



Safer Recruitment of Volunteers and Paid Staff

Introduction

This paper is based on a national document entitled *Practice Guidance: Safer Recruitment* which was published by the Church of England on 24 June 2015. Failure to implement and adhere to national guidance may invalidate church insurance.

Only a tiny percentage of adults who abuse get caught and still fewer are convicted, so parishes must never rely solely on a criminal record check. Criminal record checks, although crucial, remain only one element of safeguarding and the safer recruitment process.

Finding and recruiting the right people to work with adults at risk and children can be difficult. What follows is a checklist to help ensure that parishes recruit and appoint the most appropriate people as volunteers or paid staff.

It is a criminal offence for an individual who is barred from working with vulnerable groups to apply for a regulated activity role.¹ It is also a criminal offence for an organisation to appoint a barred person to a regulated activity role.²

Purpose, scope and definition

This paper sets out a process for recruiting people to work with adults at risk and/or children in a parish context. However, the same principles can also be applied to other contexts (eg the diocesan office).

This process must be used for the appointment of new volunteers and new paid staff. It may also be used to inform any review of people already in post.

Please note that this process does not address the additional requirements of those working in: schools; childcare settings which are registered with Ofsted; or settings where personal care, nursing care and specialist health care services are provided.

This paper uses the following definition of terms:

- **Child** - anyone under the age of 18 years.
- **Adult at risk** - a person aged 18 years or over who is experiencing or at risk of abuse (including neglect). The term 'vulnerable adult' is also used in some legislation.
- **DBS** - the government's Disclosure and Barring Service which carries out criminal record checks.

Resources on the diocesan website

This paper makes several references to resources which are available on the diocesan website. These can all be found at: www.dioceseofcoventry.org/SafeguardingResources

¹ Regulated activity roles are listed in a document entitled *DBS Checks for Volunteers and Paid Staff* which is available on the diocesan website. If in doubt, always check with the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser.

² There are two barring lists held by the DBS. One holds details of those barred from working with children and the other holds details of those barred from working with adults at risk.

The Recruitment Process

1. Be clear about who is responsible for appointments

The responsibility for appointing clergy and licensed or approved lay ministers rests with the Bishop.

In local churches, the responsibility for appointing staff and volunteers rests with the PCC.

Responsibility for the recruitment process can be delegated to someone else, but that person must be capable, competent and trained in safer recruitment. They must also be able to keep personal matters confidential.

2. Ensure that applicants are aware of relevant policies

The following policies are available on the diocesan website:

- *Safeguarding Policy for the Diocese of Coventry*, and,
- *Policy Statement on the Recruitment of Ex-Offenders*.

All PCCs are required to formally adopt these policies, and copies should be given to all applicants.

3. Provide a clear job/role description

This needs to set out the tasks that the applicant will do and the skills that are required. For paid staff, a formal job description and person specification must be provided. For volunteers, a simple role description may be used (for which a model template is available on the diocesan website).

The job/role description must say if a criminal records check is required and, if so, the level of that check. Further information can be found in a document entitled *DBS Checks for Volunteers and Paid Staff* which is also available on the diocesan website.

4. Provide an application form and take up references

An application form is always necessary when recruiting paid staff in order to assess the person's suitability for the job. An application form is also good practice when recruiting volunteers. A model template *Application Form for a Volunteer* is available on the diocesan website.

Always ask for and take up references. Ask referees specifically about an individual's suitability to work with adults at risk or children. A model template *Reference Request for a Volunteer* is available on the diocesan website.

Carefully examine application forms and references to make sure that the information is consistent or that there is a satisfactory explanation for any discrepancies. Also ensure that there is a satisfactory explanation for any gaps in an applicant's personal history and/or career. If anything is unclear in the reference, contact the referee to clarify the position.

5. Obtain a Confidential Declaration from each applicant

Applicants must complete a *Confidential Declaration* for any roles involving adults at risk or children. This form is available on the diocesan website.

The form asks if there is any reason why an applicant should not be working with adults at risk or children. It can also help to identify any issues that might need resolving at an early stage. Having a criminal record may not necessarily be a bar to working with adults at risk or children.

The Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser can provide advice to the person responsible for the appointment and must be contacted if an applicant answers 'Yes' to any of the questions in the *Confidential Declaration*.

Should an applicant not wish to complete the *Confidential Declaration*, which is entirely his/her choice, the application process must be terminated.

6. Have a face-to-face interview or discussion with short-listed applicants

An interview or discussion must contain pre-planned and clear questions to assess a person's suitability for a role.

A model template for *Face-to-Face Questions to Ask a Volunteer* is available on the diocesan website. Answers to these questions should be checked against the *Confidential Declaration* and references.

During the interview/discussion an applicant might disclose a matter of concern relating to adults at risk or children. Advice must be sought from the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser if this matter could affect the applicant's suitability for the role.

When recruiting paid staff (and sometimes volunteers) the applicant's identity will need to be checked by asking him/her to produce photographic ID as well as evidence of his/her relevant qualifications.

7. Request a DBS check

If the interview panel (or the person conducting the discussion) is minded to recommend approval, the applicant must be asked to carry out a DBS check if appropriate. Further details can be found in a document entitled *DBS Checks for Volunteers and Paid Staff* which is available on the diocesan website.

Should an applicant not wish to apply for a criminal record check, which is entirely his/her choice, the application process must be terminated.

DBS checks that are non-clear (ie which contain information of criminal convictions, cautions, arrests etc) must always be referred to the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser for advice.

Special arrangements apply to overseas applicants.³ Provided they are eligible, an enhanced criminal record check must always be required as part of the UK recruitment process in relation to people sent abroad to work with adults at risk or children.

8. Issue a letter of appointment

The decision to appoint to voluntary or paid work must be made only by those who have that responsibility (see step 1 above). The start date or appointment must not be confirmed until the relevant DBS check has been received and examined.

All paid staff must receive a letter of appointment. It is also good practice for volunteers to receive a letter of appointment, since this can set out both an organisation's commitment to its volunteers and what it hopes from its volunteers. A model template *Letter of Appointment to a Volunteer* is available on the diocesan website.

The following documents should also be included with the appointment letter:

- A Safeguarding Statement. The model template of a *Parish Safeguarding Statement* is available on the diocesan website.
- A 'What to do if...' leaflet, which is also available on the diocesan website.

³ See Home Office advice at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/criminal-records-checks-for-overseas-applicants>

After recruiting someone

Arrange safeguarding training

Volunteers and paid staff whose roles involve working with adults at risk or children must receive relevant safeguarding training from the diocese after starting their role, regardless of previous experience. They must also attend regular updates every three years.

Information about diocesan safeguarding training can be found at...

<http://www.dioceseofcoventry.org/SafeguardingTraining>

Arrange meetings during the first six months

For paid staff, it is good practice to have a six month probation period. For volunteers, it is good practice to have a six month settling-in period when the volunteer and the organisation can see if the volunteer is suited to the particular role.

During this period, relevant training can be planned and support can be arranged. In addition, regular meetings with a supervisor are useful to discuss any issues that might arise.

For paid staff, the successful completion of the probation must be confirmed in writing.

Arrange on-going supervision and review

For paid staff, all posts will be subject to management, supervision and appraisal.

For volunteers working with adults at risk and children, it is good practice to ensure regular supervision and to conduct a review regularly (eg annually). This ensures that volunteers feel supported and that issues can be discussed and/or resolved.