

Complaints Policy¹

Introduction

A complaint is a written or verbal expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet about an action, or lack of action by a person acting on behalf of the church, or about the policies and procedures of the church. We shall do all we can to avoid the need for anyone to complain about the service we offer, but we offer visitors the opportunity to express dissatisfaction so that we can improve our service.

When a complaint is made by someone who is deployed within the parish, either paid staff or voluntary office holders, it is referred to as a grievance. The policy for dealing with grievances is part of St. John's HR Policy.

A complaint or a grievance may include an allegation that a person has behaved in an unacceptable way.

The procedure for dealing with a complaint or grievance is formed of three main stages:

1. Receipt of complaint and initial assessment
2. Informal problem solving
3. Formal procedure

Receipt of complaint and initial assessment

Specific categories of complaint/grievance must be handled according to the appropriate procedure:

1. If a complaint or grievance relates to or includes an allegation that a child or adult who may be vulnerable has been harmed or is at risk of harm, or that an adult or another child may have caused harm to a child or adult who may be vulnerable, it must be responded to according to the Diocesan Safeguarding Policy.
2. Complaints and grievances against clergy are handled through the Clergy Discipline Measure. Complaints or grievances against clergy should be addressed to the archdeacon or the area bishop.
3. Complaints and grievances against licensed or commissioned ministers (such as Readers) are handled through a separate Diocesan procedure. These complaints or grievances should be addressed to the Vicar.

If any church office holder or staff member receives any other complaint, however trivial, from any visitor or other person they are to listen carefully and show empathy, and to promise investigation followed by appropriate action. Details of the complaint are to be noted and sent to the Parish Administrator who will keep a log of complaints.

¹ Agreed at PCC on 23rd March 2019. To be reviewed every three years.

Problem-solving

The aim, when responding to complaints and grievances, is as far as possible to enable them to be resolved informally, speedily and fairly by discussion, problem solving, mediation and negotiation. Problems should therefore be brought direct to the person(s) deemed responsible for the area of dissatisfaction or disquiet, and will hopefully be resolved in this way.

If this is unsuccessful, then the complainant may invoke the formal procedure:

Formal procedure for complaints (for grievances see HR Policy)

The formal procedure has two stages:

Stage 1

A complaint should be submitted in writing to a churchwarden or deputy churchwarden of the parish (who is not him or herself the subject of the complaint).

The person bringing the complaint has the opportunity to state his or her case in person; and to be represented, if they wish at any meeting, by a friend or other supporter.

The churchwarden will notify the PCC via the PCC Secretary and a panel of three PCC members will be appointed to hear an appeal in stage 2. This panel will then be excluded from any further discussion of the matter pending a possible appeal to avoid compromising their impartiality.

The recipient of the complaint will then meet with the complainant to listen to and note the facts of the complaint. S/he will then give to the subject of the complaint the note of the facts relating to it. The churchwarden will then interview the subject of the complaint, who may also be represented by a friend or other supporter if they wish, to listen to their response to the complaint -brought against them. The churchwarden may then interview any other relevant parties.

The churchwarden then draws conclusions and informs the complainant and the subject of the complaint of the outcome, ideally within a week of the complaint being made.

Stage 2

If the reply given at stage 1 does not satisfactorily resolve the complaint, or the subject of the complaint appeals against the outcome of stage 1, the matter shall be put in writing to a churchwarden, who will take the complaint to the PCC. The PCC will authorise the panel of three that has been formed to hear the appeal on its behalf.

The panel will establish why the complainant continues to feel aggrieved, and receive all the documentation from the previous investigation at Stage 1. The panel will then meet with the complainant and his/her supporter, the subject of the complaint and his/her supporter, and the churchwarden who investigated the complaint at the first stage. Witnesses may be called.

The panel members will then sit alone to form a judgement and make a decision about the complaint. Their conclusion will be brought to PCC for ratification. The panel will then inform the complainant and the subject of the complaint of the outcome, within a month of the complaint being made.

The decision of the panel ratified by the PCC will be final.