



Policy no. 24

Complaints' Policy

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 We recognise that from time to time complaints will arise from the public, members of organisations, or an organisation itself, about how we do things, or how our employees, clergy, or other Diocesan or church representatives behave. We view these as an opportunity to learn and improve as individuals and as an organisation. Our aim is to have a process to respond to these that is simple to use and understand, and in line with the Church of England's mission to [Promote a Safer Church](#).
- 1.2 This policy and the procedures outlined here are applicable for complaints that relate to the way we have dealt with both safeguarding and other issues.

2. SCOPE

- 2.1 This policy does not apply to clergy, readers or Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF) employees who wish to make a complaint. They should pursue complaints under the appropriate process or policy in the [Clergy Handbook](#), Reader Handbook, or Staff Handbook.
- 2.2 If you have a safeguarding concern, rather than a complaint about how we have dealt with a safeguarding matter, or believe somebody's wellbeing may be a risk you should contact either the Parish Safeguarding Officer or the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor as appropriate, or in an emergency with Adult or Children's Social Care immediately, in accordance with our [Safeguarding Policy](#).
- 2.3 The complainant must be the person directly affected by the issue or an interested party to the person affected (e.g. a close relative, carer), and not an unrelated third party or wider observer.

3. PRINCIPLES

- 3.1 The process is based on the following principles that apply to how we deal with complaints, whether they relate to clergy, readers, authorised lay ministers, lay people, volunteers, or paid officials:
 - All complaints will be dealt with in good faith and treated seriously;

- The process will be fair, just and easy to use;
- Wherever possible the aim is to resolve complaints informally rather than formally, and locally rather than centrally.
- We will be as open and transparent as we can in how complaints will be dealt with;
- Complaints will be dealt with in a way that is timely and appropriate;
- All meetings and conversations will be minuted or noted, and the notes/minutes shared with the appropriate individual and their comments sought;
- Help and support will be offered to those making the complaint and those subject to the complaint;
- Confidentiality must be respected and all information will be handled sensitively, shared on a ‘need to know’ basis only and with due regard to our obligations under the General Data Protection Regulations; and
- Where it is appropriate, the possibility of reconciliation should be explored;
- Errors that may have been made will be corrected wherever practical, reasonable and affordable.

4. RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER PROCESSES

- 4.1 If other, specifically relevant complaints processes apply, e.g. whistle-blowing, you may be directed to these or be advised under which policy your complaint is being dealt with. This includes using the informal process for dealing with complaints against members of the clergy (see below), and which itself may result in complaints being carried forward under the Church of England’s [Clergy Discipline Measure](#).

5. THE INFORMAL STAGE

- 5.1 Many matters can be resolved informally and locally, and if you have a complaint, you should consider this approach first:
- Think about what would resolve your concern;
 - Consider sharing your complaint with the person concerned if this is appropriate, or locally with someone who is in a position to take, or facilitate, action to resolve it, e.g. priest in charge, PCC member, or Archdeacon
 - Do you have a friend or colleague who could support you confidentially and sensitively?
- 5.2 If you feel that an informal approach is not appropriate, e.g. because your complaint relates to a serious matter, or if you are not satisfied with the outcome of an informal approach, you should make a formal complaint in writing as below.

6. THE FORMAL STAGE

All formal complaints will first be referred to the Diocesan safeguarding team for them to determine whether it is a safeguarding matter. If they deem it not to have reached the safeguarding threshold, then the procedures below will apply.

6.1 Complaints about how a safeguarding concern has been handled or managed

6.1.1 We aim to ensure that all safeguarding concerns are dealt with well, in line with national Practice Guidance and the Truro DBF Safeguarding Policy: Promoting a Safer Diocese. However, sometimes we may unintentionally get things wrong. If you are not satisfied with the handling of a safeguarding concern or allegation, please follow the procedure below.

6.1.2 If your complaint is about a clergy member, then please follow the process below at 6.2. Otherwise, in the first instance you should put your complaint in writing, or if you prefer by phone, to the Diocesan Secretary. All telephone conversations will be noted in writing and shared with the complainant to ensure accuracy. The Diocesan Secretary will confirm that they have received the complaint and that they will respond fully within 14 days. They will supply a copy of this complaints procedure to the complainant.

6.1.3 If your complaint is about the Diocesan Secretary or a Diocesan Bishop, then you should contact the Independent Chair of the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel in the first instance (see [here](#) for contact details). They will seek the guidance of the Diocesan Registrar and such other legal and professional advice as may be required to ensure that we deal with your complaint well and independently from the Diocesan organisational structure but in line with the principles and timescales below.

6.1.4 Within this timescale, the Diocesan Secretary will do, or delegate to another appropriate officer (e.g. Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor) to do, the following:

- make all necessary and appropriate enquiries to establish the substance of the complaint and any attempts already made to resolve the matter informally;
- initiate further discussions or meetings with the complainant if required, to fully understand their issue, seek clarity and be clear on what would constitute a resolution for them;
- speak with any other parties such as may be required in order to ensure that they have the necessary information available to respond to the complaint.

6.1.5 If it is not possible for the person above to respond to your concerns within 14 days, they will advise you of why this is the case, and when a response can be expected.

6.1.6 If necessary, they will determine subsequent actions and where necessary, arrange mediation between the parties concerned.

6.1.7 It is hoped that an acceptable resolution will be found and that the complaint can be resolved to the complainant's satisfaction at this level. However, if not, then you have the right of appeal to the Bishop of Truro within 14 days of receiving the outcome of your complaint. You should set out the grounds for your appeal in writing. The Bishop is responsible for hearing your appeal within 28 days of receiving it, and they will deal with it in line with principles above. Their decision is final.

6.2 Complaints about clergy members

6.2.1 Matters of serious concern or allegations of professional misconduct relating to a clergy member should be referred to the relevant [Archdeacon](#), or to the Bishop's office if it relates to an Archdeacon. You should expect an acknowledgement within 10 working days and a definitive reply to your complaint within 28 days. If this is not possible, we will send you a progress report with an indication of when a full reply will be given.

6.2.2 In the first instance, it will be for the Archdeacon or Bishop to decide whether:

- this is a matter that might be better considered locally; or
- to suggest an approach that may require an independent review of a local decision, further reconciliation, internal investigation; or
- to deal with the matter under the "6-steps process" for following up concerns as outlined in the Diocese [Clergy Handbook](#).

6.2.3 Our purpose under [Safer churches](#) is to ensure that the vulnerable, marginalised and oppressed have a right to a voice and this process is committed to providing an open fair and transparent process to consider the issue and agree a respectful way forward which aims to resolve the issue. However, it is recognised that on rare occasions an agreement cannot be reached or positions reconciled, and other options will be explored.

6.2.4 If you remain unsatisfied with the outcome, you have the right to appeal this decision. If the matter relates to a member of the clergy, the appeal should be made in writing to the Bishop of Truro.

6.3 Other complaints

6.3.1 Formal complaints about employees, volunteers, contractors or consultants engaged or employed by the Diocese (i.e. Truro DBF) should be sent in the first instance to the Diocesan Secretary. They will investigate it, or delegate investigation of the complaint, to the appropriate person, e.g. Human Resources. Complaints about the actions of the Diocese or our work (e.g. about the website, our policy and practices, strategy, etc) should be

directed wherever possible to the relevant member of Diocese staff if known. If not, you should send it to the Diocesan Secretary.

- 6.3.2 The same timescales apply as when and how we respond as for complaints about clergy above in 6.2.1.
- 6.3.3 Appeals should be addressed in the first instance to the Diocesan Secretary and state the grounds for appeal. If the Diocesan Secretary was involved in the original complaint, then the appeal should be sent to the Chair of the Bishop's Diocesan Council for them to consider, or delegate to another Board member, or members, to hear.

7. EXTERNAL STAGE

7.1 If you do feel that our resolution of your complaint:

- has not resolved your concerns; and
- the issues of concern pose a risk of significant harm to the beneficiaries, assets, services or reputation of the Diocese of Truro (or the Diocese Board of Finance as its administrative umbrella);

you may refer your complaint to the Charity Commission. Information about how to make a complaint to the Charity Commission, and the ground on which individuals can complain, are [here](#).

8. MONITORING COMPLAINTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

- 8.1 The Diocesan Secretary will ensure that a log is kept of all complaints received, the timescale of the resolution process, lessons learned, and action to be taken.
- 8.2 The number, type and outcome of complaints made under this policy will be reported annually to the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (for complaints about our management of safeguarding concern) and the Truro Diocesan Board of Finance (for all complaints) so that any trends or further actions deemed necessary can be considered and agreed.

9. CONTACT POINTS

- 9.1 You can find phone and email contact details for the Bishop, Archdeacons and Diocesan Secretary on our website [here](#)

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