RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS

Where information about an allegation or a concern becomes known to a person within the Church, then action must be taken to inform the Police or Social Services as appropriate so that children, young people and vulnerable adults are not put at continued risk and a proper investigation may take place.

1. KEY PRINCIPLES

- If any person reasonably suspects that a child, young person or vulnerable adult is being, has been or is likely to be abused, they must take action. To do nothing is not an option.
- The actions of those who first handle allegations and concerns are most important. They could dictate the effectiveness of a subsequent enquiry.
- Under no circumstances should the alleged abuser be alerted at this stage, either directly or indirectly. Important evidence may be lost.
- The aim of the process which follows is to reach a point where the fullest possible information has been gathered. Formal investigations will be carried out by the Police or Social Services. It is only with the benefit of complete information that vulnerable people may be protected through careful assessment of risk, based on fact and professional judgement.
- The guiding principles for any person in receipt of information about a concern or an allegation should be:
  LISTEN
  RECORD
  REFER
- Sometimes information will be in the form of observations made by the person recording the allegation or concern.

a. LISTEN

- Where information is given in person, listen and accept what is said seriously. Do not pre-judge, rationalise, dismiss or minimise. Do not make judgemental statements about any person involved.
- Be aware that a person's ability to recount his or her concern or allegation will depend on age, culture, nationality and upon any disability which may affect use of language and range of vocabulary. Do not suggest words, but use theirs.
- Adopt a listening style which is compassionate, calm and reassuring. If the information given to you shocks, disgusts or distresses you, do not allow these feelings to show. If you do, you may inadvertently dissuade the person from giving any further information.
- Do not promise total confidentiality. If this is proposed as a condition of giving information about possible abuse, such confidence must be refused.
- Do not make promises about future events.
- Explain what will happen next. Indicate who will be made aware of the information which has been given by them. Leave contact details of yourself and any other appropriate person in case the referrer needs to ask questions later.
- An adult who provides information should be encouraged to share their information, where appropriate with the Statutory Authorities. Support should be offered in doing so. If they refuse, explain that you will have to take advice from the Safeguarding Coordinator.

RECORD

- Whenever possible and practical, take notes during the conversation. Always ask permission to do this and explain the importance of recording all information. If it is not appropriate, make a written record as soon as possible afterwards, if possible by the end of the day.
- Use the Safeguarding Incident/Concern Report Form – it will help you obtain the relevant information. The record should be signed and dated by the author. Wherever possible the speaker's own words should be used. It is important to include full details of referrals to Police or Social Services.
- All original records, including rough notes, should be passed to the Safeguarding Coordinator by noon the next working day.

c. REFER

- See flowchart (fig 1).
- The overriding principle of referral is as follows: 'If somebody believes that a child, young person or vulnerable adult may be suffering, or may be at risk of suffering significant harm, then s/he should always refer his or her concerns to the local authority social services department. In addition to the social services department, the Police have powers to intervene in these circumstances.'

2. CONCERN OR ALLEGATION

- Where a concern exists that a child, young person or vulnerable adult may be being abused, may have been abused or be at risk of abuse, such a concern must initially be treated in the same way as an allegation.
- Refer the concern/allegation to the Safeguarding Coordinator/Safeguarding Officer promptly so that further action may be considered. If a child, young person or vulnerable adult is at immediate risk, a referral must be made to the Statutory Authorities and then the Safeguarding Coordinator/Officer must be informed.
- Do not alert the alleged abuser, either directly or indirectly.
- Where a referral is made to the Statutory Authorities by a person other than the Safeguarding Coordinator or Safeguarding Officer, all information must be passed to the Safeguarding Coordinator/Safeguarding Officer by noon the next working day and followed up in writing.

3. CONFIDENTIALITY AND INFORMATION SHARING

- All information connected with a child, young person or vulnerable adult enquiry is confidential within the multi-agency network. No information should be shared with any person who does not need to know for the purposes of protecting children, young people or vulnerable adults and facilitating the conducting of an effective investigation.
- Consider: Does the person **NEED** to know the information?
  Does the person need to know **ALL** the information?
  Does the person need to know the information **NOW**?

  Record what information has been provided and to whom, with reasons.

ROLE OF A LOCAL SAFEGUARDING REPRESENTATIVE WHERE A CONCERN OR ALLEGATION HAS BEEN MADE?

- The Local Safeguarding Representative will follow the procedures above whenever they receive information about a concern or allegation.
- Some Local Safeguarding Representatives may be child protection professionals and may be tempted to initiate investigative action because of their knowledge and expertise. Such blurring of boundaries between roles should be carefully avoided. The Local Safeguarding Representative does not have an investigative role, and should follow the above procedure.
- The Local Safeguarding Representative may be requested to assist the Safeguarding Coordinator/Safeguarding Officer with any practical matters.
- The Local Safeguarding Representative must not take on the role of support person to a victim or survivor of abuse, to his or her family or to an alleged abuser. The role of support person is independent of the Safeguarding structure.
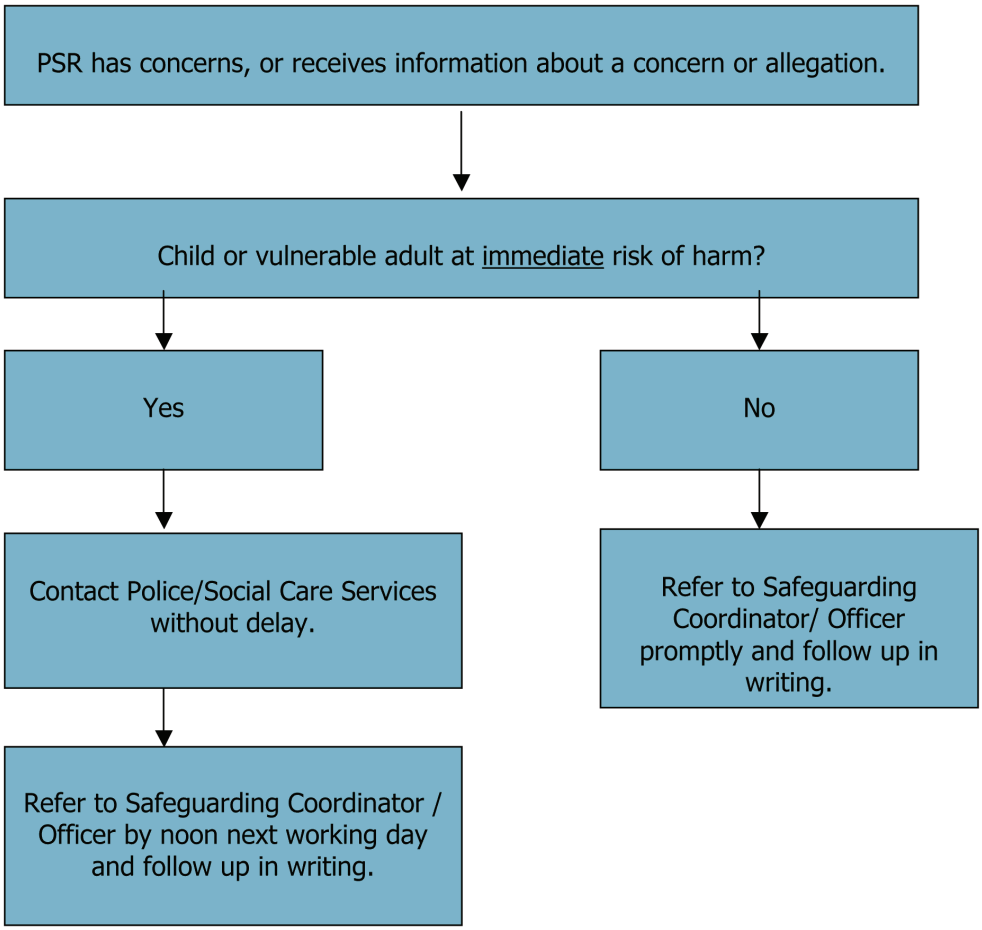
Fig 1. Flowchart - Responding to Allegations