

The Church of England has published today new House of Bishops' guidance on reporting safeguarding and other Serious Incidents to the Charity Commission. This is the first time the Church of England has produced Charity Commission approved guidance.

The Charity Commission updated its guidance on Serious Incident Reporting in October 2018, with a particular focus on the reporting of safeguarding Serious Incidents following recent high-profile incidents in the charity sector. All PCCs and DBFs and most Religious Communities are charities and their trustees (eg PCC members, DBF directors) are required to report any Serious Incidents – both safeguarding and non-safeguarding - to the Charity Commission.

The CofE's bespoke new guidance for PCCs (Parochial Church Councils), DBFs (Diocesan Boards of Finance) and Religious Communities - all charities – seeks to support them to understand what needs to be reported as a serious incident and to do so in a timely and effective way.

A safeguarding Serious Incident is an actual or alleged safeguarding incident, which results in or risks significant harm either to people linked with or employed by the charity or to its reputation. Other Serious Incidents are actual or alleged adverse incidents, which result in or risk loss of the charity's money or assets, damage to its property or harm to its work or reputation.

The new CofE guidance sets up a system which provides for the reporting of all safeguarding serious incidents by PCCs to be through their diocese. The Charity Commission has also agreed to the bulk reporting of safeguarding serious incidents by DBFs every six months - unless an incident is very serious, for example it presents a live risk, in which case it must be reported immediately. Religious Communities (except closed communities which are not charities) will continue to report directly to the Charity Commission, but will now use the new template reports to assist them.

The new detailed guidance on reporting, which PCCs, DBFs and religious communities must now follow, includes explanatory cover notes and templates for reporting safeguarding and other serious incidents. The National Safeguarding Team will be alerted to all reporting of safeguarding serious incidents and for the first time will be able to develop a national picture of safeguarding serious incidents.

The guidance does not change how any PCC deals with safeguarding as the House of Bishops' policy and guidance must still be followed; any safeguarding concerns or allegations must be reported to the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser (DSA) within 24 hours, who will liaise with statutory agencies, as required.

Bishop Peter Hancock, the Church of England's lead safeguarding bishop said: "This new guidance for reporting means that for the first time we will start to have a national picture of emerging trends in serious incidents, particularly around safeguarding. We would like to thank the Charity Commission for offering their support and advice to enable the Church to develop this guidance across its dioceses, parishes and religious communities. It is vital that all institutions follow correct safeguarding governance, including reporting to the Charity Commission, but for the Church it is about the core missional business of who we are, valuing everyone in God's image. Safeguarding is about the prevention of harm and the promotion of wellbeing; everyone's wellbeing. This new guidance is another important step in ensuring we are a safer Church for all."

Kate Waring, Head of the Charity Commission's Risk Assessment Unit said: "It is important that charities report serious incidents to the Charity Commission so we can ensure that trustees comply with their legal duties and manage incidents responsibly. We're clear that reporting a serious incident alone is not necessarily a sign that there have been failings within a charity. In fact, making a report to us is an important way for trustees to demonstrate that they are responding responsibly to an incident. The Commission recently updated its guidance on serious incident reporting and the new House of Bishops' guidance helpfully supplements this with information that is specific to PCCs, DBFs and Religious Communities. So we were pleased to be able to approve this guidance and the associated reporting process, which we hope will assist trustees in ensuring that the right incidents are reported to us at the right time with the right information."

Notes

- [Serious Incident Reporting](#)
- [Identifying and Reporting Safeguarding Serious Incidents to the Charity Commission: Guidance for DBFs, PCCs and Religious Communities](#)

House of Bishops safeguarding guidance

- [Responding to, Assessing and Managing Safeguarding concerns or allegations against church officers](#) which is summarised for parishes in the [Parish Safeguarding Handbook section 7](#).

Charity Commission guidance

- [Reporting serious incidents in your charity](#)

In some cases, the Commission will respond to a serious incident report by providing timely regulatory advice and guidance to trustees to ensure they meet their duties or use our statutory powers to protect charities. Reporting also enables the regulator to identify any risks to other charities and take action to address these where necessary.

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