

Complaints Policy

Castlefields Church, CIO, Charity No: 1192197

Purpose

As an outward facing organisation, it is recognised by the Trustees that the church may be the subject of a level of complaints. The purpose of this policy is to provide a framework for handling complaints in a Biblical way and restoring relationships wherever possible. As this is the case, the Bible will be the main guide to the Elders / Trustees in making fair and just decisions concerning complaints raised.

A complaint is commonly defined as a voluntary expression of dissatisfaction with our policies, procedures, employee(s) or how we do things in accordance with our Church Handbook. It may be made in person, by phone, by email, a recorded message, through the website, social media and in writing.

Seriousness of Complaint Handling

As required by Charity Commission Guidelines:

- The Trustees will take seriously negative feedback and complaints.
- The Trustees will demonstrate that they learn from mistakes and use this learning to improve performance and internal decision making.”
- The Trustees will make sure that there is a transparent, well-publicised effective, and timely process for making and handling a complaint, and that any internal or external complaints are handled constructively, impartially and effectively.
- The Trustees recognise that there are always two sides to any story and that it is important to take a balanced approach when considering complaints.
- The Trustees recognise that the structure of the church leadership means that there is no person or body to whom complaints can be escalated if the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome. In such circumstances the church will offer to ask an Elder / Church Leader from another church with no specific relationship with the complainant or ourselves to act as mediator to endeavour to bring the matter to a satisfactory conclusion.
- The Trustees will ensure that the Safeguarding Policy of the Church is the governing document in relation to all safeguarding complaints.
- The Trustees will act in accordance with the Church Handbook (where it applies) in respect of any complaint made by a church member.
- The Trustees will, of necessity in some cases handle matters of potential “church discipline” in accordance with Section 2.8 of the Church Handbook.

Receiving Complaints

Complaints may be addressed to any member of the Trustees / Elders either orally or in writing.

In certain cases, and for the avoidance of doubt, the Trustees may request oral complaints to be repeated in writing and reserve the right to share complaints with other trustees as they see appropriate.

Oral complainants must be informed that certain aspects of oral complaints will be recorded (either at the time or later)

Where the complaint relates to a specific person, the Trustees may choose to inform that person of the nature of the complaint and to receive a formal response from them. The name and any other sensitive information provided by the complainant will not be shared with the subject of the complaint.

Practical Aspects of Complaint Handling

All complaints will be handled by the Trustees / Elders of the church. This may initially be by a one-to-one conversation but if this does not bring a conclusion, the matter will be handled by two of the Trustees / Elders as the “best practice” of Scripture requires.

As set out in the Charity Commission “good governance code”, the Trustee(s) / Elder(s) will:

1. Inform the complainant of this policy and offer to provide them with a copy
2. Endeavour to make the complainant feel comfortable in any conversation
3. Be helpful and friendly
4. Deal with complaints fairly, equitably, and consistently;
5. Ask the person what they would like to be done to resolve the issue;
6. Be clear about what you can do, how long it will take and what it will involve;
7. Keep the complainant informed, as far as possible, about progress and how to pursue their complaint further, if not satisfied with outcome;
8. Explain why it is not possible to agree to the complainant’s request if this is the case.
9. If an apology is deserved for something that was the responsibility of the church, a full apology will be made.
10. Record details at all stages of complaints.

Resolving Complaints

1. Formal complaints will be acknowledged by the Trustees within 2 calendar weeks of being received and will include details of who is dealing with the complaint and when the complainant can expect to have a response.
2. The Trustees will use best endeavours to provide a definitive response within one month of receiving the complaint. If, because of ongoing investigations or for other reasons this is not possible, a progress update will be provided to the complainant within one month of receiving the complaint.
3. A definitive response will include:
 - Actions taken to investigate the complaint;
 - Conclusions drawn from the investigation;
 - Actions taken as a result of the investigation.

Appeals and escalation

- Where the complainant is not satisfied with the response, they should inform the Trustees of this dissatisfaction in writing within 1 month of receiving the response.
- Wherever possible, a different trustee will take the lead in investigating the appeal.
- If the complaint cannot be resolved after consideration of an appeal, the Trustees will seek to gain the assistance of another outside mediator as already outlined in this policy.
- After this process has been exhausted, the appeal decision will be considered final.
- At any time, the complainant can complain directly to the Charity Commission or any other appropriate regulating authority. The information about the types of complaints that the Commission can become involved with are set out on their website.

Policy Approved by Trustees Meeting & recorded in Minutes

Date: 22/10/24

Next Review to be undertaken:

Date: (max 12 months from above date