

What happens when an offender wants to worship at your church?

The Diocesan Safeguarding Team have devised a fact sheet for a five-step process to follow when an individual who has a sex offence (or other significant criminal record) wishes to worship in your church; including how this may be agreed to and carefully supported and managed.

An individual can become known in a number of ways:

- The individual may offer this information willingly.
- The individual may have an allegation raised against them which the Diocese (and/or local church) knows about already, either because it arose within the church or because statutory authorities informed us of it.
- Where an individual is convicted or receives a caution the offence may be disclosed to the church or Diocesan Safeguarding Team under the police's public protection arrangements.
- Where information becomes known locally, this must be reported to the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser as an urgent priority.

The process will then be managed in accordance with the National Church's Practice Guidance.

The Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser must be advised / consulted if it becomes known a person is attending or wishes to attend a church who it is believed has a conviction or other information indicating they may pose a risk.

Step One

The Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser will gather as much information as possible from the individual, the church, and any of the statutory services involved (for example the police, probation, social care etc.) and complete a Risk Assessment which reviews what would be needed in a church setting for the individual concerned; and what boundaries, service attendance, other attendance and support would be required.

Under no circumstances should a church/benefice conduct a Risk Assessment on their own.

Step Two

Once a Risk Assessment has been carried out the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser will be in touch with the church to discuss with the incumbent in confidence whether this is potentially something that the church is able to take on and manage and to talk through any concerns or questions.

If it is felt the church could support an individual the incumbent and Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser will identify a small group of appropriate people locally to form a reference group, so that there is shared management and support in place. The group may typically involve the incumbent, a churchwarden, nominated person, someone designated to provide pastoral support, leader of any agreed activities and so on.

Step Three

The final step will be for the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser and the incumbent (and normally a nominated person and/or churchwarden will also be present) to meet the individual and put in place an Agreement which the individual will sign and which will detail what they are and are not allowed to do or attend. The Agreement will also include dates for review.

An offender may not attend the identified church until the Agreement is signed. Agreements include things such as being clear the individual may not take up a position of trust, what activities they may attend and so on. Each Agreement is tailor-made for the situation and context.

Step Four

The Reference Group maintains oversight of the Agreement and can support the individual. Any concerns, queries or need for further advice can be sought from the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser at any time. Any member of a Reference Group can report any breach of the Agreement.

Step Five

Most importantly the Agreement will be reviewed at regular intervals. All reviews are co-ordinated and led by the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser in consultation with the incumbent. Reviews are carried out at least annually, but can also happen if new information comes to light, if circumstances change, where there is a breach of an agreement or if other concerns are expressed about risk management. Review meetings will also check out what is working well, and what support has been helpful.



Agreements don't end when an individual moves away or stops attending a church, so the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser needs to be kept up to date with any changes so that these can be reported to any statutory bodies involved.

Further information and resources

Practice Guidance: 'Responding to, assessing and managing safeguarding concerns or allegations against Church Officers'

Click on www.churchofengland.org/more/safeguarding#na and scroll down the page.

For further advice contact the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser

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