Christ Church Felixstowe
Disciplinary Policy and Procedure

1. Adoption of this policy

This policy was formally adopted at a meeting of the Parochial Church Council on __13th October 2026___, and will be reviewed and re-adopted annually.

Signature of the vicar: ___Dominic Turner_____, on behalf of the PCC.

2. Purpose

Christ Church Felixstowe seeks to be a community where all people are treated with dignity, fairness, honesty, and care. This includes the way we address concerns about conduct, behaviour, attendance, or performance at work.

This policy explains how the PCC will handle disciplinary matters involving employees. Its aims are to:

- Clarify expectations.
- Encourage improvement where needed.
- Ensure concerns are handled fairly, proportionately, and without unnecessary delay.
- Protect the wellbeing, ministry, reputation, and proper functioning of the church.

This policy does not form part of any employee's contract and may be amended by the PCC.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all paid employees of the PCC.

It does **not** apply to clergy in their office-holder capacity. Where the Vicar has a conflict of interest or is not the appropriate person to act, the Churchwardens or another PCC-appointed person may act instead.

Volunteers, office-holders, clergy, licensed ministers, and PCC members are not subject to this employee disciplinary procedure. Concerns about their conduct should be handled fairly and pastorally under the relevant policy or Church of England process.

4. Relationship with Other Policies

This policy should be read alongside:

- Code of Conduct.
- Equal Opportunities Policy.
- Safeguarding Policy.
- Whistleblowing Policy.
- Grievance Policy.
- Sickness Absence Policy.
- GDPR policies.
- Health & Safety Policy.

Safeguarding concerns **must** be handled under the Safeguarding Policy.

Concerns relating to ill-health, disability, or sickness absence should normally be handled under the Sickness Absence Policy or a capability process.

Concerns involving whistleblowing, governance failure, financial irregularity, or legal breach may require alternative procedures.

Where more than one process may apply, the PCC will determine the most appropriate route.

5. Principles

Christ Church Felixstowe will seek to:

- Treat employees with dignity, fairness, and respect.
- Act without unreasonable delay.
- Consider informal resolution where appropriate.
- Investigate concerns before taking formal action.
- Explain clearly the nature of any allegation.

- Give employees a fair opportunity to respond.
- Provide relevant evidence where appropriate.
- Avoid prejudging outcomes.
- Consider wellbeing and reasonable adjustments.
- Handle information sensitively and confidentially.
- Make proportionate decisions.
- Provide reasons for formal action.
- Allow employees to appeal.

Dismissal for a first offence will not normally occur unless the matter amounts to **gross misconduct**.

Employees are expected to cooperate honestly and responsibly with disciplinary processes.

6. Informal Action

Many concerns can be resolved informally. Informal action may include:

- A conversation.
- Clarifying expectations.
- Additional supervision or support.
- Training.
- Pastoral or wellbeing support.
- A written note of guidance.
- A review meeting.
- Agreed steps for improvement.

Informal action is not a formal warning.

The PCC may move directly to formal action where concerns are serious, repeated, unsafe, or unsuitable for informal handling.

7. Investigation

Before formal disciplinary action is considered, the PCC will investigate the matter appropriately. The purpose is to establish facts and determine whether there is a case to answer.

An investigation may include:

- Speaking with the employee.
- Speaking with witnesses.
- Reviewing documents, emails, messages, rotas, records, or other relevant material.
- Considering relevant policies or role descriptions.
- Seeking HR, legal, diocesan, or safeguarding advice.

Where practicable, the investigator should not be the person making the final decision.

Employees and witnesses are expected to cooperate and respect confidentiality.

8. Investigation Meetings

An employee may be invited to an investigation meeting. This is a fact-finding meeting, not a disciplinary hearing.

There is no statutory right to be accompanied, but the PCC may allow it where reasonable, especially where the matter is serious or the employee has a disability or vulnerability.

If it becomes clear that formal action may be needed, the meeting may be adjourned and continued under the formal procedure.

9. Suspension

Suspension is not disciplinary action and does not imply guilt.

Suspension may be considered where:

- There is a safeguarding or safety risk.
- Working relationships may be seriously affected.
- The employee's presence may hinder the investigation.
- The allegation may amount to gross misconduct.

Suspension will normally be on full pay and for as short a period as reasonably possible.

Alternatives (e.g., temporary changes to duties or access) will be considered first.

Terms of suspension will be confirmed in writing.

10. Formal Disciplinary Hearing

If, after investigation, the PCC considers there is a disciplinary case to answer, the employee will be invited to a formal hearing.

The written invitation will include:

- The allegation.
- Sufficient information to understand the case.
- Possible consequences (including dismissal).
- Date, time, and place.
- List of attendees.
- The right to be accompanied.
- Relevant evidence.
- Any witnesses to be called.
- A request for the employee's evidence or witnesses.

The employee will be given reasonable time to prepare.

11. Right to be Accompanied

Employees have the statutory right to be accompanied at a disciplinary hearing by:

- A work colleague, or
- A trade union representative.

The companion may address the hearing, sum up the case, and confer with the employee.

If the companion cannot attend, the employee may propose an alternative date within five working days.

12. Reasonable Adjustments

The PCC will consider reasonable adjustments for employees with disabilities or health conditions.

Adjustments may include:

- Changing meeting format or location.
- Providing documents in alternative formats.
- Allowing breaks.
- Additional support.
- Remote attendance.
- Extra time to respond.

Employees should notify the PCC of any needs as early as possible.

13. Conduct of the Hearing

The hearing will be conducted calmly, fairly, and respectfully.

It will include:

- An explanation of the concern.
- The presentation of evidence.
- An opportunity for the employee to respond.
- Questions from both sides.
- Witness evidence where appropriate.
- Adjournments if further investigation is needed.

A decision will be made only after proper consideration.

14. Possible Outcomes

After the hearing, the PCC may decide on:

- No further action.
- Informal guidance or support.
- Training or supervision.

- An improvement note.
- First written warning.
- Final written warning.
- Dismissal.
- Action short of dismissal (where lawful and contractually permitted).

Formal outcomes will be confirmed in writing, including:

- Decision and reasons.
- Required improvements.
- Timescales.
- Review arrangements.
- Consequences of further misconduct.
- Appeal rights.

15. Improvement Note / First Written Warning

Issued where conduct, performance, or attendance does not meet acceptable standards.

Will normally remain live for 12 months.

16. Final Written Warning

Issued where:

- The matter is serious.
- There is further misconduct.
- Insufficient improvement has occurred.

Will normally remain live for 12 months, or longer if proportionate.

17. Dismissal or Action Short of Dismissal

Dismissal may be considered where:

- There is gross misconduct.
- Further misconduct occurs while a final warning is live.

- Insufficient improvement follows a final warning.
- Conduct or performance remains unacceptable.
- Another substantial reason justifies dismissal.

Dismissal decisions may only be taken by the Vicar, Churchwardens, or another authorised PCC representative.

Written confirmation will include:

- Reasons.
- Termination date.
- Notice arrangements.
- Final payments.
- Return of church property.
- Appeal rights.

18. Gross Misconduct

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Theft, fraud, dishonesty.
- Physical violence or threats.
- Serious bullying or harassment.
- Serious safeguarding breaches.
- Serious confidentiality or data protection breaches.
- Misuse of church funds or property.
- Serious health and safety breaches.
- Serious insubordination.
- Intoxication at work affecting safety or judgement.
- Serious misuse of IT or social media.
- Conduct bringing the church into serious disrepute.
- Criminal conduct relevant to the role.

19. Appeals

Employees may appeal within **five working days** of receiving the outcome.

Appeals may be based on:

- Unfair procedure.
- Unreasonable decision.
- Disproportionate sanction.
- Overlooked evidence.
- New evidence.
- Conflict of interest.

The appeal will be heard by someone not previously involved, where practicable.

The appeal decision is final.

20. Grievances Raised During Disciplinary Proceedings

If a grievance is raised during disciplinary proceedings, the PCC will determine how best to handle both matters fairly. Options include:

- Pausing the disciplinary process.
- Addressing both matters together.
- Appointing a different person.
- Seeking external advice.

21. Criminal Allegations

The PCC may proceed with disciplinary action before criminal processes conclude, where appropriate.

Safeguarding or legal advice will be sought where necessary.

22. Confidentiality

Disciplinary matters will be handled confidentially, with information shared only where necessary.

Absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed where safeguarding, legal obligations, or risk of harm are involved.

23. Records and Data Protection

Records will be kept securely and handled in accordance with our GDPR policies.

24. Protection from Unfair Treatment

Employees will not be treated unfairly for participating in disciplinary processes, raising concerns, or exercising statutory rights.

Malicious allegations or breaches of confidentiality may themselves be disciplinary matters.