

**Policy and Guidelines on Lone Working and Personal Safety**

Approved by the Parochial Church Council on 19th November 2020

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# Introduction

St Paul’s Parochial Church Council is committed to the health, safety and wellbeing of its clergy, staff and volunteers who, in the course of their work and ministry, may have to work alone. This policy [[1]](#footnote-1)provides a framework for managing the risks presented by lone working in all settings – the community, visiting individuals in their homes, receiving people in their own home, working in church buildings or in any other situation where a church officer is physically isolated from colleagues or family, without access to immediate assistance. Where the work involves home visits, the safety of both the visitor and the person being visited is paramount.

**Principles:**

The PCC is responsible for ensuring that all lone working activities within the church are formally identified, and appropriate risk assessments undertaken to identify and mitigate the risks associated with lone working. The perception of risk may be seen differently by individuals and therefore it is important that all lone workers receive relevant information about identified risks within their role so that they are equipped to recognise the risks and take responsibility for their own safety and security.

Pastoral encounters are at the heart of church ministry, undertaken by clergy and laity every day. We therefore recognise that lone working is an everyday and essential practice for clergy and laity, which also carries additional risks. It is important, therefore that the additional risks that arise from lone working in pastoral encounters are fully understood, so that our core mission and ministry can proceed in safety.

All risks to workers identified from lone working must be recorded in accordance with requirements of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. Where there is any reasonable doubt about the safety of a lone worker, other arrangements must be made to complete the task or activity, including the possibility of co-working.

# Potential hazards of lone working

There are a number of areas where risks may be greater when working alone:

* Accidents or sudden illness when there is no-one to summon help or first aid.
* Violence or the threat of violence.
* Allegations of inappropriate and/or abusive behaviour.
* Fire or other threat.
* Attempting tasks which cannot safely be done by one person alone, e.g. heavy lifting, or use of certain equipment.
* Lack of safe way in or out of a building (e.g. danger of being accidentally locked in).
* Travelling, particularly in bad weather.

# Measures to minimise the risks of lone working

There are a number of things which can be done to minimise risks when working alone. Consider the following:

* Know as much as possible about any potentially risky situation.
* Avoid, as far as possible, situations with significant risk of vulnerability.
* Consider beforehand a strategy for a swift exit if a situation changes.
* Consider who else might be available to be working in church any other setting where a one to one meeting is requested.
* Be familiar with strategies for dealing with difficult situations.
* Be aware of effective communication skills.
* Ensure you have a mobile phone with you.
* Let someone else know where you are going and when you will be back.
* Explore a simple system for reporting safe return e.g. short text or phone call.
* Ensure that someone else has a record of car and mobile phone details.
* Park safely and as close to the destination as possible.

**Personal Safety in Church buildings**

The church office is staffed by an administrator working alone, although there are frequent visits by clergy and other church officers during office hours. Access during office hours is controlled by keypad. Visits by members of the public, where possible are made by appointment. If an unknown visitor attempts or requests to gain entry, the administrator will establish the reason for the visit before permitting entry. If there are concerns about the visitor, the administrator should politely refuse entry, offer to take the visitors contact details for a follow up appointment. If the visitor becomes irate, aggressive or refuses to leave the premises, the administrator should call the vicar, a churchwarden or the safeguarding officer for advice and/or if necessary call the police.

There may be many reasons for lone workers to be in church – preparation for meetings or services, flower arranging, organ practice, light maintenance, cleaning etc. However, lone workers must keep the church doors locked, must always ensure that someone knows where they are and a time when they will return and must not under any circumstances work at height or lift heavy objects without another person present.

Whenever the church is open to the public, there must always be at least one other person present. ‘Open Church’ arrangements will always involve people working in pairs and the doors must not be opened to the public until the second person arrives.

Staff and volunteers should avoid working in the building alone late into the evening. Wherever possible, they should lock up in the presence of another person. If this is not possible they must make sure that someone else knows (a ‘buddy’) that they are working late, that they will be locking up on their own and the time they will be doing so. Once buildings are secure and the person is in their vehicle, they must make contact with their ‘buddy’ to confirm that they are safe.

Wherever possible, if members of staff are working late on their own, they should park their vehicles in a lighted area, close to the exit to avoid having to walk long distances alone in the dark and across a car park. As above, staff should ensure that their buddy is contacted once safely in their vehicle.

Security lighting is in place around the church and the church hall.

**Pastoral meetings, including home visits**

Clergy, staff and volunteers may need to meet one to one with parishioners or group members. Where possible, this should be done in a public place, for example a coffee shop. However, there may be reasons why the visit needs to be at a person’s home. Many people who need visits will be well known to the visitor, and there will have been no previous concerns. In this case, the level of risk to both parties will usually be low. However, we must be mindful that unexpected circumstances can be encountered which may present a risk, such as the unexpected presence in the home of a relative or friend with a history of violence or threatening behaviour.

Therefore, all staff and volunteers making one to one meetings should:

* Always undertake a risk assessment for a first visit, whether you know the person or not and consider working in pairs on a first home visit.
* Ensure that someone else is aware of your movements – address, expected arrival and departure times etc. Agree a time for the person to make contact if they have not heard from you by a prescribed time - otherwise known as a ‘buddy system’. The ‘buddy’ must be available to be contacted for the duration of your visit.
* Never visit a child or young person in their own home unless another adult is present.
* Be alert to potential signs of danger during the home visit and be prepared to leave immediately if you have any concerns. Avoid confrontation and never assume that violence cannot happen, even thought many home visits are made safely every day.
* Ask the person you are visiting to secure any pets which may present a safety risk.
* Conduct home visits morning or early afternoon wherever possible to avoid travelling in the dark. If this is not possible, consider working in pairs.
* Call by arrangement.
* Record meetings clearly and concisely as this may prevent problems in the future (see below).

**Record keeping**

Everything, with the exception of safeguarding concerns, is confidential in pastoral ministry, unless it is agreed that it can be shared with the informed consent of the individual. However, if the individual’s behaviour or situation threatens the wellbeing of themselves or others, the parish safeguarding officer must be informed. In all such cases, the parish safeguarding officer will seek the advice of the diocesan safeguarding officer and where appropriate, statutory agencies will be informed of the concerns.

All church officers should keep a record of significant pastoral encounters – meetings, phone calls, home visits etc, including details of the time, subject and actions taken. It is important to keep factual records and separate fact from any opinions expressed. Safeguarding records will be maintained by the parish safeguarding officer and reports of safeguarding concerns must follow the PCC’s safeguarding practice guidance.

# Additional risks to the clergy

“*At the heart of ministry is risk. Faced by a pastoral situation the minister has to take immediate decisions about what to say and do*”. [Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy]

We recognise that our clergy will often find themselves in the powerful position of meeting people at the limits of their vulnerability. The Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy seek to help clergy to safeguard and reassure such people, so engendering trust, without which ministry cannot take place. They set out how to maintain appropriate boundaries, which in themselves are helpful in preventing misunderstandings and reducing risks.

**This policy should be read in conjunction with the following policies:**

* Safeguarding policies and practice guidance
* Health and Safety Policy
* Privacy Policy

**It will be reviewed in November 2022 or earlier if substantive changes are required.**

**Please contact the parish safeguarding officer at** **safeguarding@stpaulsletchworth.co.uk** **if you have any queries.**

1. This policy has been drawn extensively on the Diocese of Portsmouth Lone Working policy, November 2016 and the Diocese of Peterborough document ‘Visiting adults who may be vulnerable in their homes’. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)