

Equal Opportunities Policy

St Peter's, Colchester

Adopted by the PCC: [tbc]

Review date: [3 years]

Policy owner: The Parochial Church Council

1. Purpose

This policy explains St Peter's commitment to treating people with dignity, fairness and respect.

It applies, as relevant, to recruitment, employment, volunteering, training, ministry involvement, leadership, governance, participation in church life, and access to church activities and premises.

The Parochial Church Council has responsibility for the governance and oversight of St Peter's. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we seek to be faithful in all that we say and do. That includes avoiding partiality, treating people justly, protecting the vulnerable, making decisions fairly, and using authority and responsibility with humility and care.

This policy is intended to help St Peter's act fairly and consistently, while also recognising our responsibilities as a Church of England church, including safeguarding duties, legal responsibilities, charitable purposes, the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England, and the agreed policies of the PCC.

This policy should be read alongside St Peter's Welcome, Dignity and Fair Treatment Policy, Safeguarding Policy, safer recruitment arrangements, Volunteer Policy, Code of Conduct, Staff Handbook, Data Protection Policy, Privacy Notice and other relevant PCC policies.

2. Christian foundation

Our commitment to fair treatment is rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Every person is made in the image of God and should therefore be treated with dignity, honesty and care.

The Apostle James writes:

*"My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory."
– James 2:1, ESV*

We therefore seek to avoid partiality, favouritism, contempt, exclusion, stereotyping or unfair treatment. We want St Peter's to be a church where people are welcomed warmly, listened to carefully, protected where vulnerable, and treated justly.

Fair treatment does not mean treating every situation identically. It means making decisions honestly, consistently, proportionately and with proper regard to the person, the role, the circumstances, safeguarding responsibilities, legal duties, the needs of others, and the Christian character of the church.

3. Our commitment

St Peter's will seek to ensure that people are not treated unfairly because of:

- age;
- disability;
- gender reassignment;
- marriage or civil partnership;
- pregnancy or maternity;
- race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin;
- religion or belief;
- sex;
- sexual orientation;
- personal background, education, employment, family circumstances, poverty or wealth, health, neurodiversity, church background or any other irrelevant factor.
- We will seek to make decisions fairly, consistently and transparently, taking proper account of:
 - individual circumstances;
 - legal responsibilities;
 - safeguarding duties;
 - safer recruitment requirements;
 - health and safety;
 - the needs and welfare of others;
 - the nature of the role or activity;
 - the charitable purposes of the PCC;
 - the Christian ethos, doctrine and discipline of St Peter's as a Church of England church.

St Peter's will not tolerate unlawful discrimination, harassment, bullying, victimisation, intimidation, abuse, coercion, contempt, or misuse of power.

4. Scope

This policy applies, as relevant, to:

- clergy, licensed and authorised ministers;
- employed staff and applicants;
- volunteers and prospective volunteers;
- PCC members and candidates for elected or appointed office;
- ministry leaders and those being considered for ministry roles;
- members of church groups and activities;

- visitors, hirers and others engaging with the life of St Peter's.

Some roles will have additional requirements because of their responsibility, visibility, risk level, safeguarding implications, legal duties, governance responsibilities, representative character, or connection with the doctrine, worship, teaching and pastoral life of the church.

This policy applies to decisions about:

- recruitment and appointment;
- employment and volunteering;
- training and development;
- role suitability;
- leadership and governance;
- participation in church activities;
- pastoral and practical support;
- use of church buildings and premises;
- access to information, communication and reasonable adjustments;
- how concerns are raised and handled.

5. Role suitability and church responsibilities

A commitment to equal opportunities does not mean that every person is automatically suitable or eligible for every role.

St Peter's may set role requirements where these are necessary, proportionate and lawful. Depending on the role, this may include consideration of:

- safeguarding suitability;
- safer recruitment, DBS, references and training requirements;
- Christian profession, maturity, character and conduct;
- agreement with, or willingness to uphold, the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England and the ethos and parish convictions of St Peter's;
- competence, experience, availability and capacity;
- ability to work safely and appropriately with others;
- ability to work under appropriate authority and within agreed policies;
- role-specific requirements in a Ministry Role Description, employment document, safer recruitment document or PCC policy.

Some roles may legitimately require a person to be a practising Christian, to uphold the teaching of the Church of England, to support the ethos and parish convictions of St Peter's, or to meet particular safeguarding, pastoral, doctrinal, governance, sex-based or representative requirements.

St Peter's also recognises that some roles may be affected by the parish's theological convictions and PCC resolutions concerning the ordering of ministry and the exercise of teaching, pastoral and representative leadership in the church. In keeping with those convictions, and with the

parish's current Church of England ministry arrangements, some roles may be reserved for, or ordinarily exercised by, suitably qualified men.

This does not affect the equal dignity, welcome, gifts, service or value of women and men in the life of the church. Women and men are to be welcomed, heard, protected, encouraged, equipped and treated with honour and fairness. Many roles in the life of St Peter's are open to women and men alike.

Where sex, Christian profession, doctrine, safeguarding, conduct or another role-specific requirement is relevant to a role, St Peter's will seek to make this clear, apply it carefully and proportionately, and ensure that decisions are made in accordance with the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England, the resolutions and policies of the PCC, and applicable law.

This may apply, for example, to roles involving:

- teaching, preaching, leading worship or public prayer;
- children's, youth or vulnerable-adult ministry;
- pastoral care or visiting;
- church governance or trusteeship;
- ministry leadership;
- representation of St Peter's in public;
- access to confidential information, money, keys, data or buildings;
- employment or authorised ministry.

A decision that someone is not suitable for a particular role because of safeguarding, safer recruitment, conduct, capability, legal, doctrinal, pastoral, sex-based or role-specific reasons is not contrary to this policy, provided the decision is made fairly, proportionately and in accordance with relevant policy and law.

A decision about role suitability is not a judgement on a person's worth, welcome, dignity or value before God.

6. Employment, volunteering and recruitment

St Peter's will seek to apply recruitment, appointment, employment and volunteering processes fairly and consistently.

Where appropriate, we will seek to:

- provide clear information about the role;
- use relevant and proportionate selection criteria;
- apply safer recruitment requirements where needed;
- consider reasonable adjustments;
- avoid irrelevant assumptions or stereotypes;
- keep appropriate records;
- explain decisions where it is reasonable and appropriate to do so;

- ensure that those involved in appointments understand the requirements of the role and this policy.

Recruitment and appointment decisions should be based on the requirements of the role, the person's suitability, safeguarding considerations, legal responsibilities, Christian ethos and doctrine where relevant, and the wider needs of the church.

Where a role has a genuine occupational requirement, doctrinal requirement, safeguarding requirement, or other role-specific requirement, this should be made clear as early as reasonably possible.

7. Safeguarding and protection

This policy does not override St Peter's safeguarding responsibilities.

Where a role involves children, young people, vulnerable adults, adults with vulnerabilities, pastoral responsibility, leadership, trusteeship, confidential information, money, keys, public worship or another position of trust, St Peter's will apply its safeguarding, safer recruitment, DBS, training and role-suitability requirements.

Safeguarding concerns must always be handled through St Peter's safeguarding procedures. They must not be treated merely as equal opportunities concerns, ordinary complaints or interpersonal disagreements.

Where safeguarding concerns, known risks, past behaviour, boundaries, capacity, vulnerability or welfare considerations affect a person's participation or role, St Peter's may need to set boundaries, restrict responsibilities, require supervision, pause a role, or decline an appointment. Such decisions should be made carefully, proportionately and with appropriate advice where needed.

8. Reasonable adjustments and practical support

Where reasonable and practicable, St Peter's will seek to make appropriate adjustments to enable people to participate in church life, serve, volunteer or work effectively.

This may include adjustments to:

- communication;
- access;
- seating;
- rotas;
- tasks;
- equipment;
- information;
- training;
- supervision;
- timing;
- support;

- the way a role is carried out.

Any adjustment must be consistent with safeguarding, health and safety, role requirements, available resources, legal responsibilities and the needs of others.

St Peter's recognises that some needs may be visible and others may not be. We will seek to respond with patience, clarity and care, while also recognising the practical limits of what the church can reasonably provide.

9. Harassment, bullying and victimisation

St Peter's will not tolerate harassment, bullying or victimisation.

This includes behaviour that humiliates, intimidates, excludes, demeans, threatens, coerces, pressures, silences or undermines another person.

It may include:

- verbal, written, physical or online behaviour;
- jokes, mockery, insults or stereotypes;
- unwanted personal, sexual, racial or other comments;
- misuse of spiritual, pastoral, organisational or positional authority;
- repeated unreasonable criticism or pressure;
- exclusion from information, groups or opportunities for improper reasons;
- retaliation against someone who raises a concern in good faith.

Concerns of this kind should be raised promptly and appropriately. Where the matter involves safeguarding, abuse, coercion, risk of harm, a person in authority, or a vulnerable person, safeguarding or other formal procedures may need to be used.

10. Use of church premises and participation in activities

St Peter's seeks to welcome people into worship, church life and appropriate activities with warmth and care.

Access to public worship and many church activities is normally open to all, subject to safeguarding, good order, health and safety, capacity, lawful use of premises, and appropriate conduct.

Use of church buildings, hall or parish premises by outside groups is subject to St Peter's hire terms, safeguarding expectations for hirers, insurance requirements, health and safety requirements, charitable purposes and Christian ethos.

The PCC may decline, restrict, cancel or terminate a booking, role or activity where the proposed or actual use is unlawful, unsafe, contrary to safeguarding requirements, likely to cause serious disorder or harm, damaging to the church's witness, or incompatible with the charitable purposes and Christian ethos of the church.

Use of church premises by an outside group does not imply endorsement of all views, activities or purposes of that group.

11. Concerns

Anyone who believes they have been treated unfairly should raise the matter promptly and appropriately.

Depending on the concern, the appropriate route may be:

- the relevant Ministry Area Leader;
- a staff member;
- the Church Administrator;
- the Vicar;
- the churchwardens;
- the Parish Safeguarding Officer or Safeguarding Team;
- the Complaints Policy;
- the Whistleblowing Policy;
- the safeguarding procedure;
- employment, grievance or disciplinary procedures where relevant.

Where the concern involves safeguarding, abuse, harassment, bullying, discrimination, exploitation, a person in a position of trust, or risk to a child or adult, it must be handled under the relevant safeguarding, complaints, whistleblowing, conduct or employment process.

Those who raise concerns in good faith should not be victimised or treated adversely for doing so. Equally, concerns should be raised truthfully, responsibly and without malice.

St Peter's will seek to respond to concerns fairly, carefully and proportionately.

12. Related policies and documents

This policy should be read alongside, where applicable:

- Welcome, Dignity and Fair Treatment Policy;
- Safeguarding Policy;
- Safer Recruitment arrangements;
- Code of Conduct;
- Volunteer Policy;
- Volunteer Agreement;
- Ministry Role Descriptions;
- Staff Handbook and employment policies;
- Complaints Policy;
- Whistleblowing Policy;
- Conflict of Interest Policy;
- Social Media Policy;
- Data Protection Policy;
- Privacy Notice;
- Data Retention Policy;

- Health and Safety Policy;
- Hall and Church Hire Terms and Conditions;
- Safeguarding Expectations for Hirers;
- relevant risk assessments and operational guidance.

13. Review

This policy will be reviewed by the PCC every three years, or sooner if required by changes in law, Church of England guidance, diocesan guidance, safeguarding requirements, parish practice or pastoral need.

The PCC is responsible for ensuring that this policy remains faithful to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England, legally responsible, pastorally wise, and practically useful in shaping the life of St Peter's.

Short public-facing summary

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This commitment sits alongside St Peter's Christian convictions, safeguarding responsibilities, legal duties, charitable purposes and role-suitability requirements.

Not every person is automatically eligible for every role. Some roles require safeguarding checks, training, Christian profession, maturity, agreement with church teaching, willingness to uphold the ethos of St Peter's, or other role-specific requirements.

Where reasonable and practicable, St Peter's will seek to make appropriate adjustments to enable people to participate, serve, volunteer or work effectively.

St Peter's will not tolerate unlawful discrimination, harassment, bullying, victimisation, abuse, coercion or misuse of power.

Concerns about unfair treatment should be raised promptly and appropriately. Safeguarding concerns must always be handled through safeguarding procedures.