Safeguarding Social Media and Online activities: A Policy for the Diocese of Lichfield, its churches and Parishes.

Contents

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1. Introduction and context

1.1 This policy was written by Neil Spiring (Diocese Safeguarding Advisor), with consultation being provided by the former Diocesan Online Pastor Rosalind Clarke and revisions by her successor, the Diocesan Online Enabler Tamar Willoughby. As such, it pulls in relevant parts of pre-existing Online Pastor's Policy (written by Rosalind Clarke and Kim Hodgkins) and seeks more importantly to integrate the learning and evidence from the development of these Online roles.

1.2 This policy recognises that the Christian faith has communication (written or spoken) at its heart and that electronic communications is now a central part of everyday life. In this sense it has a vital role in updating, co-ordinating and improving the experiences of Christian groups (such as youth groups, community care groups, house groups and prayer ministry). It is also recognised that with this comes risk, and it is in this document that we will explore how this risk can be managed; what can, should (and how it should), be done with regards church life online in the Diocese and parishes of Lichfield.

1.3 This is an open document to be developed and improved over time by the amendment and contributions of our stakeholders in the Diocese and beyond. We welcome suggestions, debate and engagement in development to ensure organic improvement. Should you have any queries, ideas, suggestions or additions relating to this or any other Diocese Safeguarding Policy we would like to hear from you.

Neil Spiring – Diocese Safeguarding Advisor. 17/09/2018

2. Working Principles of this Policy

2.1 Safeguarding vulnerable adults, children and young people is always the primary concern and responsibility of all those associated with church activity. As a consequence, safeguarding is everyone's concern, rather than one person's.

2.2 As a result of the above we commit to the principle of 'No More Secrets' and will be transparent in our responsibilities, interests, behaviours and concerns. We will be open to scrutiny without defence and admit mistakes openly. We will challenge each other in appropriate ways and work together to ensure we consider all issues from as wide a range of perspectives and views as possible. We will be forgiving but hold ourselves and others to account.

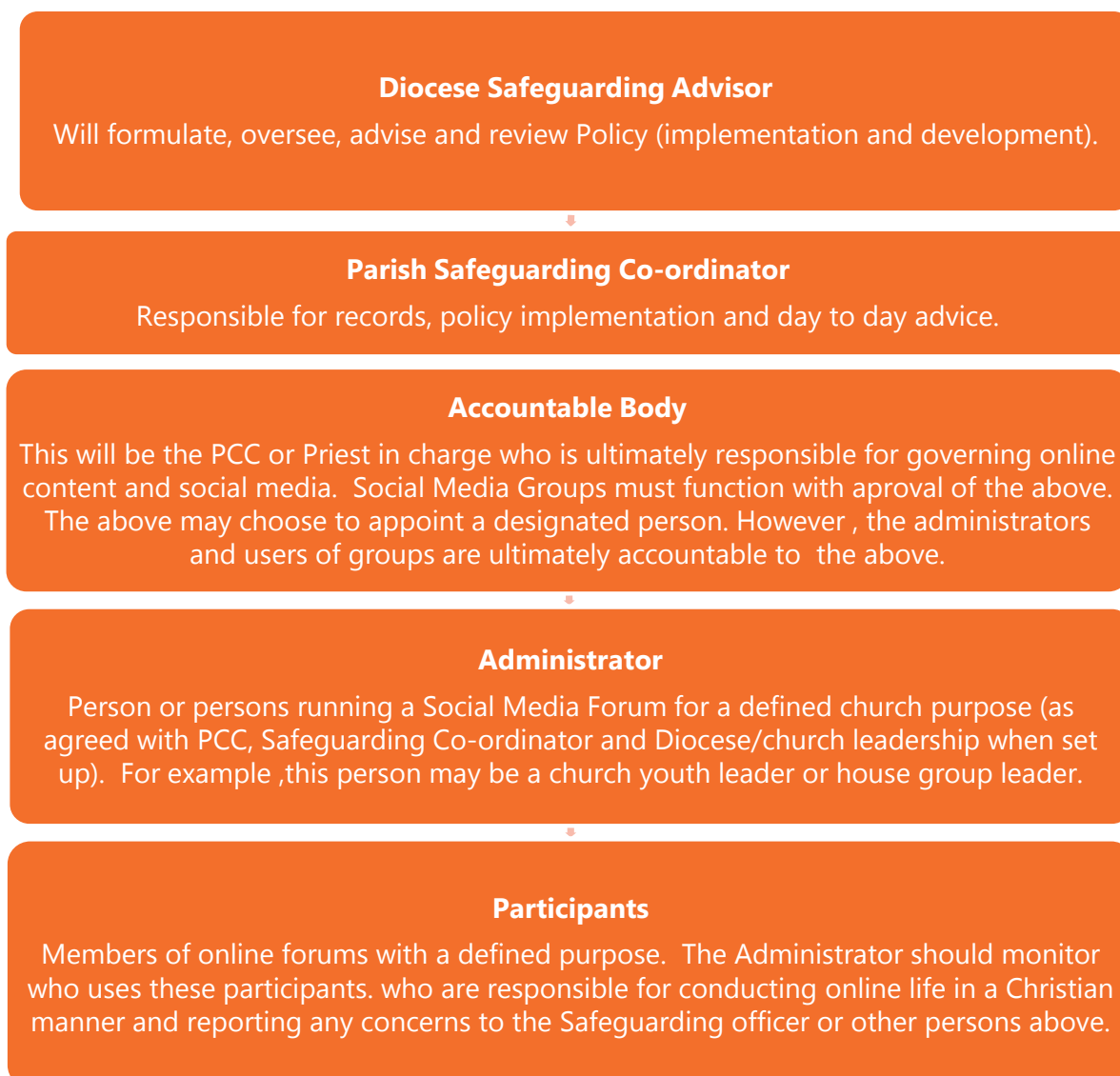# 3. Who is covered by this policy?

3.1 Any person undertaking activity relating to online and social media, whether lay or ordained; licensed/PtO or not; through an account belonging to a Church, Chaplaincy or Fresh

Expression which is part of Lichfield Diocese or in a manner that could be understood to be posted as a representative of such is subject to this policy, along with the Diocesan safeguarding policies for children and vulnerable adults, and national Church policies. This policy is specific to social media and online material and any issues not covered within it relating to this type of activity should be addressed to the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor on a case by case basis.

4. Structure for ensuring Safety on Social Media

The persons shown in the structure below are referred to throughout this document:

Diocese Safeguarding Advisor

Will formulate, oversee, advise and review Policy (implementation and development).

Parish Safeguarding Co-ordinator

Responsible for records, policy implementation and day to day advice.

Accountable Body

This will be the PCC or Priest in charge who is ultimately responsible for governing online content and social media. Social Media Groups must function with aproval of the above. The above may choose to appoint a designated person. However , the administrators and users of groups are ultimately accountable to the above.

Administrator

Person or persons running a Social Media Forum for a defined church purpose (as agreed with PCC, Safeguarding Co-ordinator and Diocese/church leadership when set up). For example ,this person may be a church youth leader or house group leader.

Participants

Members of online forums with a defined purpose. The Administrator should monitor who uses these participants. who are responsible for conducting online life in a Christian manner and reporting any concerns to the Safeguarding officer or other persons above.

5. Transparency and social media accounts

5.1 Personal social media accounts should be kept distinct from accounts relating to church roles and responsibilities, and should be clearly labelled so that the views expressed cannot be taken to represent those of the Diocese or parish. Nonetheless, church leaders administering online duties for the church should ensure that their personal social media use is conducted in a manner consistent with their Christian character.

5.2 Online social media accounts relating to church roles and responsibilities should all be administered with oversight. Administrators will ensure they have login and password details for full access at any time and there should be a process in place to ensure a second person has also these (in order to cover absence, illness etc). Administrators should be DBS checked appropriately and have completed safeguarding training to C2 level. _This person shall be referred to as Administrator throughout this document but may be one of the persons listed above._

5.3 The Administrator should check all of the church social media accounts regularly and keep a log. Any concerns should be raised with the Parish Safeguarding Co-ordinator and the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor as appropriate. Screenshots of any concerns are to be taken and retained by the Safeguarding Co-ordinator where they will be retained on file for three years in case they need to be later referenced.

5.4 Administrators will regulate membership, behaviour, content and undertake other functions identified to this role in line with this policy.

6. Social Media types and parameters

6.1 The church group will only use clearly labelled groups/forums to facilitate communication between members. Public pages (eg church websites or church Facebook pages or groups), may be used to communicate with the church and the wider community. Secret groups will not be permitted at any time or in any circumstance.

6.2 Consideration will be given to the purpose of social media. For example, is it intended for private/closed group discussion within a group or will it be utilised for general public engagement? The Administrator should give consideration to the risks and requirements of managing a platform based on the above factors; particularly how the safety of vulnerable users can be maintained.

6.3 Administrators should give consideration to the social media platform being used and its potential risks. For example some platforms do not retain a log of past entries and will be harder to police. The suitability of any given platform will likely depend on its intended

audience and use. This should be assessed on a case by case basis using a risk assessment if appropriate.

6.4 The church accepts the suitability of closed group/forum accounts of providers such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for use with groups where those under 18 are involved. Other platforms such as WhatsApp may be used following proper consideration of risks and restrictions).

6.5 The church accepts the suitability of closed group/forum accounts of WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for use with groups where those aged over 18 are involved. Other platforms may be used following proper consideration of risks. If in doubt, consult with Diocese communication and safeguarding officers.

7. Online Behaviour of participants

7.1 Being online is an extension of church life and the expectations of the parishioner remain as high in this context as in any other. In general those engaging online will conduct themselves in a Christian manner and demonstrate these values at all times. In particular:

7.2 Language: there must be no swearing or offensive language.

7.3 Respect: those participating will give space to others when communicating and will not say anything designed to cause upset or distress to others. Individuals will not engage in online disputes and arguments contrary to group harmony or that may cause wider offence and distress.

7.4 Equity: unkind and inappropriate reference to someone's race, gender, disability, religion or other similar demographic factor will not be tolerated and will result in an offline discussion in line with equal opportunities and other policy processes.

7.4 Rules and boundaries: participants will respect all local group rules in addition to all those points made in this policy. This will be monitored by the Administrator. The Administrator will act in accordance with direction of their Accountable Body.

7.5 Participants will respect and act upon any direction provide by the Administrator.

7.6 Persons refusing to respond to direction and instruction are subject to removal from the group and may be cautioned offline in relation to their behaviour.

7.7 Offensive, sexual or unChristian photos, files and attachments will not be posted by members. Administrators should also risk assess the users involved to see if attachments, files or photos are appropriate to be posted.

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7.8 The use of web cameras and livestreaming videos must not be offensive, sexual or unChristian. Administrators should consider if use of cameras, videos or livestreams are appropriate to any forum being operated, by assessing the associated risks to users.

7.9 Offline meetings should not be arranged online.

7.10 In some cases members of groups may have offline friendships that are not connected to their involvement in a church forum. In such cases any communication relating to that friendship should not be made on a social media group organised and connected with the church.

7.12 Users will undertake to keep themselves safe online – not engaging in inappropriate discussion, language or behaviour and reporting any person that approaches them in such a way to the Administrator, their vicar or another appropriate designated person.

8. Reporting Online Safeguarding Concerns

8.1 This policy deals with how to manage Safeguarding in an online context but does not seek to define safeguarding of adults or children. ***What Constitutes abuse in the real world constitutes abuse in the virtual world*** and persons using this policy should ensure they are fully aware of and trained in the use of all church safeguarding policies and procedures defined and discussed in other local and national policies.

8.2 Administrators and others with concern should take screenshots of any concerning content. These should be stored safely, away from social media, and should be shared with the Parish Safeguarding Coordinator and Diocese Safeguarding Advisor. A record of all incidents and actions taken should be kept.

8.3 The Administrator and Safeguarding Co-ordinator should keep a log of all incidents and appropriate action taken to minimise immediate risk.

8.4 Concerns should be reported to the Diocese Safeguarding Advisor as a safeguarding referral (in line with the principle that abuse is abuse – online or offline).

8.5 Administrators and participants should ensure that appropriate boundaries are maintained between their work, participation and their personal life when interacting with each other online and offline. This should be specifically monitored where children or vulnerable adults are participating.

8.6 Images and videos must not be posted online unless permission has been given from all those identifiable in the photograph or video. Consideration needs to be given to how long this material once posted will remain available.

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8.7 Online communication should normally take place in public forums. However, if in rare circumstance the use of direct messaging is necessary (for example if an online member is reporting abuse to the Administrator or making a disclosure, or should the Administrator need to discuss a member's behaviour with them) it must be made clear that all conversations may be monitored and that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

8.8 The Administer should provide safe spaces online, being particularly alert to bullying, trolling, grooming, sexting and other forms of internet abuse. Where necessary, the Administrator can and should exclude and report anyone engaging in such practices.

8.9 Bullying, trolling, grooming, sexting and other forms of internet abuse should be reported to the Parish Safeguarding Co-ordinator who in turn **will refer** as a safeguarding referral to the Diocese Safeguarding Advisor. This policy makes no distinction between online abuse and real world abuse. Information will be shared with the Police and Social Services as appropriate.

8.10 If it is necessary for an Administrator to meet offline and face-to-face due to behaviour or disclosure meetings should be in in a safe place and should involve at least two persons from the list in section 4 of this policy.

8.11 Under-18s should be accompanied by a parent/guardian/youth worker/other responsible adult for any face-to-face meeting. All such meetings should be discussed in advance with and between the Administrator, responsible body and Parish Safeguarding Co-ordinator. Such meetings should be discussed with the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor.

8.12 All allegations of abuse or other concerning information should be immediately reported to the Diocese Safeguarding Advisor and Social Services' First Response team or the Police as appropriate.

8.12 Administrators should take and share screenshots of any concerning content and share with the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor, Parish Safeguarding Co-ordinator and any statutory services involved.

8.13 The parish should review all online groups at least annually. This meeting as a minimum should involve all Administrators and the Parish Safeguarding Co-ordinator.

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