



## COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

### **Purpose of the policy**

This policy is intended for complaints made by parishioners or people with whom the Diocesan priests, employees and volunteers come into contact in the course of their work or ministry. The Diocese acknowledges that it doesn't get everything right all of the time and it is important that complaints are raised and that they are handled with courtesy and fairness.

We take complaints seriously because they may impinge upon the professional competencies and standards of the diocese and its staff, but also upon how we act as Church and resolve disagreements.

### **How to complain**

All complaints will be dealt with applying the same principles. The nature of the complaint will determine who you complain to in the first instance. All complaints must be submitted in writing or by email, even if the initial approach was made by telephone or in person.

Complaints will not be dealt with unless the complainant sets out the following:

- the name of the person who is being complained about and/or the name of the event that is being complained about;
- details of when and where the issue of concern took place;
- details of any witnesses;
- details of what has been done to try and resolve any concerns;
- an indication of what might resolve any concerns;
- details of who else the matter has been reported to;
- confirmation that the complainant agrees that the complaint and the supporting documentation may be provided to the person complained about – should it be necessary to do so.

The Diocese reserves the right not to investigate anonymous complaints.

## **Who to complain to?**

### **Safeguarding matters**

If your complaint relates to how a safeguarding matter has been handled, the Diocese follows the national complaints policy guidelines issued by the Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (CSSA). The policy can be found following the link to the CSSA website [here](#).

Your complaint should be directed to [safeguarding@hallam-diocese.com](mailto:safeguarding@hallam-diocese.com).

### **Clergy matters**

If your complaint relates to clergy or local church matters, including sacramental preparation, that is not of a safeguarding nature you should in the first instance discuss this with the parish priest concerned, before raising a formal complaint. The Diocese encourages that, wherever possible, complaints should be discussed at an informal level in an attempt to seek a resolution. The Diocese reserves the right not to consider a formal complaint until that informal conversation has taken place.

If after a conversation with the parish priest concerned has not resolved the issue you should direct your complaint to the Dean of your deanery. In some circumstances the Dean of your deanery may not be the appropriate person to deal with the complaint e.g. if the Dean is the parish priest concerned. In which case a Dean from another deanery, or person nominated by the Bishop may hear your complaint.

The contact details for the relevant Dean are on the diocesan website or can be obtained by making a request to [contact@hallam-diocese.com](mailto:contact@hallam-diocese.com).

### **Schools matters**

If your complaint concerns a school of the Diocese your complaint will be handled using the Schools Complaints Procedure which may be found [here](#).

Your complaint should be addressed to [schools@hallam-diocese.com](mailto:schools@hallam-diocese.com).

## **Not sure who to complain to?**

If you are unsure who to address your complaint to then please send your complaint to:

Secretary to the Trustees,  
Hallam Pastoral Centre,  
St Charles Street,  
Sheffield,  
S9 3WU  
or email [finance@hallam-diocese.com](mailto:finance@hallam-diocese.com).

Your complaint will be passed to the appropriate body.

### **Handling Of Complaints**

All complaints must be raised within 3 months of the incident occurring, unless there are exceptional extenuating circumstances.

There is no restriction on who can bring a complaint. However, in some cases we may receive a number of inter-related complaints or a number of people may make the same complaint. In those circumstances, we may decide to consolidate the investigation into the complaints or deal with the earliest complaint first. The approach will depend on the nature of the complaints and the timing and receipt of the complaints.

### **Receiving a complaint**

Any employee who receives a complaint under this procedure must inform his or her line manager as soon as reasonably practicable. If the complaint is made orally the employee to whom it is made will make a written note of the complaint for the line manager's information. The complainant must then submit the complaint in writing. The diocese will endeavour to acknowledge the complaint within 7 working days from receipt of the written complaint.

### **Informal stage**

Where possible a complaint should be resolved by the person responsible for the issue being complained about. They should be willing to listen, to discuss the matter and seek to satisfy any justified concerns. While this stage is called an 'informal' stage to distinguish it from the formal procedures described in the following paragraphs, complainants are assured that the process at this stage will be conducted with the same care and treated with the same seriousness as the formal stages.

### **Formal Stage**

Depending upon the subject area of the complaint, as identified in the section "How to complain", a suitably senior person should be appointed to investigate the facts of the case fully. This may include interviewing priests, volunteers or employees involved in the subject of the complaint and/or obtaining written statements from them. This may also involve referring the complaint to a higher level in the structure of the organisation or of management at the discretion of the Diocese. If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given the opportunity to respond.

At the discretion of the Diocese, outside support may be sought to investigate the complaint. There is an expectation that all clergy, volunteers and employees will cooperate fully with the complaint process.

## **Action**

Following the investigation, the Diocese may take action that it considers appropriate, including the commencement of the capability or disciplinary procedure in respect of one or more employees, the removal of volunteers from positions or the initiation of disciplinary measures under canon law for a priest. Appropriate action may also include a review of policy, or an examination of what the Diocese could have done better and the lessons to be learnt from the matter investigated.

The complainant must be informed of the outcome and notified in writing of the decision. The outcome does not necessarily need to contain details of that action.

## **Review**

If a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint, they may request a review of the decision. This request must be made within seven days of notification of the outcome and must be in writing and submitted to the Secretary to the Trustees.

The complainant should give reasons why he or she considers that a review is necessary. On receipt of the request the Diocese will determine whether the grounds for a review are warranted. If a review is warranted, the Diocese will arrange for a review panel, normally consisting of at least two members who have had no prior involvement with the complaint. The Diocese may at its discretion appoint persons from outside the diocese, or with specialist knowledge to review the complaint.

The terms of reference for the Review Panel are to consider the complaint documentation, how the complaint has been handled and the decision arrived at given the evidence. The Review Panel will not reinvestigate the complaint.

The Review Panel will normally consider and respond to the review within 28 working days.

## **Variation to the Complaints Procedure**

The Diocesan Board of Trustees may vary the process outlined above for good reason. For example, it may be necessary to avoid a conflict of interest if the person designated under this policy to investigate a complaint was a party being complained about.

## **Unreasonably Persistent Complaints**

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore we will treat them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- has made the same complaint before, and it's already been resolved by following the complaints procedure;

- makes a complaint that is obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, defamatory or repetitive;
- insists on pursuing a complaint that is unfounded, or out of scope of the complaints' procedure, beyond all reason;
- pursues a valid complaint, but in an unreasonable manner, for example refuses to articulate the complaint, refuses to co-operate with the complaints procedure, or insists that the complaint is dealt with in ways that are incompatible with this procedure and the time frames it sets out;
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation goes on;
- Makes a complaint designed to cause disruption, annoyance or excessive demands on Diocesan time;
- Seeks unrealistic outcomes, or a solution that lacks any serious purpose or value.

In these circumstances the Diocese reserves the right not to consider a complaint.

### **Privacy Policy**

Information that is collected concerning a complaint will be handled in accordance with the Diocesan Privacy policy, a copy of which is available on the Diocesan website. Documentation concerning a complaint will be kept for a period of six years after the closure of the complaint. Note that information collected as part of a safeguarding matter may have a longer retention period as stated in the Safeguarding Complaints policy.

*Date last reviewed:*

*The next review is due on or before:*