



A Blessing to Cuckfield

The Parochial Church Council of Holy Trinity Cuckfield
UK Registered Charity No. 1131432

Bullying and Harassment: PCC Policy Guidelines

This policy is designed to underwrite compliance with the Church of England's safeguarding regime; UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR); the Data Protection Act 2018; the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations (PECR); the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025; applicable Church of England guidance; charity law obligations; and relevant social media policy aspects of the Online Safety Act 2025.

Adopted by: The Parochial Church Council (PCC) of Holy Trinity Church Cuckfield
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Policy owner: PCC/PCC Secretary

1. Purpose

These guidelines are adopted by the Parochial Church Council ('the PCC') to promote a healthy, respectful and Christ-centred church environment in which all people are treated with dignity and care.

The PCC is committed to ensuring that bullying, harassment, intimidation and abusive behaviour are not tolerated within any aspect of parish life, whether involving clergy, employees, volunteers, church officers, contractors, or members of the congregation.

2. Policy Scope

These guidelines apply to conduct occurring during worship and church activities; in meetings and governance processes; in pastoral relationships; in electronic communications, including email, messaging applications, and social media; in parish employment situations; and in any context connected with the life of the parish, including social, fundraising other charitable or mission based activities, .

The PCC recognises that churches depend heavily upon trust, goodwill and voluntary service, and that misuse of authority or influence can cause significant personal, spiritual and communal harm.

3. Informing Christian Principles

The PCC affirms that all people are made in the image of God and should be treated with dignity; courtesy; honesty; patience; fairness; and compassion.

Strong disagreement, robust discussion and constructive challenge may sometimes be necessary in church life. However, behaviour becomes unacceptable where it humiliates, intimidates, demeans, isolates or undermines another person.

4. The Bullying and Harassment Context

The PCC recognises that bullying and harassment can occur openly or subtly; intentionally or unintentionally; between individuals of differing authority; or between peers. The impact of behaviour on the recipient is an important consideration.

5. What Is Bullying?

Bullying is behaviour which misuses power or influence and which a reasonable person would recognise as likely to offend; intimidate; humiliate; isolate; undermine; or cause distress.

Bullying is often persistent and repeated, though a single serious incident may also amount to bullying or misconduct.

Examples may include: repeated personal criticism or belittling; shouting, aggressive behaviour or intimidation; unjustifiable exclusion of individuals from meetings or parish activities; spreading rumours or gossip; humiliating someone publicly; persistent undermining of competence or ministry; unreasonable demands or workloads; hostile or abusive emails or messages; threats relating to role, reputation or position; deliberate withholding of information; aggressive physical behaviour or invasion of personal space.

Firm leadership, reasonable accountability, or constructive criticism given respectfully and proportionately do not in themselves constitute bullying.

6. What Is Harassment?

Harassment is unwanted conduct which violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading or offensive environment.

Harassment may relate to age; disability; race or ethnicity; sex; sexual orientation; gender reassignment; marriage or civil partnership; pregnancy or maternity; religion or belief; theology or church tradition; or any other protected characteristic.

Harassment may consist of a single serious incident or repeated behaviour.

7. Expectations of Behaviour

All clergy, PCC members, churchwardens, employees, volunteers and ministry leaders are expected to model respectful and Christ-like behaviour; listen courteously to differing views; avoid aggressive or demeaning language; exercise authority responsibly; address conflict constructively; maintain appropriate boundaries; and contribute to a culture of mutual care and accountability.

Care should be exercised by those holding leadership or pastoral responsibility, recognising that power imbalances can make others vulnerable to pressure or intimidation.

8. Electronic Communications and Social Media

Bullying or harassment may occur through email; WhatsApp or messaging groups; social media; online meetings; or other electronic communications.

Church-related communications should always remain respectful and proportionate.

The following are inappropriate: hostile or humiliating messages; repeated criticism copied widely to others; exclusion from essential communications; inflammatory or accusatory online exchanges; public disparagement of individuals; or misuse of parish communication platforms.

The PCC expects all electronic communications connected with parish life to be conducted respectfully, proportionately and in good faith. Email, messaging applications and social media must not be used to escalate conflict, create unnecessary 'communication flares', or place individuals under collective pressure. This includes copying or forwarding correspondence to additional recipients to reinforce a personal position, rally support, embarrass another person, or intensify disagreement. Care should be taken to communicate directly, calmly and appropriately, limiting circulation to those who genuinely need to be involved. Concerns or disagreements should wherever possible be addressed through constructive conversation and established church processes rather than through public or cumulative electronic exchanges.

The PCC has adopted an additional policy to reflect the specific challenges of social media use and behaviour.

9. Reporting Concerns

Anyone who believes they have experienced bullying or harassment is encouraged to seek support and report concerns at an early stage.

Concerns may be raised with the incumbent, a churchwarden, the PCC safeguarding officer, or another appropriate diocesan officer.

Where concerns involve safeguarding matters, these must be referred in accordance with diocesan safeguarding procedures.

No person should be disadvantaged or victimised for raising a genuine concern in good faith.

10. Informal Resolution

Where appropriate and safe, concerns should initially be addressed informally.

This may include a respectful conversation; facilitated discussion; mediation; restorative approaches; or clarification of expectations and boundaries.

Informal resolution will not always be appropriate, especially where there is a serious imbalance of power; behaviour is severe or persistent; safeguarding concerns arise; or previous attempts have failed.

11. Formal Action

Where informal approaches are unsuccessful or inappropriate, formal action may be necessary.

Depending upon the circumstances, this may involve diocesan grievance procedures; employment procedures; the Clergy Conduct Measure; safeguarding procedures; or other disciplinary or governance processes.

The PCC will cooperate fully with diocesan advice and procedures.

12. Confidentiality

Concerns relating to bullying or harassment will be handled as sensitively and confidentially as possible. Information will be shared only where necessary: to investigate concerns properly; to protect individuals; to comply with safeguarding or legal obligations; or to implement appropriate action.

Absolute confidentiality cannot always be guaranteed where risk, safeguarding or legal duties arise.

13. Support

The PCC recognises that bullying and harassment can have serious emotional, psychological and spiritual consequences.

Appropriate support may include pastoral support; mediation; counselling; diocesan support services; occupational health support; or external professional advice.

Support should be available both to those raising concerns and to those against whom concerns are made.

14. Malicious or False Allegations

While the fact that a complaint is not upheld does not in itself mean that it was made maliciously, false or malicious allegations are serious matters and may themselves result in disciplinary or legal consequences.

15. PCC Responsibilities

The PCC will promote a culture of dignity and respect; ensure these guidelines are communicated clearly; respond promptly and appropriately to concerns; seek diocesan advice where necessary; ensure safeguarding obligations are met; and review these guidelines periodically.

The PCC will also encourage appropriate training for clergy, church officers and volunteers in healthy leadership; safeguarding; conflict resolution; and respectful communication.

16. Related Policies

These guidelines should be read alongside: the parish safeguarding policy; diocesan safeguarding procedures; social media and communications policies; GDPR policy and regulations; grievance or disciplinary procedures where applicable; and relevant Church of England guidance.

17. Review

These guidelines shall be reviewed by the PCC every three years, or sooner if required by changes in legislation, diocesan policy or parish circumstances.