



# **Policy for the Diocese of Carlisle in the care of the spouses and partners of divorced and separated clergy**

## **Policy summary**

This policy sets out the responsibilities of Bishops for the provision of Bishops Visitors to the spouses and partners of divorced and separated clergy. It provides a role description and person spec for Bishops Visitors and an outline of their duties. Finally, it provides guidance in terms of the provision of accommodation for spouses/partners.

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## Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to set out clear responsibilities for Bishops and Bishops Visitors in terms of the care of the spouses and partners of divorced and separated clergy.

## Policy

### 1. Responsibilities of The Diocesan Bishop

The Diocesan Bishop must

- 1.1 Appoint at least two Bishop's Visitors to the Spouses and Partners of Divorced and Separated Clergy (Bishop's Visitors). These are ideally lay appointments demonstrating a diversity of backgrounds, a balance of gender and a good geographical spread across the Diocese.
- 1.2 Ensure that in discharging their responsibilities, Bishops are mindful of the need to manage any conflicts of interest, and the Bishop's Visitor must always place the safety of any children first, and the spouse/partner if appropriate. In line with this, the Diocesan Bishop will notify the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor when a marital breakdown occurs.
- 1.2 Ensure the Bishop's Visitors meet the requirements of the person specification in Sections 2 and 3. They should not be senior members of the clergy nor the spouses or partners of senior clergy of the Diocese (Bishop, dean, archdeacon or senior diocesan officer).
- 1.3 Inform the Hon Secretary to the Bishop's Visitors of the names and contact details of the Bishop's Visitors when an appointment is made.
- 1.4 Ensure Bishop's Visitors have access to and have completed the necessary Safeguarding Training and DBS checks.
- 1.5 Provide the Bishop's Visitor with a named supervisor who is a member of BLT or DBF staff<sup>1</sup> and who has the necessary pastoral skills to offer support.
- 1.6 Ensure that every clergy spouse or partner who has separated from or been divorced from their partner, or is in the process of separation or divorce, is offered the support of a named Bishop's Visitor and provided with their contact details. A record should be kept (in line with Data Protection principles) of any support offered, whether it was accepted or not.
- 1.7 With the agreement of the spouse or partner, pass their contact details to the Bishop's Visitors so they can be in touch directly.
- 1.8 Provide, via the diocesan website, details for a spouse/partner who is in process of divorcing or separating who wants to contact a Bishop's Visitor without the Bishop's knowledge. Ensure that all spouses and partners are made aware of what support is available to them when they arrive in the Diocese.

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<sup>1</sup> Supervision should be undertaken by an appropriately skilled and preferable senior cleric, for example Bishops Chaplain or equivalent. The term "supervision" is used here not to refer to any line management or

accountability, but more as a pastoral support to the Bishops Visitor if they need it. Should it be felt the Bishop's Visitor will need professional support in terms of counselling, this should be provided.

- 1.9 Be available to the Bishop's Visitor should there be matters which the spouse/partner and Bishop's Visitor agree need to be brought to their attention.

## 2. Role Description for Bishop's Visitors

The role of the Bishop's Visitor is to support clergy spouse/partners in the event of a clergy marriage facing difficulties or coming to an end for any reason. The role is to support, help identify needs and provide signposting to ensure those needs are met. The role is not to provide advice. It must be recognised that "one size does not fit all", and that clergy spouses/partners will have very different needs according to their own situation, and these needs may change during the course of the engagement.

If appropriate, the Bishop's Visitor should encourage any spouse or partner who has not advised the Bishop of their circumstances of their marriage to do so, but they must not themselves disclose this to the Bishop unless agreed in writing.

### **Role Description:**

- 2.1 Support the spouse/partner at the time of the breakdown of the marriage.
- 2.2 Identify with the spouse/partner any additional pastoral needs or other needs they have, eg housing, spiritual, independent financial advice, therapeutic and signpost them to a person (or service) qualified to provide this.
- 2.3 Meet with the spouse/partner as often as the spouse/partner wants in the short term, and agree a plan with them for immediate and medium term actions. In some circumstances, this will include identifying what income is expected, where they will live, and providing help to access financial support from charities or applying for benefits.
- 2.4 Inform the spouse/partner of their rights, including that of attending public worship. In certain circumstances, the clergy spouse/partner may be subject to a Safeguarding Agreement, and this will place restrictions on their worship in order to keep themselves, their former spouse/partner and others safe. Where this does not apply, every effort should be made to ensure the spouse/partner can continue to worship within a supportive community, according to their wishes.
- 2.5 Be alert to risk of any nature to the spouse/partner and any children in the immediate aftermath of exiting an abusive relationship.
- 2.6 Report to the DSA immediately any concerns for the safety of the spouse/partner and any children. If the spouse/partner or child(ren) is/are at immediate risk, report to the police.
- 2.7 Maintain contact with the appointed supervisor (see 1.5) especially when involved in actively supporting a spouse or partner.

- 2.8 Attend all mandated [safeguarding training](#) and at all times follow the [safeguarding practice guidance](#) mandated by the House of Bishops.
- 2.9 Make an annual return to the Hon Secretary to the Bishops Visitors detailing the number only of new contacts and the total number of those being supported.
- 2.10 Plan, together with the spouse/partner, a strategy for the reduction and ceasing of active support, including where further support is available for medium and longer term needs.
- 2.11 Be aware of, and at all times operate within, Data Protection and Information Sharing requirements.

### 3. Person Specification for Bishop's Visitors

- 3.1 Willingness and aptitude to undertake the role, attend the relevant training and undertake their own development in the field of safeguarding.
- 3.2 Ability to respect boundaries and offer unbiased support without offering specialist advice.
- 3.3 Understanding confidentiality in respect of safeguarding issues, when it is appropriate to contact statutory services and when and how information can be shared.
- 3.4 Ability to actively listen and to recognise trauma.
- 3.5 Experience of working with individuals and families who have experienced trauma, or working with individuals and families to resolve difficult situations and conflict.
- 3.6 Knowledge of local statutory and third sector services an advantage.
- 3.7 Understanding of Church of England structures generally, and the Diocese specifically.
- 3.8 Ability to work alongside Senior Leaders in an independent capacity, ensuring the voice of the spouse/partner is heard.
- 3.9 Ability to be mobile within the Diocese at short notice and to be available at unsociable hours if required.

## 4. Housing for Spouses and Partners in Church-provided Accommodation

The Bishop has a pastoral responsibility to the spouse/partner and dependents of clergy in the Diocese. In the event of a clergy marriage/partnership breakdown where the spouse or partner was living in church-provided property, this will mean a responsibility to ensure that the spouse/partner and dependents have a safe, appropriate home to live in, as described in the Archbishop's Commission on Housing, at least in the short and medium term. The long-term aim would be to work to independent housing, either by buying their own property or through housing association provision.

Being required by the church to live in tied housing leaves the spouse/partner in a difficult legal position regarding housing following a relationship breakdown; unlike a normal tenancy, the spouses cannot simply agree that one will take it. Local authorities will usually advise people who need housing, especially those with dependent children and where there is no risk, to stay where they are. It is important for all concerned to understand that moving out of accommodation, even that tied to their spouse/partner's employment, voluntarily, will result in a local authority determining that the person had made themselves voluntarily homeless, thus compromising the statutory support to which the spouse/partner might otherwise have been entitled. Clergy housing is provided to clergy "for the better performance of their duties", hence it may not always be possible for the member of clergy to leave, other than for a temporary period with the permission of the Diocesan Bishop. Help with securing alternative accommodation might be necessary if the spouse/partner is willing, forced or required as a result of a court order to leave the house.

Although the numbers of clergy spouses/partners and families needing support with housing when a marriage or partnership breaks down are not large, in cases involving safeguarding concerns or allegations of domestic abuse there is often a need to respond quickly, especially where children are involved.

Circumstances vary widely. The assistance required by a family consisting of a cleric with a non-earning spouse/partner and several young children will be different from that needed by a couple in their 60s with no dependent children, both earning, and owning a house of their own. It is important not to make assumptions about the different needs of clergy spouses/partners and to recognise even where a clergy spouse/partner may have shared ownership of alternative housing, such houses may be either rented out, in the wrong location for work/schools or not immediately available, and short-term help may still be necessary.

In relation to housing, the following support could be provided depending on the circumstances of the clergy spouse /partner:

1. In cases of allegations of domestic abuse, the aim is to provide information and support to the clergy spouse/partner to enable them to identify a temporary place of safety or access 'refuge' accommodation. If there is a suggestion of any safeguarding concerns, including domestic abuse, then the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser must be advised and be part of the discussion about the steps that should be taken in the specific case.
2. Assist the clergy spouse/partner to find and secure affordable private rented accommodation which meets the Archbishops' Commission on Housing criteria of being safe, stable, satisfying, sociable and sustainable. This may involve:-
  - a. Support from the Property Department in undertaking a property search and support with property viewing and tenancy arrangements.
  - b. Providing a grant to cover rent deposit.
  - c. The DBF acting as rent guarantor for an initial 6 to 12 month period for an assured shorthold tenancy.
3. Should there be a suitable DBF property available, offer a let on an assured shorthold tenancy at market rent or Universal Credit housing allowance cap level. Care will be needed in drawing up the tenancy to ensure that the house can be used if it is needed for the better performance of the duties of a clergy office holder or if the circumstances of the clergy spouse or partner change.
4. Assist the clergy spouse/partner to find and secure a property to purchase. This may involve:-
  - a. Support from the Property Department in undertaking a property search and support with property viewing, advising on suitability and market value or appropriate level of offer.
  - b. Providing information on conveyancing firms.

It might also be possible for a DBF to provide an interest-free transitional loan while the spouse/partner is waiting for Universal Credit