

COMPLAINTS HANDLING AND REPORTING POLICY FOR THE CARE, PROTECTION AND SAFETY OF CHILDREN AND ADULTS AT RISK

The safeguarding of children, young people and adults at risk, is a collective responsibility incumbent on all who are part of the St Michael's Berwick. It is therefore a responsibility to be taken up by all Church personnel.

St Michael's Berwick has a zero tolerance to all forms of abuse and inappropriate behaviour which comes in many forms.

The Diocese of Sale's Strategic Plan for Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk, articulates that approach.

There are four components:

1. **Safe People** is about changing culture through training, skills and staffing.

Training both face to face and online is aimed at changing the overall culture around safeguarding and developing awareness of inappropriate behaviour and understanding the signs of abuse. It also includes training on how to respond to and report abuse.

2. **Safe Practices** is about policies, practice and the operational model.

It includes prevention strategies such as Codes of Conduct, Risk assessments, Guidelines, Policies and Procedures, of which this document is part of.

3. **Safe Places** is about managing risks.

It includes Guidelines in managing risks in the physical locations of parish ministry and in the online environment.

4. **Safe Data and Information** is about information management.

RISK ASSESSMENT

It includes the provision of robust, secure and confidential management of information which supports the reporting of abuse in all its forms, be it recording concerns, observations, allegations, formal complaints and any other matters.

This Complaints Handling and Reporting Policy encompasses both the components of 'Safe Practices' as well as 'Safe Data and Information'. It aims to address the requirements of the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (NCSS) Standard 6, 'Effective complaints management' in its entirety.

The audience for this Policy are all Church personnel, volunteers so that they understand how complaints are handled. Risk assessments are carried out by Parish Priest of St Michael's Berwick or Safeguarding Officer or a Leader of a group, the Diocesan Professional Standards Officer in consultation with the Bishop, Head of Entity and the Professional Standards Committee on any complaint that has been made to ensure that the factors that have brought about the incident have been mitigated.

According to the NCSS Implementation Guide 2019:

Risk assessments should be conducted once an allegation has been made, during an investigation and at the end of the investigation so that a final decision can be made regarding what action, if any, needs to be taken regarding the respondent to address any risk to:

- the child(ren);
- other children with whom the respondent may have contact;
- the respondent; and
- the proper investigation of the complaint. (NCSS Implementation Guide, 2019, p.46).

CONCLUSION TO RISK ASSESSMENT

St Michael's Berwick with consultation of Diocesan Professional Standards Office will conduct risk assessments initially, periodically and after the final decision to ensure that the risks to children and adults at risk are mitigated, if not completely eliminated.

A principle applicable during the process in which the complaint is being investigated is that the respondent will be stood down from their role or ministry in the Church and information is shared with relevant personnel on a need to know basis.

As per best practice risk management, the risk owner for any risk in relation to an allegation will be the Parish Priest of St Michael's Berwick or Safeguarding Officer or a Leader of a group. A risk owner has the overall accountability for the mitigation of that risk. However, risk actionee(s) are appointed to carry out the respective actions to safeguard children and adults at risk. It will normally be the Professional Standards Officer but other personnel could be nominated as risk actionees.

Risk assessments will be reported periodically to the Professional Standards Committee. Safety Officer will know what to do and expect if they are required to make a report.

St Michael's Berwick together with The Catholic Diocese of Sale is committed to the sensitive and skilful handling and reporting of all types of complaints regardless of whether or not the law requires this to be reported. It ensures that mechanisms are in place to care for the range of complainants and provides a compassionate, confidential and supportive approach.

It is committed to providing ongoing pastoral support to any person affected by physical, emotional, sexual abuse and financial abuse by Church personnel. This commitment is made in the spirit of Christ's teachings and on behalf of the Bishop, clergy, and all other church personnel who serve in St Michael's Berwick.