

St Matthew's Church, Sheffield: Policy on the Inclusion and Support of Ex-Offenders

Effective Date: 17 July 2025

Approved by: St Matthew's Parochial Church Council (PCC)

Review Date: July 2026

1. Purpose

St Matthew's Church, Sheffield, is committed to being a welcoming Christian community, reflecting the love and grace of Jesus Christ. We believe in the transformative power of faith and the importance of supporting all individuals, including ex-offenders, in their journey of rehabilitation and reintegration into society. This policy outlines our approach to welcoming ex-offenders into our church community while ensuring the safety and well-being of all members, particularly children and vulnerable adults, in line with our safeguarding commitments.

This policy aligns with the Church of England's *Promoting a Safer Church* safeguarding guidelines, the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (as amended), and the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Code of Practice.

2. Scope

This policy applies to:

- Ex-offenders seeking to participate in worship, activities, or volunteering at St Matthew's Church.
- Church staff, volunteers, and leadership involved in the recruitment, support, or supervision of ex-offenders.
- Any roles or activities requiring a DBS check, particularly those involving work with children, young people, or vulnerable adults.

3. Principles

- **Inclusion and Redemption:** We believe that every person is made in the image of God and that faith can play a vital role in rehabilitation. Ex-offenders who have served their sentences, expressed repentance, and seek to engage with our community will be welcomed with compassion and respect.
- **Safeguarding:** The safety of all members of our congregation, especially children and vulnerable adults, is paramount. We will implement robust measures to ensure safety while supporting ex-offenders.
- **Fair Treatment:** Ex-offenders will be treated fairly and without discrimination, in line with the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, which allows certain convictions to become "spent" after a specified period.
- **Transparency:** We will maintain open and honest communication with ex-offenders about their involvement in church activities and any restrictions that may apply.

- **Confidentiality:** Information about an ex-offender's criminal history will be handled sensitively and shared only with those who need to know, in accordance with data protection laws and safeguarding protocols.

4. Recruitment and Involvement of Ex-Offenders

St Matthew's Church welcomes applications from ex-offenders for volunteer or paid roles, as well as participation in worship and community activities, subject to the following guidelines:

4.1 Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Checks

- For roles involving work with children, young people, or vulnerable adults, or other positions exempt under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975 (as amended), a DBS check at the standard or enhanced level will be required.
- Applicants will be informed at the outset of the recruitment process if a DBS check is required and will be provided with a copy of this policy.
- Only "unspent" convictions or cautions (as defined by the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974) will be considered unless the role is exempt, in which case relevant "spent" convictions may also be reviewed.
- Applicants must complete a Church of England Confidential Declaration Form (CDF) for roles requiring a DBS check.

4.2 Assessment of Criminal Records

- A criminal record will not automatically bar an individual from participation or employment. Each case will be assessed individually, considering:
 - The nature, severity, and relevance of the offence to the role or activity.
 - The time elapsed since the offence and evidence of rehabilitation.
 - The potential risks to the church community, particularly vulnerable groups.
- Discussions regarding any disclosed offences will be conducted sensitively, either during an interview or in a separate meeting, to understand the circumstances and assess suitability.
- The Diocesan Safeguarding Panel will be consulted in cases involving serious offences (e.g., violent or sexual offences) or unresolved allegations, and their recommendations will guide decisions. Approval from the Bishop may be required in certain cases.

4.3 Support and Supervision

- Ex-offenders participating in church activities may be assigned a mentor or support team to foster discipleship, provide spiritual guidance, and help integrate them into the community. This is not intended to monitor or control but to build meaningful relationships and support personal growth.

- For ex-offenders with specific restrictions (e.g., license conditions or probation requirements), the church will work with relevant agencies (e.g., probation services) to ensure compliance.
- Where necessary, a tailored agreement may be established outlining boundaries for participation (e.g., avoiding certain areas of the church or specific activities) to protect both the individual and the congregation.

4.4 Withdrawal of Offers

- Failure to disclose relevant information about convictions or cautions directly related to a role may result in the withdrawal of a conditional offer of employment or volunteering.
- Any decision to withdraw an offer will be discussed with the individual, and they will be given an opportunity to provide further context before a final decision is made.

5. Welcoming Ex-Offenders into the Congregation

- Ex-offenders are welcome to attend worship and participate in general church activities, subject to any legal restrictions or safeguarding requirements.
- Where an ex-offender's history includes serious offences (e.g., sexual or violent crimes), a risk assessment will be conducted in consultation with the Diocesan Safeguarding Panel to determine appropriate participation. This may include restrictions on certain activities or areas of the church to ensure safety.
- The church will work to foster an environment of acceptance and rehabilitation, encouraging the congregation to respond with love, forgiveness, and support while addressing any concerns or fears through clear communication and education.

6. Training and Awareness

- All individuals involved in recruitment, safeguarding, or pastoral care will receive training on:
 - The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 and related legislation.
 - The Church of England's Safer Recruitment and People Management Guidance.
 - The DBS Code of Practice.
- Training will emphasize the importance of balancing inclusion with safeguarding and handling sensitive information appropriately.

7. Confidentiality and Data Protection

- Information disclosed through DBS checks or discussions about an ex-offender's history will be treated confidentially and shared only with those directly involved in the decision-making process (e.g., the Vicar, safeguarding officer, or Diocesan Safeguarding Panel).
- All personal data will be handled in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

8. Appeals and Complaints

- If an ex-offender believes they have been unfairly treated in the application of this policy, they may submit a written appeal or complaint to: **The Vicar, or the Parish Safeguarding Officer, St Matthew's Church, Sheffield, S1 4FT.**
Email: Father.Naylor@carverstreet.co.uk, Safeguarding@carverstreet.co.uk
- The appeal should include the individual's name, contact details, the nature of the complaint, and any relevant information (e.g., date of DBS disclosure or decision).
- The Vicar will arrange an independent review of the matter, with a response provided within six months. The outcome will be communicated to the individual and relevant parties.

9. Partnerships with External Organizations

St Matthew's Church recognizes the value of collaborating with organizations that support ex-offenders. We may refer individuals to or work with:

- **In2Change South Yorkshire** (www.in2change.org): A Sheffield-based charity delivering programs by ex-offenders to prevent crime and support rehabilitation.
- **Tempus Novo** (www.tempusnovo.org): A charity providing employment opportunities for ex-offenders.
- **Nacro** (www.nacro.org.uk): Offers housing and support services for ex-offenders to reduce reoffending.
- **Caring for Ex-Offenders (CFEO)** (www.caringforexoffenders.org): Connects ex-offenders to church-based mentoring and support.

10. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years by the Parochial Church Council (PCC) or sooner if required by changes in legislation, Church of England guidance, or local circumstances. The next review is scheduled for [Insert Date, e.g., July 2027].



EX OFFENDERS POLICY

11. Contact Information

For questions about this policy or to discuss participation as an ex-offender, please contact:

Safeguarding Officer, St Matthew's Church, Sheffield, S1 4FT

Email: Safeguarding@carverstreet.co.uk

**Adopted by the Parochial Church Council of St Matthew's Church, Sheffield, on
17/07/25.**