

ST JOHN'S CHURCH COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

SUMMARY

Issues and concerns do arise from time to time. St John's encourages individuals to seek resolution informally to provide them with the opportunity to resolve your concerns. You may also address any concerns with the Vicar, whose leadership responsibilities include managing the church's staff. If your concerns relate to the Vicar, you may prefer to contact one of the Wardens or Lay Chair of the PCC. Concerns and feedback can also be raised with the Church Wardens - Messrs Stephen Rigby and John McLernon. This allows them to pick up undercurrents or issues that might otherwise go unnoticed. Where the above avenues do not resolve the matter or the issue requires a formal complaint, then the complaints procedure can be used. Please fill in the form in Attachment 1 and send to the Complaints Review Body.

PATHWAYS FOR RAISING CONCERNS

Complaint Type	Complainant	Action	Appeal
"Surfacing Concerns" Specific or general concern about a person in a leadership role	Church member or church attendee	Can be raised informally with the Church Wardens (Messrs Stephen Rigby and John McLernon) or others nominated by the PCC	Use Complaints Procedure
Behaviour of, or activities and decisions taken by, the church's staff, charity trustees, or church members.	Church member or church attendee	Use complaints procedure if matter cannot be informally resolved or, where relevant, Vicar or Church Warden has been unable to take appropriate action	Use Complaints appeals procedure
Behaviour of, or activities and decisions taken by, the church's staff, charity trustees, or church members.	Member of public or external organisation	Write to Vicar or "Church & HR Administrator" who will refer complaint to be dealt with by relevant person	Use complaints procedure
Behaviour of, or activities and decisions taken by, the church's staff, charity trustees, or church members.	Paid staff member	Use Staff Grievance Procedure if matter cannot be informally resolved <u>Staff Grievance Procedure</u>	See grievance procedure
Safeguarding related	Church member or member of the public	Raise with Safeguarding Officer <u>Safeguarding Officer</u>	
Whistleblowing	Church member or member of the public	Invoke whistleblowing policy <u>Whistleblowing Procedure</u>	

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1. INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of our complaints procedure is to provide a process for dealing with complaints relating to the behaviour of, or activities and decisions taken by, the church's staff, charity trustees, or church members (both attendees and members of the electoral roll).

As a Christian organisation, we consider this to be a highly important procedure. However, we also hope it will seldom be required. Before raising a formal concern through this procedure, we would expect and encourage you to seek resolution informally. Therefore, in the first instance, please contact the member of church staff involved and provide them with the opportunity to resolve your concerns. You may also address any concerns with the Vicar, whose leadership responsibilities include managing the church's staff. If your concerns relate to the Vicar, you may prefer to contact one of the Wardens or Lay Chair of the PCC before making a formal complaint.

2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Wherever possible the church would prefer to follow Biblical principles of reconciling differences informally and personally.

Matthew 18:

15 "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector"

Informal resolution can be achieved directly with the individual and/or by involving the Vicar, Associate Vicar or member of the Standing Committee.

However, on occasion attempts to resolve an issue informally may fail or may not be appropriate. Where this is not possible or appropriate, we will seek to resolve your complaint through a formal process.

3. Can I make a complaint if I am not a member of the church?

Yes. You do not have to be on the church's electoral roll to make a complaint. If you believe you have reasonable grounds to make a complaint and you cannot resolve the issue informally or believe it would not be appropriate to do so, you can make a complaint.

4. What kind of complaint can I make using this procedure?

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, whether it subsequently proves to be justified or not, about any aspect of church life. This can be about a person or persons, an activity or a group, or about a service that is provided by the church. Issues may include bullying behaviour, coercion, manipulation, dishonesty, inappropriate sexual behaviour, criminal activity, and bribery.

5. What kind of complaints are not suitable for this procedure?

Safeguarding concerns relating to the protection of children or adults at risk

- Any safeguarding concern should be reported to church's safeguarding officer following the church's safeguarding procedure.

An employment grievance

- The church has a staff grievance procedure which is set out in the employee's contract of employment. Employment-related grievances by staff should be dealt with in accordance with that grievance procedure which can be found in the staff handbook.

Whistleblowing

- A concern that practices or procedures in the church or charity places people at risk. Whistleblowing is the act of telling someone internal to the organisation or to the public that the organisation you work for either in a paid or voluntary capacity is doing something illegal, immoral, illicit, unsafe or fraudulent, or out of line with the standards set in the governing documents. A whistle-blower is a person who comes forward and shares his/her knowledge on any wrongdoing which he/she thinks is happening in the whole organisation or in a specific department. A whistle-blower could be an employee, volunteer or a person accessing the organisation who becomes aware of the activities listed above. A whistleblowing policy is in force in St John's and this should be used in cases of whistleblowing.

6. How will I make a complaint and how will the church deal with it?

If informal resolution fails or is not appropriate the church has adopted this complaints procedure. Whilst complaints can be lodged verbally, it is preferred that the complainant completes the form for recording complaints. See attachment 1. If, however, the church receives a written or verbal complaint which is not on the correct form, the person designated to receive the complaints will ensure that all the information required for the form has been included. If not, they will request the additional information that would have been provided had the form been completed.

Complaints should be made to St John's Church Complaints Review Body. The Complaints Review Body (CRB) is a small team of church members who are not members of staff or members of the PCC. The CRB is responsible for maintaining confidential records of all complaints for a minimum period of 10 years.

Members of the CRB are asked to absent themselves from dealing with any complaint where there may be a conflict of interest in actuality or perception. A conflict of interest would be anything that inhibits or could be seen to inhibit a fair and impartial examination of the complaint. For example: a family relationship (spouse, parent, child, brother, sister). Also, if the complaint was around a particular area of ministry, it can't be investigated by someone also involved in that ministry area.

Dealing with your complaint

All complaints submitted under this procedure will be handled sensitively. Attachment 2 lists guidance for CRB members hearing your complaint. We hope that you will feel able to voice concerns openly under this policy. Completely anonymous disclosures are difficult to investigate. If you want to raise your concern confidentially, we will make every effort to keep your identity secret and only reveal it where necessary to those involved in investigating your concern. Please notify us if you wish your concerns to be investigated confidentially in this way.

On receipt of your complaint, the person to whom it was made will:

- Reply telling you who will be dealing with your complaint.
- Begin dealing with the complaint, contacting you for further information if needed, finding out what happened, when it happened, and who was involved, and if necessary, interviewing those people.
- Inform the person or people who the complaint is about what the complaint is about unless this would seriously prejudice addressing your complaint.
- Recommend what could be done to resolve your complaint, if anything, giving reasons.
- Write to you informing you of the outcome of the review.

Depending on the complexity of the issue and availability of the persons involved will affect how quickly the complaint can be dealt with. Ideally, we aim to complete step 1 above within 7 days and step 2 within 14 days.

Multiple complaints

The church may, on occasion, receive related complaints, or several people may make the same complaint. Depending upon the nature of the complaint and when each complaint is received, the CRB may decide to consider/deal with the complaints together or to deal with the earliest complaint first. The more complex the complaint is, the longer it may take the church to respond. This is especially likely if the complaint relates to historic matters or if several people need to be interviewed.

Complaints where there is a police investigation

If the police investigate the person who is the subject of the complaint in relation to the same or related matters, the church may not be able to begin or complete the review until the police have completed their investigations.

Reporting obligations

Please be aware that the church may decide that it is under a duty to report the matter to statutory authorities or the Charity Commission. If this is the case, the church will write to you to tell you this. The church will treat the facts and content of your complaint carefully and in line with the church's privacy policy. We will only share details of your complaint with those who need to know about it. When sharing details of your complaint we will look to discuss this with you, although there may be occasions where we cannot do so. However, on occasion, the church may need to make a public statement about the subject matter of the complaint, report it to statutory authorities or seek professional advice, and consequently the church cannot guarantee to keep your complaint confidential. You should maintain reasonable confidentiality as to the nature and content of your complaint, other than to seek professional advice if required.

7. What if I am not happy with how the church deals with my complaint?

If the complaint has not been resolved to your satisfaction you may request a review of the decision.

Requests for a review should be submitted in writing to the Church Wardens or Chair of the PCC within 14 days of the date on which the outcome of the investigation was sent or given to you. The review will be dealt with impartially by a senior lay person or staff member not involved in the previous investigation where possible (although they may ask anyone previously involved to contribute to their review of the previous decision). At this stage it may be decided to refer the complaint to an independent Christian organisation or to the Bishop of Ebbsfleet.

We will confirm our final decision in writing, usually within four weeks of your submission of your request for a review. This is the end of the procedure and there is no further right of review. An appeal should not include new evidence unless you could not with reasonable diligence have provided that evidence when you first complained.

If you are unhappy with how the church deals with your complaint, you may choose to contact the Charity Commission, the regulator of charities, using the following form:
<https://forms.charitycommission.gov.uk/raising-concerns/>

8. VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS

If someone makes repeated complaints about the same or similar matters and these have been addressed through this process, then we will contact the complainant and may inform them that we will no longer be responding to their complaints.

If the church concludes that the complaint is vexatious and particularly disruptive to the church and the complainant is a church member, the church may consider exercising church discipline.

This policy was approved by St. John's PCC at its meeting on the 9th January 2023.