

## **Role and Responsibilities of a Link Person**

A link person will be offered to all respondents who are church officers.

The link person may be a senior member of clergy (where the respondent is in ministry), including retired clergy, e.g. a suffragan bishop, honorary (assistant) bishop, provincial episcopal visitor, archdeacon or area dean or an individual specifically trained in pastoral care.

No-one directly involved in the management of the case, or who may be required to give evidence in any court proceedings, should be directly supporting the respondent, since their roles or their status may be compromised.

Respondents who are children or young people will require specialist support.

In consultation with the DSA advice should be sought from Children's Services and the child or young person should be referred to a professional agency qualified to provide such support.

### **The Role**

A link person should be particularly alert to the sense of isolation and vulnerability which the respondent may experience.

The link person is responsible for:

- After agreement with the respondent - attending the initial meeting with the respondent, the DSA and the diocesan bishop's appointed representative to support them, keep them informed of the progress of their case, and direct them to counselling and support as necessary;
- Assisting the respondent to access advice in relation to both criminal and ecclesiastical law;
- Considering the respondent's family's wishes (when not the victim/survivor) regarding a pastoral response by the Church to them;
- Identifying with the respondent any therapeutic or other needs they have, and offering choices as to how these may be best met;
- Monitoring compliance with Safeguarding Agreements if this is an agreed part of their role
- Recording any meetings or contact they have with the respondent and passing on relevant information to the DSA as appropriate, this should be made clear from the outset of the relationship.

They will not be responsible for managing the file but will pass on written records to the DSA as appropriate, during regular meetings with them. Records of meetings would include dates, times, locations and an overview of the meeting rather than a specific and detailed account.

The link person is NOT the confidant of the respondent. They must be bound by a professional responsibility to disclose to the appropriate authorities (e.g. the Police, DSA etc.) where:

- Others are at risk of harm;
- The respondent makes disclosures of intentions to hurt or harm either themselves or others;
- The respondent makes disclosures of their guilt, or not, in the matter being investigated;
- Safeguarding information is shared to assist in the prevention, detection or prosecution of a crime.

It is important to recognise and to acknowledge where others may still be at risk, the Police and possibly Children's / Adult's Services or the Local Authority will need to be informed.

If the link person is unsure about whether they can share information, they should seek advice from the DSA and/or diocesan registrar.

### **Clarity about the Role**

The link person is not:

- A counsellor for the respondent and should not act in that role;
- A spiritual guide for the respondent;
- An advocate for the respondent;
- A core group member.

The link person (where they are clergy) should not take confession from the respondent.

The link person does not manage the case file and will not have access to it.

Where the respondent accepts the offer of a link person a written description of the link person's role and responsibilities should be provided to the respondent at the commencement of such an arrangement.

This may be a copy of the role as described in this guidance or may be a specifically written description based upon what is agreed between the respondent and the link person.

### **Frequency of Meetings**

The frequency of contacts/meetings should be agreed between the respondent and the link person.

### **Storage of Records**

Information regarding meetings between the link person and the respondent must be stored safely and securely in accordance with Safeguarding Records Practice Guidance 2015.

Records of the meetings that have taken place and any relevant safeguarding issues that have arisen must be forwarded to the DSA for placing in the safeguarding file.

### **Support and Supervision**

Regular contact, as determined between the link person and the DSA, should take place to enable the DSA to keep up to date with the needs and requests of the respondent.

The DSA should offer the link person access to appropriate welfare support to ensure their wellbeing and pastoral needs are met and supervision to allow the link person to receive feedback on their role. If necessary, external welfare support for the link person should be used if appropriate.

*Extracted from Church of England Practice Guidance: Responding to, assessing and managing safeguarding concerns or allegations against Church Officers V2 December 2017 (pages 15-17).*