

Middlesex County Association and London Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers

Association Policy for the Protection of Young People

Introduction

Throughout this document the phrases “young people” and “young person” refer to individuals under the age of 18, or older people having a mental age of less than 18 (sometimes referred to as “vulnerable adults”). It is recognised that members of the Association may not be qualified to identify vulnerable adults with certainty and therefore care should be taken if there are indications that any individual may fall into this category.

The Association is predominantly an adult organisation but potentially it undertakes teaching of children in any of its member towers. It has a responsibility to ensure that young people are appropriately protected and that they and their parents or guardians can have confidence that young people can attend Association events in safety. The Association’s Guidelines for Child Protection (1999) are printed in every Annual Report.

The Diocese of London, in common with other Dioceses, has a Child Protection Policy. This sets out different requirements for church groups and outside bodies using church premises. The leaders of groups (in the case of bellringing, tower captains and their deputies) within a church should be aware of the Guidelines set out in “Protecting All God’s Children”, the child protection policy for the Church of England. The Tower Captain and any deputies who may run the practice or any ringing sessions where young people are present should be notified to the PCC, which will be responsible for obtaining CRB Disclosure for the individuals it deems necessary. The PCC is also responsible for providing on-going training to such individuals and for ensuring that its guidelines are followed.

As it is not possible to foresee every eventuality in this Policy, judgment and common sense should be applied in its application.

General principles

All people attending Middlesex Association events are entitled to be confident that in doing so they will not suffer harm. “Harm” includes any form of physical, mental or sexual abuse, injury through the reckless or irresponsible behaviour of others, bullying, intimidation etc. Whilst this principle applies to everyone, particular care is needed when young people attend Association events. What may be acceptable behaviour between mature adults could result in harm for young persons.

All Association members have a responsibility to ensure that the above principles are adhered to and that young people in particular are not put at risk of harm. All members have a responsibility to provide an environment at Association events which protects young people from harm. If Members observe any behaviour which could constitute a breach of these principles they should take appropriate action. This should include informing the organiser of the event. In the case of ringing activities this will normally be the tower captain of the host tower, or the District or Association officer leading the event. All Association and District officers who take responsibility for running events involving young people should familiarise themselves with the Association’s Policy, and with the Child Protection Policy for the Church of England.

Practical considerations

Young people attending Association events should normally be accompanied by a parent, guardian or other responsible adult. Where a young person attends an event unaccompanied, or is accompanied by someone other than a parent or guardian, reference should be made to the parent(s) or guardian(s) in the case of doubt. The age of the person concerned may be taken into consideration when deciding whether to raise an enquiry, particularly when they are approaching their 18th birthday, are generally mature, are known to a significant number of those attending and/or are known to attend ringing events on their own.

Organisers are responsible for ensuring that young people are properly protected when attending Association events. This includes ensuring that clothing is suitable for the activity concerned, that there is no touching or other behaviour which could be considered a sexual advance or grooming, that no inappropriate remarks are made, including sexual innuendoes or correction which could be interpreted as bullying, that they are not left alone with an adult other than a parent or guardian and that their ringing is supervised at a level consistent with their age and experience.

Minor instances of non-compliance with the Policy will be dealt with by the provision of further advice and guidance by an Association Officer. In the case of persistent or serious breaches of this policy, it may be appropriate to consider and instigate action to prevent their reoccurrence. This may include restricting the participation of individual members of the Association in Association ringing events. Where action is necessary to protect individuals or the Association, the President, Master and Secretary (“the Officers”) are empowered to impose temporary restrictions on individual Association members, pending the next Central Committee Meeting, when they can be reviewed.

Offenders

The Church of England, including the Diocese of London in its document “Protecting Young People” makes it clear that, whilst rehabilitation of offenders is an important priority for the church, protection of young people takes priority over the interest of offenders.

A very small number of ringers have been convicted of offences against young people. In at least one case, conditions have been applied by the court which restrict their ability to take part in mixed-age activities. In addition, the Diocesan Policy has procedures in place if offenders wish to take part in church activities, including bellringing. Any restrictions imposed on individuals by the Diocese may prevent individual ringers from participating in certain Association activities.

It is the Association’s policy that where there is a choice between restricting the activity of offenders or restricting young people, the former will be selected. Where the Officers become aware that an Association member has been convicted of an offence which could raise issues for the protection of young people they should consider what (if any) restrictions on the future activities of that Member are appropriate. It is also open to any other Member to propose restrictions to the Officers if they feel it appropriate to do so.

Maintenance of this Policy

The Association Secretary has responsibility for maintaining this Policy, for keeping up to date with developments in child protection legislation, Church and Diocesan policy etc. The Secretary will update the Association about any significant changes, at meetings of the Central Committee and Association General Meetings. This will include taking account of any developments in Government policy and legislation.

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Reference materials

Protecting All God's Children (The Child Protection Policy for the Church of England)
(2004) Church House Publishing
<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/papers/protectingchildren.pdf>

Children in the Diocese of London, The London Diocese Bishops' Advisers Group 2005
(Third Edition)
<http://www.london.anglican.org/resources/Blocks/13630/ProtectingAllGodsChildren-ThirdEdition2005.pdf>

A summary of Children in the Diocese of London, The London Diocese Bishops' Advisers Group 2005 (Third Edition)
<http://www.london.anglican.org/resources/Blocks/13630/ChildProtectionGuidelinesSummary2005.pdf>