



Stewardship & Management Workgroup

of The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers



THE CENTRAL COUNCIL OF CHURCH
BELL RINGERS

Safeguarding

A Guide for Bell-Ringers

Introduction

Between 2004 and 2019 there has been a stream of both Government legislation and Church directives relating to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults. The following notes and appendices seek to summarise the present requirements and expectations of bell ringers during their activities.

Most ringing towers come under the jurisdiction of the Church of England, Church in Wales and Scottish churches all of which have common requirements. The UK legal requirements extend to other denominations and secular rings, whilst churches and ringing establishments outside the UK will be subject to local laws. In all cases ringers should maintain good practice principles whenever dealing with young and vulnerable persons.

Basic Legal Requirements

Any ringers carrying out one-to-one physical training of young persons under 18 years of age on a regular basis are considered to be carrying out a “regulated activity”.

Regular basis frequency is defined as being minimum of

- i. once a week
- ii. four days in 30 or
- iii. involving overnight hours of 02:00 to 06:00.

Anyone meeting these criteria will be required to undergo a background check through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) or, in Scotland, Disclosure Scotland check. On a local basis such checks will be initiated by the Parish Safeguarding Officer of the parish in which the ringing is taking place.

It is an offence for anyone to knowingly allow a person who has a criminal record relevant to the protection of minors or vulnerable adults to carry out a regulated activity.

Church Requirements and Expectations

The church of England has issued several documents setting out their requirements for church workers, paid or volunteer, relating to both children under 18 and “vulnerable adults”, the latter inclusion is not paralleled by state legislation except in the context of institutions. The principal documents may be referred to through the Church of England website under Safeguarding, these include:

- *Promoting a Safer Church*
- *Practice Guidance series: Safer Recruitment*
- *Practice Guidance: Safeguarding Training and Development*
- *Practice Guidance: Risk Assessment for Individuals who may pose Risk*
- *Parish Safeguarding Handbook*

The foregoing documents amount to some 260 pages and the following summary seeks to clarify their overall application to bell ringers.

Appointment of Tower Leaders (Captains and Deputies)

As part of the Church Safer Recruitment policy, those **working closely with children** in terms of training will be required to be formally appointed by the Parish, usually through the incumbent on behalf of the PCC. This process is extended to deputies where they cover absence of the leader and where they assist in managing training.

The formal process requires that a role description be agreed and that individuals complete a confidential declaration relating to any relevant cautions or convictions. Those seeking to fill such roles will also be required to undergo DBS application and provide two references. There are no charges for volunteers. An example role description is given at *Appendix A*.

Safeguarding Training

Those persons who are leading or managing training activities involving children will be required to undergo several levels of awareness training. Ringers forming part of band who only assist by their presence are not required to attend courses but, as with most church volunteers, it is still a recommendation that they do so. The table below sets out the requirements.

All parishes have audits carried out by Dioceses to ensure that there is compliance with national and local Safeguarding Policies. Failure to do so has, since 2016, carried disciplinary measures which could result in suspension from posts. It is for this reason that clergy and churchwardens are sensitive regarding fulfilment of Safeguarding requirements locally.

Training sessions are normally carried out by staff from the respective Diocesan offices although there may be basic training given to some volunteers by Parish Safeguarding Officers. Training is also available through on-line modules and in all cases a certificate of completion is normally made available and a record kept of attendance.

Requirements by Person	Tower Captain or Leader	Trainer of Children	Other Ringers	Comments
Role description appointed by PCC	YES	YES		
Confidential declaration and DBS check	YES	YES		
Basic training: Level C0	YES	YES	Recommended	Renewable each 3 years
Level C1	YES	YES		Renewable each 3 years
Level C2	YES	YES		Renewable each 3 years
3-yearly refresher Level C5	YES	YES		

Certificates and their Portability

When a person has undergone a DBS check, the results are notified to the Parish and the individual only will receive a copy of their certificate.

To enhance the usefulness and portability of a certificate, it is recommended that individuals register for the DBS Update Service. This service effectively monitors the status of the individual and can provide confirmation to an interested party that their status has not changed. However, to register for Update this **must be done** within 30 days of the date of issue of the certificate OR during a period of 28 days whilst their DBS is being processed. Note the time limit has increased from 19 days previously applied.

The Church of England has agreed that ringers carrying out similar youth training functions outside their home parish may rely on their certificate but **only within the same Diocese**. It is understood that ringers do teach across Diocesan boundaries and in these cases only those who have subscribed to the DBS Update Service may present their details to the host parish.

Known Offenders

Whether coming in the form of established ringers or seeking to become a ringer, any persons known to be on the Sex Offenders Register must not be allowed to engage in a regulated activity as this would be a legal offence.

However, a known offender **may** be able to take part in ringing activities depending upon (a) the nature of their offence, (b) any court restrictions on their activities, (c) perceived risk and (d) the level of supervision that can be afforded.

Both the Church of England and the Police have agreed procedures known as Multiple Agency Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) for dealing with offenders returning to circulate in society. The church position is set out in Section 8 of the House of Bishops document *Protecting all God's Children*.

Any proposal for such a person to be accommodated must be reviewed very seriously with all concerned parties including the incumbent, ringing Society and Diocesan Safeguarding Officer and must have due regard to **absolute safety of children** and the reassurance of parents. A written agreement with the church **must** be obtained, this generally is between the individual, the parish and the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer.

Potential Offenders

Where there is concern about the behaviour of a ringer, this should be brought to the attention of the Parish Safeguarding Officer who may also involve the Diocese. A decision may then be made as to how to proceed and where actions demand, police may need to be involved.

In the case of both known offenders and potential offenders it must always be borne in mind that the incumbent and churchwardens have ultimate sanction in allowing access to the tower. All ringers should appreciate that there is no automatic right to ring bells in any tower controlled by the church.

Safeguarding - the Wider Considerations

The term "Safeguarding" has deliberately been adopted by the Church to extend concern for the well being of all church users, although "Child Protection" is still foremost. Those undergoing Awareness Training will be shown how to recognise signs of anxiety, neglect or abuse in both children and adults.

In the case of a direct approach from an individual then they should be given reassurance and concerns noted. Whether as a result of evidenced concerns or direct approach, matters should be referred to the Parish Safeguarding Officer and if action is required immediately to prevent further harm, to the police.

Responsibilities of Ringing Societies

Most ringing societies and guilds are involved in dealing with young people although some non-territorial societies do not have any initial training role.

Whilst most initial training of children is carried out at home towers, there may be specific training organised by the local society which could draw them into the “regulated activity” category. For example, if there are regular meetings which host young people with close contact with the same adults, then the scope for familiarity is the same as for one-to-one training.

It is, therefore, recommended that the following measures be taken to ensure the safety of young people:

1. Have an agreed safeguarding policy for the society covering all activities.
2. Appoint a Safeguarding Officer (see description of role) *Appendix B*.
3. Consider provision of suitably DBS checked persons to run ringing meetings.

It is likely that provision No. 3 will be met by the presence of adults who, through their own parishes, have been DBS checked and this may include society officers. The argument for having “vetted” persons present is that they will be aware of the requirements for overseeing young people, will be able to deal with any problems which may arise, and their very presence is a reassurance for parents and guardians.

When young people attend society activities, then the organisers on the day in effect carry the same responsibility as a tower captain.

Good Practice

Guidelines for maintaining a safe environment for young people in the belfry have been previously issued and these are reproduced in *Appendix C* which may be used as a reminder and displayed in the tower.

Questions and Answers

Q. Are all tower captains required to be formally appointed and DBS checked?

A. It is a church requirement that all leaders of mixed age groups working closely with under 18s should be formally appointed and undergo a DBS check. This may extend to acknowledged deputies who undertake training and supervisory roles in the captain’s absence on a planned basis.

Q. What are the requirements for an all-adult band?

A. Where there are no children involved, there is no legal compunction on leaders to have either an agreed role description or DBS check. However, it would be good practice to voluntarily fulfil these requirements on the basis that a young recruit might present themselves at any time, it would be illegal to train them without DBS certification, their parents would expect properly certified supervision and there is the responsibility to safeguard any visiting young ringers who may visit practices on a regular basis.

Q. Is there a set ratio requirement for adults to children in a tower?

A. There are recommended ratios for child supervision in Sunday schools and other church activities but in the context of ringing it is unlikely to fall short of the ratio of 1 adult to 8 (9-12 year-olds) or 1 adult to 10 (13-18 year-olds).

Q. Can I take a child to ringing in my car?

A. Conveying children to ringing activities where agreed with parents is considered a private domestic arrangement. Any pre-agreed **formal** provision of transport as a tower or society service, albeit with parental approval, must adhere to the requirement of driver being DBS checked and, in addition, recommended a second adult be present, preferably one of each gender.

Q. What is the status and requirement for visiting adult ringers?

A. The requirements for individual visiting ringers fall into three categories:

- a) Individuals joining team just to ring, no specific requirement.
- b) Known ex-offenders (see above), should have prior clearance to ring within constraints of restrictions to which they may be subject.
- c) Visiting bands for outings, quarters and peals. It is the responsibility of the leader of such a group to ensure that any Safeguarding issues relating to young people are addressed. A parish may ask for such assurance.

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