaining the decision. The examination of the concerns raised may conclude:

16.2.1. The concerns are wholly or partially valid and require corrective action

16.2.2. That the concerns did not take account of all relevant factors, and no further action is required

16.2.3. That the concerns were invalid and have been dismissed

16.3. If the complainant is not satisfied with the response, they should formally raise the matter with the Safeguarding Trustee or the Chair of Trustees, explaining their concerns about the adequacy of the initial response. Details of how this can be done will be communicated at the same time as the initial response

16.4. Once the Trustees have considered the matter, they will formally respond to the complainant in writing, explaining their findings and the rationale for their decision

16.4.1. Details of how to raise the complaint externally will also be provided as part of the response

16.4.2. This will include contacting the Charity Commission, details of the NSPCC whistleblowing helpline and any other measures that the trustees wish to offer

AMiE Discipline Process for Licensed Clergy

In addition to the procedures outlined in Section B, any five people on the Electoral Roll of an AMiE Member Church, or any two licensed clergy of the Diocese, may bring a complaint against a licensed Minister of a Member Church concerning conduct which is a breach of doctrine and/or a breach of professional standards, and/or a breach of safeguarding policies.

Should you wish to make a complaint in this way, please refer to *Canon 10: Discipline of Clergy and Bishops* in the AMiE Constitution and Canons, which can be found on the AMiE website (<https://www.anglicanmissioninengland.org/resources/constitution-and-canons/>)