

Concerns and Complaints policy and procedure

The XXXXX Buddhist Centre aims to act ethically and with integrity. It seeks to put into practice the key Buddhist ethical principles of kindness, generosity, contentment, truthfulness and awareness.

We recognise that it is vital to the wellbeing of the Charity and to all who come to the Buddhist Centre that we recognise and respond to concerns and complaints. We also appreciate compliments and value you getting in touch when you like what is happening.

We define these below:

Compliments

We hope that the Buddhist Centre creates a positive context for living a Dharma life in XXXXX. Where you have had a positive experience of the Buddhist Centre, please do contact us to let us know the impact our work has had. Please contact the Centre Manager on email@ourcentre.org.uk to send us a compliment.

Concerns and complaints

The difference between a concern and a complaint:

It is recognised that from time to time people may have a concern which may not be a complaint. Therefore, it is helpful to explain the difference between a concern and a complaint:

- a concern may be defined as ‘an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought’
- a complaint may be defined as ‘an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or a lack of action’

This policy is designed to address concerns and complaints.

Conflicts

Conflicts between people are probably inevitable. They can take the form of a disagreement or a misunderstanding. They are generally interpersonal arising from a difference in style, opinion or approach. They can contribute to an ongoing difficult relationship or relate to an isolated dispute.

Conflicts can be creative and fruitful. They can also be disruptive and undermining, causing ongoing distress to an individual, a group of people and even the Buddhist Centre as a whole.

Though you are welcome to approach a member of the team for help with a conflict, the concerns/complaints procedure may not be applicable.

In this case, there may be other methods to resolve difficulties such as mediation.

Overview

Every effort will be taken to treat all those involved (irrespective of whether they are the complainant or a person against whom a complaint is being made) fairly and respectfully.

The purpose of the policy is to:

1. restore harmony in the sangha
2. uphold the ethical principles of the XXXXX Buddhist Centre
3. create an opportunity to learn for all those involved
4. establish the veracity of the concern/complaint
5. find a satisfactory resolution of the concern/complaint
6. prevent gossip
7. protect the reputation of the XXXXX Buddhist Centre

The process will be conducted by the Buddhist Centre in a timely way, moving forward with reasonable speed. Complainants will also be required to take part in the process in a timely way, for example, by responding promptly to requests for further communication.

Responsibilities of the Buddhist Centre

The Buddhist Centre trustees have considered the scope of their responsibilities as they cannot be accountable for all issues that happen at the Buddhist Centre or within the sangha. The extent of the responsibility of the Buddhist Centre will need to be taken on a case-by-case basis and this is reflected in the process steps below.

Raising a concern

Most concerns at the Buddhist Centre can be resolved directly in discussion with the person leading the activity or event. The first step is for an individual to attempt to resolve the problem in dialogue. In some cases, it won't be clear who to speak to. In

this case, you can contact the Chair (name) or the Charity Director (name) and they will suggest the person to address the issue you have raised.

You can either phone the Centre on xxx xxxx xxxx and ask to speak to name or name. Or email them at email@them.com or

If you can't resolve the issue directly, please get in touch with either name or name and we can take the next step - see below.

Informal complaints procedure

If you would like to enter the informal complaints procedure, contact the Chair (or, if the complaint relates to the Chair, the Charity Director).

The first step will be to assess whether the Centre can take responsibility for the complaint. It may be possible for the Buddhist Centre to help but without feeling accountable nonetheless. In some cases, there might be a more appropriate person or group where the complaint should be taken and if that is the case, the complainant will be re-directed to them.

Once that assessment has been done and the Centre feels it can respond, the Chair/Charity Director will find a member of the team who is most acquainted with the area of work that the matter relates to. They become the complaint co-ordinator.

All efforts will be made to assist a complainant in resolving the complaint informally, prior to initiation of the formal complaints procedure. A complaint may be made verbally or in writing.

If, after discussing it with the complaint co-ordinator, the complainant feels satisfied, the complaint need go no further, although a record of the complaint will be made for future reference in a secure filing system.

Formal Complaints Policy and Procedure

If the complaint has not been satisfactorily addressed at the informal level, or it is deemed too serious to be dealt with at that level; the formal complaints procedure can be used.

If the issue cannot be resolved directly or informally, then it should be brought to the attention of the Chair or, if the complaint relates to the Chair, the Charity Director.

The complaint should be put in writing and this will be acknowledged, in writing, upon receipt. It's helpful if the complainant gives as much detail as possible, including the dates, who was involved and all the circumstances leading up to their complaint being made. Please also attach copies of any previous correspondence sent and/or responses received that are relevant to the complaint being made.

The complaint co-ordinator will interview the complainant, the person about whom the complaint has been made, and any other relevant witnesses, face-to-face or by phone, and will record all interviews in writing. The records should be signed by the interviewee wherever this is possible.

An advocate or supporter may accompany the complainant to any meeting about the issue. This individual must not be a trustee of the Buddhist Centre.

The person(s) against whom the complaint has been made will be given the opportunity to identify a member of the sangha to support them and act as an advocate on their behalf throughout the exploration / investigation of the complaint. This individual must not be a trustee of the Buddhist Centre.

The complaint co-ordinator will provide a written report containing a brief summary together with their conclusions. The report should include a summary of the complaint and findings, and recommendations for any further action, changes in policy, recommendations for improvements, etc.

The Chair, plus two other trustees, will discuss the written report. Notes of the interviews the complaint co-ordinator has conducted can be made available to these three trustees on request.

The Chair will write to the complainant explaining the findings and this communication will include details of the appeals procedure. The person who has been complained about will also receive feedback in writing. The rest of the trustees will be informed of the issue at this point if it hasn't been necessary to inform them earlier in the process.

Where the complaint is found to be valid, efforts will be made to resolve it to the satisfaction of the complainant and the trustees panel. Efforts will also be made to ensure that the complaint leads to individual and collective learning that minimises the possibility of similar mistakes or harmful behaviours being repeated in the future. In some circumstances, this might require a decision by the Council (all trustees) of the XXXXX Buddhist Centre.

Where individuals in the local sangha are in conflict as a result of a complaint they will, in most instances, be expected to engage in constructive dialogue with each other in order to restore harmony and prevent divisions within the sangha. Where

required the XXXXX Buddhist Centre will offer support to source and arrange independent mediation.

Where a complaint is found to be valid, the person(s) against whom the complaint was made will be expected and encouraged to:

- if an Order member, address their ethical behaviour within their chapter, with their preceptors and/or with the regional Order convenor;
- if they are a Mitra seeking ordination, with those who have direct responsibility for their ordination process;
- or with the appropriate Mitra convenor if they are a friend or Mitra not seeking ordination.

In some instances the Council may decide to form an ethics panel which could impose sanctions, such as a suspension or expulsion from the XXXXX Buddhist Centre. This will only be considered in exceptional circumstances and will require a decision by the Council (all trustees) of the XXXXX Buddhist Centre.

Note that if the Chair or any other Trustee is implicated in the complaint they will be absented from the process / discussion.

Appeal process

If the above measures do not satisfactorily resolve the complaint from the complainant's point of view, the complainant can write to the Chair requesting an appeal. The Chair will initiate a meeting of three trustees not so far actively involved in the process to form an appeal panel. They will review the documentation of the case so far. The complainant will then be invited to make written or oral submissions to the appeal panel. The complainant should be fully informed about the members of the appeal panel and aware of their right to be accompanied by another person if/when meeting with the panel.

The decision of the appeal panel is final.

We will ensure that all trustees, staff and volunteers are aware of the complaints procedure, its significance and their responsibility for fulfilling its commitments.

This policy will be reviewed every 5 years. The next review date will be xxxxxx.

Notes for Chairs and Trustees

Listening compassionately to the original presentation of the problem is time well spent. It can really avoid the formalisation of a complaint. This is something everyone who might hear a complaint needs to be aware of.

The ethics Order convenor (or equivalent if the role evolves) might be helpful to you. Preceptors could also be called on, private and public.

Every complaint process will need to have a different design depending on the different circumstances presented. This full complaints process could be adapted and followed in terms of its structures and principles without having to go through all the steps and stages.

A complaints process is only one way of dealing with expressions of dissatisfaction. The point is to ensure that the Buddhist Centre is a place where people interact ethically. And there is harmony. In some situations, a complaints process which does not uphold a complainant's complaint could lead away from that outcome.

Alternatives to this process include more dialogue-based approaches such as mediation or restorative approaches. In that case, it would be good to get advice from people in Triratna who specialise in these forms.

Another approach is to set up a Harmony Circle. This is a group of sangha members who have had training in different conflict resolution approaches and to whom people in the community can take their difficulties with others.

Questions to ask

When you first receive the complaint, check if a complaint has been made or just an adverse comment? Or is it a conflict?

Has an informal attempt been made to address the issue? What was the outcome?

If you receive a formal complaint, have you acknowledged the complaint in writing?

Does the complaint co-ordinator know what to do? And do you know how to guide them if they don't? ACAS has some training which is available online.

At what stage do you want to inform the trustees?

Notes for complaint co-ordinators

If you are helping the complainant at an informal level, first listen fully to the account of the difficulty, ask them what outcome they want from the situation or help them to find that. Then help them plan to resolve the difficulty. Even at a very early stage, take notes because if the complaint goes to a more formal stage, the notes will be very useful.

- does the complainant understand the process and the timescale?
- whom do you need to interview?
- what will you ask them?
- is there anyone from whom a written statement would be enough?
- have you recorded your interviews in written form?
- are your notes in a secure place?
- has each person you have interviewed checked the notes you have taken and are they happy with them being a good summary?
- have you set deadlines for responding to your requests?
- have you set up a person or group for the complainant to talk to - if needed? -
- have you set up a person for the responder to talk about the case to - if needed? -
- have you explained to all parties the importance of confidentiality? And are you clear what confidentiality means for you and who can you talk about the case with?
- do you know what format your report needs to take?

Some other considerations

Please note that the XXXXX Buddhist Centre's Safeguarding Policy will be followed in all instances where matters relating to potential safeguarding issues are raised. And, if enquiry into the complaint reveals a criminal matter, the issue will be referred to the police. Initially the complainant will be encouraged to report the matter to the police themselves. The complaint process may need to be paused if that is the case and we would act on the advice of the police. If the police decide there is no criminality/ decide to take no action, we may still continue with the complaint process.

The procedure arising from this policy is exploratory and investigative in nature. The implementation of this policy and procedure does not imply fault or wrongdoing by those against whom a complaint has been made.

Experience has shown that it is extremely important to share information only with those who need to know. Much disquiet and harm may result if information circulates before the complaint is explored / investigated and the facts are independently established. We therefore will request that everybody involved in the process maintains confidentiality in this regard.

However, we do not want to leave the complainant or the person(s) against whom the complaint has been made (respondent) isolated and unsupported because of the need for confidentiality. So an appropriate person or group of people can be appointed to support the complainant and they can share as fully as they like with this person/group of people. The respondent will also be given the opportunity to identify a member of the sangha to support them and act as an advocate on their behalf throughout the exploration / investigation of the complaint. None of the individuals involved in supporting a complainant or respondent can be a trustee of the Buddhist

Centre because the trustees' role is to make a decision on the case. Or at least be available to do so.

Reasonable adjustments

In line with the Charity Commission guidance, we are committed to equal opportunities and our aim is to make our complaints policy easy to use and accessible to everyone we deal with. We will take reasonable steps to accommodate any reasonable adjustments you may have, to enable you to access this policy or receive responses to complaints in other formats and provide such assistance as you may reasonably require.

Recording complaints

Complaint details, outcomes and actions taken are recorded by us and used for our learning. We will handle your information so that it is only processed and retained appropriately and legally, in line with the Data Protection Act 2018.

Multiple complaints

Individuals who make repeated serious complaints or allegations that are subsequently found to be unsubstantiated, spurious and/or malicious will be expected and encouraged to explore and address this issue. They could do this with their chapter, preceptors or regional Order convenor (if they are an Order member), with those who have direct responsibility for their ordination process (if they are a Mitra seeking ordination), or with one of the Mitra Convenors (if they are a friend or Mitra not seeking ordination). In some instances the Trustees may decide to form an ethics panel which could impose sanctions such as a suspension or expulsion from the XXXXX Buddhist Centre. This will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.

Appendix 1

Text for website

Compliments, concerns and complaints

Compliments

We hope that the Buddhist Centre creates a positive context for living a Dharma life in XXXXX. Where you have had a positive experience of the Buddhist Centre, please do contact us to let us know the impact our work has had. Please contact the Centre Manager on email@XXXXXbuddhistcentre.org.uk to send us a compliment.

BUT things sometimes go wrong. When they do, it is important to uphold the ethical principles of the XXXXX Buddhist Centre and restore harmony between people. Concerns and complaints can create an opportunity to learn for all those involved while an attempt is made to find a satisfactory resolution. We take concerns and complaints seriously.

What's the difference between a concern and a complaint?

From time to time people may have a concern which may not be a complaint. A concern may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.

A complaint may be defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.

This policy is designed to address concerns and complaints.

Conflicts

Conflicts between people are probably inevitable. They can take the form of a disagreement or a misunderstanding. They are generally interpersonal arising from a difference in style, opinion or approach. They can contribute to an ongoing difficult relationship or relate to an isolated dispute.

Conflicts can be creative and fruitful. They can also be disruptive and undermining, causing ongoing distress to an individual, a group of people and even the Buddhist Centre as a whole.

Though you are welcome to approach a member of the team for help with a conflict, the concerns/complaints procedure may not be applicable.

In this case, there may be other methods to resolve difficulties such as mediation.

Raising a concern

Most concerns at the Centre can be resolved directly in discussion with the person leading the activity or event. The first step is for an individual to attempt to resolve the problem in dialogue. In some cases, it won't be clear who to speak to. In this case, you can contact the Chair, Maitrisara or the Charity Director, Dharmashura and they will suggest the person to address the issue you have raised.

You can either phone the Centre on xxx xxx xxxx and ask to speak to name or name. Or email them at them@gmail.com or them@aol.com.

If you can't resolve the issue directly, please get in touch with either **name** or **name** and we can take the next step. This might involve treating the issue as a complaint. Our concerns and complaints policy is available on request and **name** or **name** can send a copy to you.

Please note

Experience has shown that it is extremely important to share information only with those who need to know. Much disquiet and harm may result if information circulates before an issue is explored / investigated. Within the full concerns/ complaints policy, there are ways to ensure people get the support they need while also being discreet about the issue at hand.

Appendix 2

Shorter concerns and complaints policy and procedure - {for sharing if requested}

The **XXXXX** Buddhist Centre aims to act ethically and with integrity. It seeks to put into practice the key Buddhist ethical principles of kindness, generosity, contentment, truthfulness and awareness.

We recognise that it is vital to the wellbeing of the Charity and to all who come to the Buddhist Centre that we recognise and respond to concerns and complaints. We therefore take them seriously and endeavour to handle them in a sensitive, prompt and fair manner. We also welcome and recognise the value of feedback, and see concerns and complaints in this light, as opportunities to improve what we offer, taking any actions required to prevent further problems from reoccurring.

Every effort will be taken to treat all those involved fairly and respectfully.

The process will be conducted by the Buddhist Centre in a timely way, moving forward with reasonable speed. Complainants will also be required to take part in the process in a timely way, for example, by responding promptly to requests for further communication.

What's the difference between a concern and a complaint?

From time to time people may have a concern which may not be a complaint. A concern may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue

considered to be important for which reassurances are sought’.

A complaint may be defined as ‘an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or a lack of action’.

This policy is designed to address concerns and complaints.

Conflicts

Conflicts between people are probably inevitable. They can take the form of a disagreement or a misunderstanding. They are generally interpersonal arising from a difference in style, opinion or approach. They can contribute to an ongoing difficult relationship or relate to an isolated dispute.

Conflicts can be creative and fruitful. They can also be disruptive and undermining, causing ongoing distress to an individual, a group of people and even the Buddhist Centre as a whole.

Though you are welcome to approach a member of the team for help with a conflict, the concerns/complaints procedure may not be applicable.

In this case, there may be other methods to resolve difficulties such as mediation.

Overview

Most difficulties at the Buddhist Centre can be resolved directly in discussion with the person leading the activity or event. The first step of our concerns and complaints procedure is for an individual to attempt to resolve the problem in dialogue. In some cases, it won’t be clear who to speak to. In this case, you can contact the Chair **name** or the Charity Director **name** and they will suggest the person to address the issue you have raised.

You can either phone the Centre on xxx xxxx xxx and ask to speak to **name** or **name**. Or email them at **them@gmail.com** or **them@aol.com**.

If you can’t resolve the issue directly, please get in touch with either **name** or **name** and we can take the next step.

Discretion

Experience has shown that it is extremely important to share information only with those who need to know. Much disquiet and harm may result if information circulates before the complaint is explored / investigated and the facts are independently established. We therefore will request that everybody involved in the process

maintains confidentiality in this regard.

However, we do not want to leave the complainant or the person(s) against whom the complaint has been made (respondent) isolated and unsupported because of the need for confidentiality. So an appropriate person or group of people can be appointed to support the complainant and they can share as fully as they like with this person/group of people. The respondent will also be given the opportunity to identify a member of the sangha to support them and act as an advocate on their behalf throughout the exploration / investigation of the complaint. None of the individuals involved in supporting a complainant or respondent can be a trustee of the Buddhist Centre because the trustees' role is to make a decision on the case. Or at least be available to do so.

Raising a concern

Most concerns at the Buddhist Centre can be resolved directly in discussion with the person leading the activity or event. The first step is for an individual to attempt to resolve the problem in dialogue. In some cases, it won't be clear who to speak to. In this case, you can contact the Chair or the Charity Director and they will suggest the person to address the issue you have raised.

You can either phone the Centre on xxxx xxx xxxx and ask to speak to name or name. Or email them at them@gmail.com or name@aol.com.

If you can't resolve the issue directly, please get in touch with either name or name and we can take the next step, to move to the informal complaints procedure.

Informal complaints procedure

If you would like to enter the informal complaints procedure, contact the Chair (or, if the complaint relates to the Chair, the Charity Director).

The first step will be to assess whether the Centre can take responsibility for the complaint. It may be possible for the Buddhist Centre to help but without feeling accountable nonetheless. In some cases, there might be a more appropriate person or group where the complaint should be taken and if that is the case, the complainant will be re-directed to them.

Once that assessment has been done and the Centre feels it can respond, the Chair/Charity Director will find a member of the team who is most acquainted with the area of work that the matter relates to. They become the complaint co-ordinator.

All efforts will be made to assist a complainant in resolving the complaint informally,

prior to initiation of the formal Complaints Procedure. A complaint may be made verbally or in writing.

If, after discussing it with the complaint co-ordinator, the complainant feels satisfied, the complaint need go no further, although a record of the complaint will be made for future reference in a secure filing system which is only accessible to the people managing the complaint.

Formal Complaints Policy and Procedure

If the complaint has not been satisfactorily addressed at the informal level. Or it is deemed too serious to be dealt with at that level; the formal complaints procedure can be used.

The complaint should be put in writing to the Chair/Director and this will be acknowledged, in writing, upon receipt. It's helpful if the complainant gives as much detail as possible, including the dates, who was involved and all the circumstances leading up to their complaint being made. Please also attach copies of any previous correspondence sent and/or responses received that are relevant to the complaint being made.

The complaint co-ordinator will interview the complainant, the person about whom the complaint has been made, and any other relevant witnesses, face-to-face or by phone, and will record all interviews in writing. The records should be signed by the interviewee wherever this is possible.

An advocate or supporter may accompany the complainant to any meeting about the issue. This individual must not be a trustee of the Buddhist Centre.

The next part of the process will involve the Chair and two trustees coming to a decision based on the work of the complaints co-ordinator. The Chair will write to the complainant explaining the findings and this communication will include details of the appeals procedure. The person who has been complained about (if specific to a person) will also receive feedback in writing.

The person(s) against whom the complaint has been made will be given the opportunity to identify a member of the sangha to support them and act as an advocate on their behalf throughout the exploration / investigation of the complaint. This individual must not be a trustee of the Buddhist Centre.

Where a complaint is found to be valid, the person(s) against whom the complaint was made will be expected and encouraged to address their ethical behaviour within their Chapter, with their preceptors and/or with the regional Order convenor (if they are an Order member), with those who have direct responsibility for their

ordination process (if they are a Mitra seeking ordination), or with the appropriate Mitra convenor (if they are a friend or Mitra not seeking ordination).

In some instances the Trustees may decide to form an ethics panel which could impose sanctions such as a suspension or expulsion from the XXXXX Buddhist Centre. This will only be considered in exceptional circumstances and will require a decision by the Council (all trustees) of the XXXXX Buddhist Centre.

Note that if the Chair or any other Trustee is implicated in the complaint they will be absented from the process / discussion.

Appeal process

If the above measures do not satisfactorily resolve the complaint from the complainant's point of view, the complainant can write to the Chair requesting an appeal. The Chair will initiate a meeting of three trustees not so far involved in the process to form an appeal panel. They will review the documentation of the case so far. The complainant will then be invited to make written or oral submissions to the appeal panel. The complainant should be fully informed about the members of the appeal panel and aware of their right to be accompanied by another person if when meeting with the panel.

The decision of the appeal panel is final.

Agreed by XXXXX Buddhist Centre Trustees date