Safeguarding Policy

### For the Protection of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

The charity trustees of **HOPEHALL EVANGELICAL CHURCH (‘The Church’)** approved the following Safeguarding Policy and on 14th January 2024

Church Statement

**The Church** is an Independent Church affiliated with the Evangelical Alliance.

**The Church** offer a wide range of ministries to those both inside and outside of our church of all ages including children and young people and the Leadership Team takes seriously their responsibility to care for and protect the welfare of the children, young people and vulnerable adults entrusted to the church’s care

Introduction

**The Church** is committed to creating and maintaining a safe and secure environment for all individuals who participate in its activities, particularly children and vulnerable adults.

This Safeguarding Policy outlines the principles and procedures that the church will follow to ensure the welfare and protection of children and vulnerable adults.

The policy applies to all staff, volunteers, and participants involved in any church-related activities.

**Policy Statement**

**The Church** recognizes that safeguarding is the responsibility of everyone in the church community.

**The Church** is committed to the welfare, protection, and safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, and to preventing their abuse, neglect, harm, or exploitation.

**The Church** will take all reasonable steps to ensure the safety and well-being of children and vulnerable adults who participate in its activities.

**Key Principles**

**The Church** will treat all individuals with respect, dignity, and fairness, irrespective of age, gender, race, religion, or disability.

**The Church** will promote the well-being and rights of children and vulnerable adults and will listen to their concerns and take them seriously.

**The Church** will adopt safe recruitment practices, including thorough screening, training, and supervision of staff and volunteers working with children and vulnerable adults.

**The Church** will ensure that appropriate reporting and response procedures are in place in cases of suspected abuse or neglect.

**The Church** will regularly review and update this policy to reflect best practices and legal requirements.

**Role and Responsibilities**

The Leadership Team will appoint a designated safeguarding officer (DSO) responsible for overseeing safeguarding practices and providing guidance and support.

All staff, volunteers, and participants are responsible for reporting any concerns, suspicions, or disclosures of abuse or neglect to the DSO or an appropriate authority.

The DSO will ensure that all individuals involved in working with children and vulnerable adults undergo appropriate safeguarding training.

The DSO will maintain records of staff and volunteers, including relevant background checks and training certifications.

The Leadership Team will ensure that sufficient resources are allocated to implement and maintain effective safeguarding measures.

**Procedures**

**R****ecruitment and Training**

All staff and volunteers who work directly with children or vulnerable adults will undergo appropriate background checks and screening procedures.

All staff and volunteers will receive safeguarding training and will be made aware of the church's Safeguarding Policy.

**Code of Conduct**

**The Church** will establish a code of conduct that sets out expected behaviour and boundaries for all staff and volunteers.

The code of conduct will include guidelines on appropriate physical contact, communication, and the use of technology and social media.

**Reporting and Responding**

All concerns, suspicions, or disclosures of abuse or neglect will be taken seriously and responded to promptly and appropriately.

**The Church** will follow local statutory reporting requirements and cooperate fully with relevant authorities.

**Monitoring and Review**

**The Church** will conduct regular reviews of its safeguarding practices to ensure compliance with this policy and applicable laws.

Feedback from staff, volunteers, participants, and relevant stakeholders will be sought to identify areas for improvement.

**Confidentiality**

All information related to safeguarding concerns will be handled sensitively and in accordance with legal requirements and applicable privacy policies.

Confidentiality will be maintained, but not at the expense of the safety and welfare of children and vulnerable adults.

Sharing information with appropriate authorities will be done on a "need to know" basis and in consultation with relevant professionals.

**Training and Awareness**

**The Church** will provide regular safeguarding training and awareness programs for staff, volunteers, and participants to ensure a common understanding of safeguarding practices.

**The Church** will promote awareness of this policy through various means, including displays, posters, and online resources.

**Recognising the Signs and Symptoms of Abuse**

**Definition of Abuse**

**Physical:** Actual or likely physical injury, or failure to prevent physical injury or suffering

**Emotional:** Impairment of emotional and behavioural development caused by persistent or severe emotional ill-treatment or rejection

**Sexual:** Exploitation of children/young people/vulnerable adults to gratify sexual desires

**Neglect:** Failure to care for children/young people/vulnerable adults and protect them from danger, seriously impairing health and development

**Signs and Symptoms**

**Physical Abuse:**

▪ Any injuries not consistent with the explanation given for them

▪ Injuries which occur to the body in places which are not normally exposed to falls, rough games, etc

▪ Injuries which have not received medical attention

▪ Reluctance to change for, or participate in, games or swimming

**Emotional Abuse:**

▪ Changes or regression in mood and behaviour

▪ Nervousness, watchfulness

▪ Sudden under-achievement or lack of concentration

▪ Attention seeking behaviour

▪ Running away, stealing, lying

**Sexual Abuse:**

▪ Any allegations made by a child/young person/vulnerable adult concerning sexual abuse

▪ Excessive preoccupation with sexual matters and (if a child) detailed knowledge of adult sexual behaviour, or regularly engaging in age-inappropriate sexual play

▪ Sexual activity through words (if a child), play or drawing

▪ Sexually provocative or seductive behaviour

▪ Inappropriate bed-sharing arrangements at home

▪ Severe sleep disturbances with fears, phobias, vivid dreams or nightmares, sometimes with overt or veiled sexual connotations

**Neglect:**

▪ Appearing ill-cared for and unhappy

▪ Withdrawn or aggressive

▪ Lingering injuries or health problems

**Responding to Suspicions or Allegation of Abuse**

Priority rests with the interest of the child/young person/vulnerable adult, their protection takes precedence over any concern regarding the person who might be involved.

**Handling Suspicions of Abuse**

Any Worker who suspects that a child/young person/vulnerable adult under their responsibility may have been abused or suffered neglect in any way will:

▪ Inform the Safeguarding Co-ordinator as soon as possible regarding their suspicions

▪ Maintain confidentiality, discuss the matter with no-one else The Co-ordinator will seek appropriate advice and take necessary action, if required.

**Handling Allegations of Abuse**

In the event of a child, young person or vulnerable adult disclosing allegations of abuse the Worker should:

▪ Accept what the child or young person says (however unlikely the story may sound)

▪ Listen sympathetically, remain calm ▪ Look at the child, young person or vulnerable adult directly, be honest

▪ Avoid apportioning blame

▪ Let the child, young person or vulnerable adult know that the worker will need to tell someone else – do not promise confidentiality

▪ Be aware that the child, young person or vulnerable adult may have been threatened

▪ Never push for information. Gently repeat back to the child, young person or vulnerable adult what they have said and ensure it has been heard correctly. The worker should let them know that they are ready to listen

▪ Avoid questioning the child, young person or vulnerable adult, e.g. “Why didn’t you tell anyone before?” “Are you sure this is true?” “Why, where, when, whom?”

▪ Never make statements such as “I can’t believe it” or “I’m shocked”

When concluding the discussion the Worker should reassure the child, young person or vulnerable adult and let them know what will happen next and that they will be informed of the outcome. The Worker should then:

▪ Immediately contact the Safeguarding Co-ordinator and inform them in as much detail as possible regarding the allegations. If the allegations involve the Co-ordinator then the Lead Pastor, Pastor, or one of the Leadership Team should be approached. The Worker retains the right to directly contact Social Services or the Police

▪ Makes notes as soon as possible (preferably within an hour), writing down exactly what the child, young person or vulnerable adult said, when he/she said it, what was said in reply, and what was happening immediately prior to the disclosure. Record exactly when the report was written and sign and date the notes. If these handwritten notes are subsequently typed up then they should be signed and dated also. All handwritten notes, even if subsequent typed notes have been made, should be kept in a safe place

▪ Maintain the strictest confidentiality, and discuss with no-one the allegations The nature and gravity of such allegations will determine the detailed response of the Safeguarding Co-ordinator within the framework of the following procedure:

**Where a child, young person or vulnerable adult has a physical injury inconsistent with the explanation given, or displays a clear symptom of neglect, either of which arouse suspicion:**

▪ The Co-ordinator will immediately inform the Lead Pastor and contact Social Services who will then make an early assessment of the situation and seek medical opinion if need be. In an attempt to work in collaboration, parents will be advised that a referral to Social Services will be made.

▪ In the event of serious injury urgent medical attention will be sought, and Social Services will be informed immediately. Information disclosed to parents will be left to the discretion of the statutory authorities.

▪ The Co-ordinator will maintain the strictest confidentiality disclosing information on a “need-to-know” basis.

**Where a child or young person makes allegations of sexual abuse:**

▪ The Co-ordinator will immediately inform the Lead Pastor and contact Social Services. The Police may want to try and obtain forensic evidence, it would not therefore be helpful for the child or young person to change clothing, or have a bath, etc.

▪ The Co-ordinator will not investigate the matter. This is the joint responsibility of the Social Services and the Police

▪ Information disclosed to parents will be left to the discretion of the statutory authorities

▪ The Co-ordinator will maintain the strictest confidentiality disclosing information on a “need-to-know” basis

**Allegations from third parties or anonymous referrals:**

▪ The Worker or Safeguarding Co-ordinator will elicit as much information as possible regarding the allegation from the referrer, i.e. the cause of concern and nature of injuries, and unless they wish to remain anonymous this should include their name, address and telephone number.

▪ The referrer will be told that any information relating to any child, young person or vulnerable adult at risk may result in referral to Social Services who may wish to interview them (if known) as part of their investigation.

**The Church** and Social Services will seek to offer appropriate support to all involved in the situation.

**Review**

This policy will be reviewed annually or as required by changes in legislation, best practice guidelines, or internal circumstances.

Any revisions to the policy will be communicated to all staff, volunteers, and participants.