

A model Complaints and Grievances Procedure

It may be that your PCC have already agreed such a procedure. You are strongly recommended to have one in place, especially if you are employing staff. If you don't already have one, you may wish to adopt the following model.

1 What counts as a complaint and a grievance?

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.

When the complaint is made by someone who is deployed within the parish, whether paid (for instance, paid youth workers and administrators) or holding unremunerated office (for instance, Sunday School leaders, servers), it is usually referred to as **a grievance**.

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

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.

Complaints and grievances against licensed or commissioned ministers (Readers, Southwark Pastoral Auxiliaries, Church Army Officers) are handled through a separate Diocesan procedure. These complaints or grievances should be addressed to the incumbent of the parish.

2 Problem-solving

The aim always, when responding to complaints and grievances, is 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, however, 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 through the Diocesan procedures for handling allegations of abuse.

If the complaint or grievance does not concern a child or adult who may be vulnerable, and the person bringing it is not satisfied with the outcome at the problem-solving stage, s/he may then invoke this formal procedure.

3 Formal procedure for complaints and grievances

Stage 1

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

A grievance should be submitted in writing to the person to whom the person bringing the grievance is accountable; this will be the direct line manager of a paid employee, or the person responsible for co-ordinating the work of a volunteer. If, however, the person who is accountable is the subject of the grievance, the grievance should be taken to a churchwarden.

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

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

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

Stage 2

If the reply given at stage 1 does not satisfactorily resolve the complaint or grievance, the complaint or grievance should be put in writing to a churchwarden, who will take the complaint to the PCC. The PCC will form a panel of three of its members who have not been involved in the process before.

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 or grievance and his/her supporter, and the churchwarden or line manager 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 or grievance. They will inform the complainant and the subject of the complaint or grievance of the outcome, within a month of the complaint being made.

The decision of the panel representing the PCC will be final.

As a result of an investigation into a complaint or a grievance, it may be necessary to address the matter through the disciplinary procedure.