



Version 2: Jun2025

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## **Trinity Cheltenham – Our Policy and Process for Handling Complaints**

We hope people don't need to make a complaint about something to do with Trinity; however, sometimes things do go wrong and people can make mistakes. In line with our beliefs as Christians and best practice, we encourage anyone with a complaint to try and first resolve the matter by directly contacting the person they have been dealing with. If this does not work or you feel unable to speak to the person by yourself, we encourage you to be in touch with another more senior member of our ministry team to ask them to support you in trying to resolve the situation in this way. If you feel unable to do this or if the complaint is of a serious nature then we follow the formal process set out below.

Regardless of whether a complaint is submitted informally or formally we will do our best to resolve the issue in a timely fashion (where that is possible) and to communicate well with you.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

**This policy sets out the various ways in which formal complaints to the PCC about matters for which they are responsible will be responded to, and to ensure people working or volunteering at Trinity know what to do when a formal complaint is received.**

The PCC aims to be an open and transparent organisation which both welcomes *and* encourages challenges where there are perceptions that decisions or actions may reflect potential discrimination. This applies to the widest contexts of justice and equality, racial justice, and all protected characteristics as set out in law.

Complaints may be made using this policy about general issues of Trinity PCC policy and action, or individual action by members of the PCC, clergy licensed at Trinity, members of the staff team, church volunteers and those participating in church activities being run under the auspices of the PCC. Complaints cannot be made or considered about decisions or

actions that have been taken following legal, National Church or Diocese of Gloucester processes protocols, due process, and appeal processes.

Our key principles are that formal complaints will be

- Normally received in writing. If telephone complaints are raised these will be followed up in writing so that clear information is recorded and agreed with the complainant (e.g. contents of any initial telephone notes that have been taken). Anonymous complaints will rarely be followed up.
- Responded promptly and with confidentiality so that only those needing to know or be involved are included and in line with data protection rules.
- Investigated fairly and with pastoral care and sensitivity.
- Resolved as amicably as is possible in any situation.
- Reviewed at the end point by the PCC to ensure we have taken all opportunities to put things right, learn and to make improvements for the future.

### **Where should my complaint be directed?**

- **My complaint is about an elected member/or members of the PCC**  
These should be directed to the Chair of the PCC (the Team Rector) or to the PCC secretary who will ensure they are followed up within the framework of this policy.  
Email: [barry.lambert@trinitycheltenham.com](mailto:barry.lambert@trinitycheltenham.com) Tel: 01242 808780
- **My complaint is about activities being run under the auspices of the PCC**  
These should be taken up with the member of church staff overseeing the activity or a member of the Senior Leadership Team who will follow up using this policy and procedure.
- **Other complaints**
  - o Complaints about any PCC safeguarding action or decision  
Should be directed to the Diocese of Gloucester Safeguarding team who will follow them up according to national and diocesan policies  
Email: [safeguarding@glosdioc.org.uk](mailto:safeguarding@glosdioc.org.uk) Tel: 01452 835516
  - o Complaints about a member of clergy licensed to serve at Trinity  
Should be directed to the Archdeacon of Cheltenham who will follow them up within the frameworks of national and diocesan protocols and policies.  
Email: [archdchelt@GlosDioc.org.uk](mailto:archdchelt@GlosDioc.org.uk) Tel: 01452 835594
  - o For complaints about members of staff employed by the PCC  
Should be directed to the member of the church Senior Leadership Team overseeing the member of staff concerned or to the Team Rector. These will be followed up through normal HR processes and potentially may include, as appropriate, capability, and/or disciplinary processes.  
Email: Please see [trinitycheltenham.com](http://trinitycheltenham.com) for details. Tel: 01242 808780

- o For internal complaints from PCC employed staff about other staff  
These should be taken up using the staff employment handbook's grievance and whistleblowing policies.

## **1. What will happen if I make a complaint under this policy?**

1.1 A formal complaint received by email/letter will be acknowledged within 48hrs of receipt. The acknowledgement will state what further steps will be taken, and what the complainant can expect will happen next, including who will be progressing the matter (complaints can be so varied, so it is important that each is dealt with according to issue, need, level of seriousness, further information needed, etc.).

***Please note: If the complaint includes any potential matters relating to safeguarding, the complainant will be immediately informed that the Parish Safeguarding Officer will follow up and that no other investigations can be undertaken while this is being done.***

1.2 Where a complaint is made verbally, the details will be confirmed including name, address, contact details, nature of complaint – and this will be passed on to the appropriate member of staff, Senior Leadership Team or Churchwarden as appropriate to progress the complaint. The appointed person will contact the complainant again to confirm the details and seek any clarification or further information that would be needed to progress the complaint.

***Please note: If the complaint includes any potential matters relating to safeguarding, the complainant will be immediately informed that the Parish Safeguarding Officer will follow up and that no other investigations can be undertaken while this is being done.***

1.3 Paperwork relating to all complaints received, actions taken, etc will be recorded and stored within data protection provisions.

## **2. How will complaints be progressed and resolved?**

2.1 The individual making the complaint will be dealt with courteously and professionally. The person appointed to progress the matter will first seek to fully understand the information already provided and ask for further information if any matters need clarifying. Where appropriate, the complainant will be asked about how they would like their complaint resolved if it is upheld.

2.2 Wherever possible the person dealing with the matter will then seek to investigate and identify ways to resolve the complaint amicably, professionally and with pastoral care and sensitivity.

2.3 Whether the complaint is upheld or not, a report to the complainant will set out how the complaint was progressed and the conclusions drawn. As appropriate

where actions/decisions are taken in response to the complaint these will be shared with the complainant. This will not include personal employment information relating to any member of staff.

2.4 The report will set out how a further referral can be made if the complainant believes the matter has not been resolved (see section 3 below).

2.5 The person progressing the complaint will keep clear notes, and copies of any correspondence related to it (kept and stored within data protection provisions).

### **3. What happens if a complainant is unhappy with the outcome of their complaint?**

3.1 If the complainant feels that the matter has not been satisfactorily resolved at the first stage (section 2), they can refer their complaint to the Team Rector, or if they have already been involved, one of the Trinity Churchwardens, within a delay of 7 days.

3.2 Either may appoint one or more independent PCC members, who have not been involved at this stage to investigate what has occurred, review any paperwork, and report back to them.

3.3 A second stage referral may take up to 28 days to complete (and practical extensions may be required) – however the complainant will be kept informed about progress by the Team Rector or Churchwarden as appropriate.

3.4 Whether the original decisions and actions regarding the complaint are upheld or not, a report to the complainant will set out how these were reviewed, the conclusion which has been made and any further actions taken. This will be regarded as the final conclusion of the complaints process by the PCC.

### **4. Further escalation and the role of the Charity Commission**

4.1 Trinity Cheltenham is a UK registered charity and church within the Church of England. At any point, the PCC or the complainant can escalate the complaint to the Diocese of Gloucester and to the Charity Commission, including if they remain unhappy after completion of the second stage set out in section 3.

4.2 The Charity Commission's involvement in looking at complaints is limited to issues that pose a serious risk of significant harm to a charity's beneficiaries, assets, services or reputation. Information about the kind of complaints the Commission can involve itself in can be found on their website at:  
[www.charitycommission.gov.uk/publications/cc47.aspx](http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/publications/cc47.aspx)

### **5. Vexatious Complaints**

5.1 Just as people have the right to complain when they believe that something is wrong, so Trinity PCC members, clergy, staff and volunteers have the right to

protection from vexatious complaints which are made aggressively, unnecessarily frequently, or without any foundation in fact.

- 5.2 Examples of what might be viewed as vexatious behaviour include:
- o Repeated phone calls, emails, letters or social media posts during or after the complaints process making similar points to those already made.
  - o Sending similar complaints to a range of clergy, staff or PCC members when the matter is being attended to in-line with policy or when the procedure has been completed.
  - o Lodging a series of similar or closely related complaints with the PCC or other Church bodies.
  - o Communication that is rude or personal, or unnecessarily persistent or repetitive.
  - o Unwanted and repeated behaviour that causes undue stress to a member of clergy, staff or the PCC, such as unwanted complaints about matters that appear to be made with the express purpose of causing distress.

5.3 Under no circumstances will the PCC accept vexatious, threatening or intimidating complaints made about any individual. These may be referred to the statutory authorities as appropriate.

5.4 In the event that the Chair of the PCC (or person delegated to handle a complaint) in consultation with other relevant internal and external parties considers a complainant to be vexatious they will make contact with the complainant and EITHER:

1. Ask the complainant to desist and explain that further contact will be ignored or blocked.

OR

2. Ask the complainant to abide by this complaints policy and reassure them that the process will be followed. They will note that the matter cannot be further revived after stage 2 has been completed (see section 3).