# Toolkit: Running Safer Food Banks

# Part 1: Policy & Procedures

## Why do food banks merit special consideration?

When churches open their doors to the community through a food bank, or other "open-door" ministries such as warm spaces or drop-ins, they are issuing an invitation for people to come as they are to receive a warm welcome and practical assistance.

While such spaces present opportunities for service and witness, they also call for wisdom.

Both guests and volunteers will bring their own vulnerabilities into the food bank – some of which will be shared, and some of which will remain private. It is therefore important for foodbank facilitators to be mindful of known and unknown risks in the environment, and to have given due consideration to the associated safeguarding policy and procedures.

There is no one-size-fits-all template for running a safe food bank. Depending on the specifics of what you are offering – Is your food bank also a community café? Are children present? Will you offer prayer? – the potential risks, and corresponding safeguarding policies, will look different. However, there are many existing resources that you can draw upon to create a bespoke policy for your church and ministry. This document aims to spell out the core components that you should consider.

*N.B. Part 1 (Policy & Procedures) of this toolkit is intended as a starting point / reference for churches establishing, reviewing or renewing their safeguarding policy.*
*Part 2 (People) covers specific vulnerabilities that might arise with guests or volunteers*

## Who ensures the running of a safe food bank?

No single person is responsible for safety and safeguarding. Safe spaces are created when everyone with a stake in the food bank plays their part.

- **The church/governance body** – is responsible for providing a safe environment. Foodbanks may be run by the church alone, or you may host it with trustworthy ministry partners. Churches should have named **Parish Safeguarding Officer** (PSO) who acts as the lead person for safeguarding matters in the parish and holds the relationship with the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor

- **Food bank managers** – should be DBS checked and undertake safeguarding training up to leadership level; they should also ensure that volunteers have had appropriate training and that those in client-facing roles have been DBS checked; in partnership

with the church, they should set and uphold safety and safeguarding policy; they should know the Parish Safeguarding Officer

- **Food bank volunteers** – should recognise the signs of key safeguarding issues and know how to make a safeguarding referral; they should be familiar with relevant safety and safeguarding policy; they should have appropriate references and be DBS checked if their role brings them into direct contact with vulnerable people; they should complete basic awareness safeguarding training as a minimum

- **The Diocesan Safeguarding Team** – support churches in all safeguarding matters; where safeguarding concerns have been identified, they provide advice and take an active role in addressing them

- **Guests** – should behave peacefully and respectfully, as the staff and volunteers working with them also have the right both to be and to feel safe.

## What is a DBS check?

Formerly called a CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) check, a DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check considers an individual's criminal record, to ensure they will not pose a risk performing certain kinds of work (including voluntary work). DBS checks can be accessed via GOV.UK, or thirtyone:eight, where they are being funded by the London Diocesan Fund for those who are volunteering at a church-run project.

## Do we really need a safeguarding policy beyond what's already on the church website?

While the church's existing safeguarding policies and procedures can and should provide the starting point for community ministries, it is important to give due consideration to the specific risks that may feature within the food bank context. The people in the church, the way the church space is used, the conversations that take place – this could all look completely different to what is typical for Sunday services or other mid-week groups. Setting specific policies and procedures for your food bank signifies that you have taken the time to consider properly the setting in which you will be operating and have planned accordingly for any context-specific risks that may arise.

That is to say: While overarching safeguarding principles will set the vision for appropriate behaviours within the church (e.g. "the church will respond to those that may pose a present risk to others"), it does not, for example, specify how volunteers should respond if someone discloses a sexual offence conviction, during a food bank session, where children and vulnerable adults are present. This is the kind of risk that might be considered in a bespoke safeguarding policy.

When you give real thought to the potential risks of running a food bank (or indeed, any community ministry!), it may feel overwhelming. However, establishing appropriate policies and procedures need not be intimidating, as there are a wealth of resources and examples to draw from:

- The annex to this document provides a list of questions for food bank teams to work through together, as they create or review their safeguarding policy and procedures.

- The National Council for Voluntary Organisations provides advice on safeguarding policy and procedures, and signposts to relevant templates.

- The Church Urban Fund and Charity Excellence provide various resources for working with volunteers.

- Ealing Food Bank has a thorough policy, based on Trussell Trust templates, kept up-to-date online.

- The Hygiene Bank has a clear and concise safeguarding policy published online.

- There are multiple diocesan churches with particularly strong safeguarding practices. The Compassionate Communities and Safeguarding teams are happy to facilitate introductions for peer-to-peer learning.

## Safeguarding responses: the Diocesan Safeguarding Team

**If you have immediate concerns about someone's safety, please contact the police and your local authority Children's or Adult Social Care Services.**

If you are concerned that a child or adult has been harmed or may be at risk of harm, please contact the Diocesan Safeguarding Team. They can be contacted Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.
Email: safeguarding@london.anglican.org Telephone: 020 7932 1224

Out of hours (i.e. from 5pm to midnight on weekdays, and from 9am to midnight on weekends and bank holidays), please contact the thirtyone:eight helpline on 0303 003 1111 and select option 2. Thirtyone:eight is an independent charity that works in close partnership with the Diocesan Safeguarding Team. The diocese receives notification of any advice they give.

## Personal & emotional safety of volunteers

While pastoral care efforts within foodbank settings will largely focus on guests, it is important that safeguarding policies and procedures do not overlook the needs and vulnerabilities of staff and volunteers. Particularly in light of ongoing economic challenges, where human need continues to increase, it is worth giving advance thought to how staff and volunteers may be susceptible to the following:

- **Burnout** – Churches and the wider third sector have seen a decline in volunteer numbers since the COVID 19 lockdowns. In the face of rising need, committed volunteers may be trying to plug capacity gaps through their own efforts; however, this is not necessarily sustainable. Team members should be realistic about what

they can achieve. Volunteers and staff are not blessed by being physically and emotionally depleted – and risk doing a disservice (or even harm) to guests if they are not well enough to serve.

- **Secondary stress / trauma** – Community ministries often entail significant emotional and spiritual investment. Standing alongside those who are navigating stormy seas can leave us physically and mentally exhausted. Having a formal / acknowledged structure and routine of pastoral care can help identify and manage stress and anxiety before they become overwhelming. Keep in mind that team leaders may require additional support / supervision from an external source e.g. a clinical psychologist or spiritual director.

- **Risky decision-making** – People are often motivated to serve in food banks because of a heartfelt care and concern for others. In a church context especially, we look for and expect to see God in other people and we want to think the best of them. However, as we are called to be "wise like snakes and gentle like doves," we must not be naïve about matters of personal safety. Clear boundaries should be set regarding issues such as one-on-one interactions; the giving of money; the sharing of contact details; etc. Everyone should know what to do if they feel threatened by a risk of violence.

## Staying up to date with safeguarding

Churches should look to make use of their Parish Safeguarding Dashboards. These are designed to make safeguarding simpler, helping churches to meet and exceed minimum standards.

The C of E's online safeguarding portal is also a very useful resource, offering foundational training as well as learning on specific issues that may be encountered in food bank settings, such as modern slavery and domestic violence. (For more on these, see Part II of this toolkit.)

You can find further resources on the Diocesan Safeguarding Team's web pages and sign up to their newsletter here.

# APPENDIX: Safeguarding checklist

## Guidance and disclaimer:

Drawn up following consultation with the Diocesan Safeguarding Team, diocesan churches, and relevant NGOs, this checklist considers safeguarding from multiple angles, to help churches in thinking broadly and deeply about their own contexts.

The following questions are therefore intended as a *starting point* for discussion within food bank teams, rather than a fait accompli. They are not exhaustive and will not all be relevant in every church context.

Please note that *you* are responsible for understanding your own context and creating the safest possible environment. It is your responsibility to remain up to date with safeguarding best practice, as well as new CofE requirements and relevant legislation.

## Recruiting volunteers

- Have volunteers been issued with a code of conduct and volunteer agreement?
- Have DBS checks been carried out for client-facing roles? Have we requested / followed-up on references?
- Have volunteers been suitably inducted and given relevant safeguarding training? Do we want to agree a trial / settling in period?
- Have we / our partner organisation given due regard to the CofE's 'Safer Recruitment and People Management' guidelines?

## Pastoral care of staff / volunteers

- Have volunteers been given clear boundaries to observe in terms of how / when / where they support guests?
- How will we help protect staff / volunteers against secondary burnout / trauma? And how can we guard our hearts against compassion fatigue?
- How are we role-modelling and fostering a culture of honesty, transparency, and accountability?
- Do staff / volunteers know how to de-escalate difficult conversations? Or know what to do if they feel threatened?

## Structures

- Does everyone in the team know who to go to if they have a safeguarding concern? Or require pastoral support?
- Are we being mindful of structural power dynamics within the team and within the wider food bank, and the role these play in our interactions?
  *For reference: A flowchart of safeguarding structures for CofE churches can be found here.*

## Record keeping

- Does everyone know how to properly record and escalate a safeguarding concern?
- Where we are storing people's personal information, are we doing so safely (password protected, in line with GDPR requirements, etc.)?

## Lone working

- Are we providing safe and visible spaces for one-to-one conversations? In what contexts are these appropriate or inappropriate?
- How will we ensure the safety of any lone workers e.g. those delivering food to local addresses?

## Documentation

- Does our volunteer agreement provide clear descriptions of the differing roles in the team? Are volunteers empowered to know what they are trusted / expected to do, and where they are required to escalate concerns?
- Have we laid out our expectations of one another in a code of conduct? Are we encouraging healthy, respectful, and life-giving behaviours and relationships?
- Is it helpful for the team to have their own copies of any particular training / advice / contact details / resources?

## Pastoral care of guests

- Are we sharing information about guests on a need-to-know basis?
- Are we aware of (and being honest) about the differing spiritual gifts of our team, and who is best to provide guests with hospitality / a listening ear / practical advice/ prayer support?
- Do we have an agreed understanding of appropriate and respectful spiritual support/witness?
- Have we jointly decided how / in what context it would be helpful and appropriate to invite guests to make use of wider church / community services?

## Community services

- Do we know what support services exist in our area, and would we know how to signpost guests on to them?
- Might it be appropriate to advertise community services on the notice board, through leaflets, or even in the bathrooms? (Many churches now display posters for e.g. the Samaritans, domestic abuse services, modern slavery helplines in toilet cubicles.)
- Do volunteers know where the phone (signal) is to contact emergency services if required?

## Children

- Can we avoid unnecessary overlap between the food bank and any children's work e.g. by running toddler church and foodbank at different times; ensure access to the onsite nursery is closed off to food bank staff and guests?
- Where children are present at the foodbank, can we encourage them to stay with their responsible adult? Can we ensure that any toys / play areas are positioned in full view of children's responsible adults?
- Are we remaining mindful that a DBS check is not required for anyone using a Food bank (thus we do not know everyone's criminal history)?
- Are we remaining mindful that a DBS check is required for anyone volunteering at a Foodbank, who may interact with children (and vulnerable adults) as part of their role.

## Training

- Have staff / volunteers completed safeguarding training on the CofE safeguarding portal to the relevant level? (Basic, Foundations, Leadership, etc.)

- Have we considered what wider training might be needed and by whom? e.g. De-escalation training, first aid / mental health first aid, understanding modern slavery, etc. How can we encourage a good take-up of this training e.g. by integrating training into a team social, or by providing additional assistance to older volunteers, who may not be confident computer / internet users.