



Reviewed by: Nigel Jameson (HR Trustee)

Date of Last Review: March 2025

Next Review Due: March 2027

Complaints Policy and Procedure

1. Opening Statement

Churches are not immune from receiving complaints or challenge and it is always preferable to have a clear process for receiving and addressing complaints, for the benefit of the church and the complainant.

Winchester Vineyard (hereafter referred to as “the Church”) recognises that from time to time we may receive complaints from members of the public (which can include church members) about our services, facilities, staff and volunteers. This policy ensures that we provide guidelines for dealing with them.

We view complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve for the future, as well as a chance to put things right for the person or organisation that has made the complaint. Therefore, we aim to ensure that:

- making a complaint is as easy as possible
- we treat a complaint as a clear expression of dissatisfaction with our service which calls for a prompt response
- we deal with it promptly, politely and, when appropriate, confidentially
- we respond in the right way - for example, with an explanation, or an apology where we have got things wrong, or information on any action taken etc.
- we learn from complaints, use them to improve our activities, and review annually our complaints policy and procedures

We recognise that many concerns will be raised informally, and dealt with quickly.

Our aims are to:

- resolve informal concerns quickly
- keep matters low-key

This policy is not intended to deal with complaints regarding

- Safeguarding which are specifically dealt with in our *Safeguarding Policy for Children and Young People* and *Safeguarding Policy for Vulnerable Adults*
- Employment matters because the Church has a staff grievance procedure which is set out in employees' contracts of employment.

2. Definitions

A complaint is defined as any expression of dissatisfaction, however it is expressed. This would include complaints expressed face to face, via a phone call, in writing, via email or any other method. All staff should have sufficient knowledge to be able to identify an "expression of dissatisfaction" even when the word "complain" or "complaint" is not used. If the member of staff is uncertain on this point then they should refer the matter to the next level of seniority (and to a person who is not the subject matter of the complaint).

3. Purpose

The formal complaints procedure is intended to ensure that all complaints are handled fairly, consistently and wherever possible resolved to the complainant's satisfaction.

4. Responsibilities

The Church's responsibility will be to:

- acknowledge the formal complaint in writing;
- respond within the timescales set out in the Policy below;
- deal reasonably and sensitively with the complaint; and
- take action where appropriate.

A complainant's responsibility is to:

- bring their complaint to the Church's attention normally within 8 weeks of the issue arising;
- raise concerns promptly and directly with a member of staff in the Church;
- explain the problem as clearly and as fully as possible, including any action taken to date;
- allow the Church a reasonable time to deal with the matter, and
- recognise that some circumstances may be beyond the Church's control.

5. Confidentiality

Except in exceptional circumstances, every attempt will be made to ensure that both the complainant and the Church maintain confidentiality. However the circumstances giving rise to the complaint may be such that it may not be possible to maintain confidentiality (with each complaint judged on its own facts). Should this be the case, the situation will be explained to the complainant.

6. Complaints Procedure

Written records must be made by the Church at each stage of the formal complaints procedure.

Stage 1

In the first instance, the staff member receiving the complaint must establish the seriousness of the complaint. An informal approach to resolving complaints is appropriate when it can be achieved. But if concerns cannot be satisfactorily resolved informally or the subject matter of the complaint is so serious that attempts at informal resolution would be inappropriate, then Stage 2 of this procedure should be followed. If a complaint is resolved informally, the staff member(s) involved in such resolution must inform their superior about the matter.

Stage 2

If the complaint cannot be resolved informally, the member of the public should be advised that a formal complaint may be made and the following procedure should be explained to them. It may sometimes be appropriate for a different member of staff, preferably a senior one, to make this explanation.

- A. A formal complaint must be made in writing. (In exceptional circumstances, a member of the staff team may take a statement from the complainant, in which

case the complainant will be required to review the statement and confirm it is correct and contains all their complaints.)

- B. In all cases, the complaint must be passed on to the Assistant Pastor (Compassion and Operations) by the person receiving it. In the event of a complaint about the Assistant Pastor (Compassion and Operations), the complaint should be passed on to the Senior Pastor; and if the complaint is about the Senior Pastor, it must be passed on to the Chair of the Winchester Vineyard Church Trustees (subject to G below).
- C. The Assistant Pastor (Compassion and Operations) or the Senior Pastor, depending on the nature of the complaint, must acknowledge the complaint in writing within 14 days of receiving it.
- D. The Assistant Pastor (Compassion and Operations) or the Senior Pastor will notify the Chair of the Church Trustees about the complaint. In the event that the subject matter of the complaint falls within the area of responsibility of one of his or her co-Trustees, the Chair will in turn usually notify that Trustee about the complaint. (If the complaint is about the Chair, then the Assistant Pastor (Compassion and Operations) or the Senior Pastor will notify the Trustee with responsibility for Compliance about the complaint.)
- E. The Assistant Pastor (Compassion and Operations) or the Senior Pastor will investigate the complaint. Any conclusions reached should be discussed with the staff member involved and their Line Manager.
- F. In the event that the complaint is about the Senior Pastor, the Chair of the Church Trustees will investigate the complaint and, at an appropriate time, brief his or her co-Trustees on any conclusions reached.
- G. In the event that the complaint is about the Chair of the Church Trustees, the complaint will be passed to the Trustee with responsibility for Compliance who will investigate the complaint and, at an appropriate time, brief his or her co-Trustees on any conclusions reached.
- H. The complainant will receive a response based on the investigation within four weeks of the complaint being received. If this is not possible then a letter must be sent explaining why.

Stage 3

- A. If the complainant is not satisfied with the decision under Stage 2, then a sub-group of the Trustee Board will be convened but that group will not include any of the Trustees who have been involved in dealing with the complaint under Stage 2 above.
- B. The sub-group will examine the complaint and may wish to carry out further interviews and examine files and notes. They will respond within four weeks in writing. If this is not possible, then a letter must be sent to the complainant explaining why.
- C. The decision of the sub-group will be final.

END OF DOCUMENT.