

Complaints Policy and Handling Procedures

Introduction

At times something in church life might concern an individual, and we hope everyone will feel able to share their concern with a trusted leader.

Sometimes that concern increases and they feel a genuine need to raise a complaint. This is different, but even then an issue can be resolved by talking with a leader and following guidance found in scripture (eg. Matthew 18 v15-16 and 1 Timothy 5 v19-20).

But it could be that a more formal approach is needed. These notes provide guidelines for handling any such formal complaint.

A formal complaint should be made in writing, by letter or by email.

Purpose of this policy

This policy aims to outline clear and simple guidelines on raising and handling a formal complaint.

Our Commitment

This policy relates to activities carried out on behalf of Christ Church Dunstable— whether by pastors, elders, group/ministry leaders, paid staff, or Church Member volunteers.

This **Complaints Policy and Handling Procedure** as well as a short, simple **Complaint Procedure** [[Link to Concerns and Complaint](#)] is available via the CCD website, or a paper copy may be obtained from the church office.

We will aim to handle any complaint fairly and in a timely way.

Those appointed to investigate any complaint will have sufficient authority within Christ Church Dunstable to avoid either intentional or unintentional interference with the process, as well as avoiding any conflict of interest. This may be anything that inhibits or could be seen to inhibit a fair and impartial examination of the complaint; for example, being a close family member could make it inappropriate for a person to be involved in the process.

Our aim is that complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and relationships repaired.

We will also reflect on the experiences to help improve what we do and how we do it.

Defining a Complaint

A complaint could be defined as an expression of serious dissatisfaction about an aspect of church life resulting in unfair, unsatisfactory or inappropriate treatment of an individual or group.

A complaint can be about a person or persons, an activity, or a group or about a service provided by the church.

A concern or complaint should first seek to be resolved via scripture-based informal conversation.

Where this fails, and a formal complaint needs to be lodged, an investigation into the complaint must take place. If a complainant wishes to commence with a formal complaint, they should be able to demonstrate why they have not sought resolution informally as set out above.

Procedure for Receiving and Handling Complaints

Any complaint should be raised using the simple, guideline found on the church website.

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The Operations Manager (Jonny Barham) is our designated person to receive any complaint.

He will ensure that all the information required has been included. If not, he may request additional information.

The Operations Manager should acknowledge receipt of the complaint within seven days. At that time, he will provide the complainant with a copy of these procedures so that they understand the process that will be followed. He will also confirm who will be handling the complaint. The complaint will be allotted to one or more individual who will be responsible to carry out the investigation. This will usually be one of the elders, or a representative of the elders and other senior leaders, Safeguarding Lead etc.

The management and oversight for this policy and its implementation sits with the pastors and elders.

A proposed timescale for our response should also be provided to the complainant. This will usually be within one month, but more complex issues may take longer.

The Operations Manager should also discern whether the threshold for reporting to statutory services or any other regulatory reporting has been met.

It is usually preferable to meet to discuss and try to resolve issues. Care should be taken to ensure that the meeting environment is conducive to constructive discussion. For example, it would not generally be appropriate for a person to be asked to attend a meeting with all the elders of the church because this could result in a significant level of intimidation which could prevent an impartial and balanced participation in the investigation.

Pastoral support should be offered to those involved and they should be allowed to bring along a friend to accompany them should they wish to.

Written notes of interviews/meetings will be taken and held securely.

If there are delays to the timeframe, all parties should be kept informed.

Whether the complaint is upheld or not, the reply to the complainant and any specific persons involved, should describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

If the Ministry Team and Elders conclude that, once the above processes have been exhausted, a complaint is vexatious (ie. unreasonable, and/or repeated,) the church may consider exercising church discipline if the complainant is a member. If the complainant is not a church member, the church is under no obligation to investigate further the complaint made once all available avenues of resolution have been explored.

Confidentiality and Information Sharing

All complaints will be handled sensitively and confidentially. Information concerning the complaint will only be shared with those who need to know the information. All relevant data protection procedures or GDPR requirements will be followed.