

Complaints Policy and Procedure (non-safeguarding matters, non-Employees)



1. Purpose

The Parish of St Mary with Christ Church, Wanstead is committed to serving God and the local community with integrity, openness, fairness and respect.

We recognise that, from time to time, people may have concerns or complaints about the way in which the parish, PCC, clergy, staff or volunteers have acted or provided services.

We welcome appropriate feedback and will treat complaints seriously. A complaint provides an opportunity to listen, put matters right where appropriate, learn from experience and improve the life and ministry of the parish.

This policy explains how complaints will be received, considered and resolved.

2. Scope

This policy applies to complaints concerning the activities, administration, services or decisions of the Parish of St Mary with Christ Church, Wanstead, including complaints relating to:

- parish services and worship;
- pastoral ministry and parish activities;
- church buildings and facilities;
- administration and communication;
- PCC decisions and the implementation of PCC policies;
- fundraising and financial administration;
- the behaviour or conduct of parish volunteers or employees, where no separate procedure applies;
- the conduct of members of the ministry team, where the matter does not fall under another formal Church of England procedure;
- other activities undertaken on behalf of or under the authority of the parish.

This policy applies to complaints made by members of the congregation, visitors, members of the local community, organisations and other people who have dealings with the parish.

3. Matters covered by other procedures

Not every concern should be dealt with under this complaints procedure.

3.1 Safeguarding

Any concern relating to the abuse, neglect, exploitation or safety of a child, young person or vulnerable adult, or an allegation concerning the safeguarding conduct of a Church Officer, must be dealt with under the Church of England's safeguarding procedures.

A safeguarding allegation must not be investigated under this complaints procedure.

Anyone receiving a safeguarding concern should follow the Church of England's safeguarding requirements and contact the Parish Safeguarding Officer and/or the Diocesan Safeguarding Team as appropriate.

Where there is an immediate risk of harm, the appropriate statutory emergency services should be contacted without delay.

3.2 Complaints concerning the Incumbent

Where a complaint concerns the conduct or actions of the **Incumbent**, the matter should not normally be investigated by the Incumbent, PCC Secretary or another member of the parish ministry team.

The PCC Chair should seek advice from the **Archdeacon and/or the Diocesan Office** regarding the appropriate procedure.

Depending on the nature of the complaint, it may be subject to a separate Church of England process, including the clergy disciplinary procedure.

3.3 Complaints concerning an Associate Minister

The Parish of St Mary with Christ Church, Wanstead has several Associate Ministers.

Where a complaint concerns an **Associate Minister**, the first point of contact should normally be the Incumbent, unless:

- the complaint concerns the Incumbent as well;
- the complaint concerns safeguarding;
- the matter is subject to another Church of England procedure; or
- there is another reason why it would be inappropriate for the Incumbent to deal with the complaint.

The Incumbent should consider whether the matter can appropriately be resolved informally or whether a formal investigation is required.

Where a complaint concerns serious alleged misconduct by an Associate Minister, the Incumbent should seek advice from the appropriate Diocesan authority.

3.4 Complaints concerning the PCC

Where a complaint concerns a decision or action of the PCC, the complaint should normally be addressed to the **PCC Secretary or PCC Chair**.

A person who was directly involved in the decision being complained about should not normally be the sole person responsible for reviewing the complaint.

Where appropriate, the PCC may appoint an independent person to assist with the investigation or review.

3.5 Complaints concerning a Churchwarden

Where a complaint concerns a Churchwarden, the matter should normally be referred to the other Churchwarden, the Incumbent or the PCC Chair, depending upon the circumstances.

If the complaint concerns the Incumbent and a Churchwarden jointly, advice should be sought from the Archdeacon or Diocesan Office.

3.6 Employment matters

Complaints or grievances raised by employees should normally be dealt with under the parish's employment, grievance or disciplinary procedures.

3.7 Criminal matters

Where a complaint alleges criminal conduct, the parish will consider whether the matter should be referred to the police or another statutory authority.

The parish will not attempt to conduct its own criminal investigation.

4. Principles

The parish will handle complaints according to the following principles.

Fairness

Complaints will be considered impartially and without prejudice.

Respect

Everyone involved in a complaint will be treated with courtesy and dignity.

Accessibility

Reasonable adjustments will be made where necessary to enable someone to make or participate in a complaint.

Confidentiality

Information will be shared only with those who need it in order to deal with the complaint, subject to safeguarding, legal and other statutory requirements.

Independence

Where a complaint concerns someone who would normally deal with complaints, another appropriate person will be appointed to consider it.

Proportionality

The parish will seek to resolve complaints at the lowest appropriate level and will avoid unnecessary formality.

Learning

The PCC will consider what can be learned from complaints and whether changes to parish practice are required.

5. Who can make a complaint?

A complaint may be made by:

- an individual;
- a parent or carer on behalf of a child, where appropriate;
- someone acting with the authority of another person;
- an organisation or community group.

Where a person lacks capacity to make a complaint themselves, the parish will consider an appropriate representative, taking account of confidentiality and the person's wishes.

Anonymous complaints will normally be considered where sufficient information is provided to enable the matter to be assessed. However, it may not be possible to investigate or respond fully to an anonymous complaint.

6. How to make a complaint

Complaints may be made:

- in person;
- by telephone;
- by letter; or
- by email.

Where possible, complaints should be made to the person best placed to deal with the matter, as follows:

Complaint concerns	Normally contact
Parish administration or activities	Parish Office / PCC Secretary
PCC decision or action	PCC Chair or PCC Secretary
Associate Minister	Incumbent
Incumbent	PCC Lay Chair, with advice from the Archdeacon/Diocese
Churchwarden	Other Churchwarden, Incumbent or PCC Chair
Volunteer or ministry team member	Incumbent or appropriate parish officer
Safeguarding concern	Parish Safeguarding Officer / Diocesan Safeguarding Team

Complaint concerns

Normally contact

Employee grievance

Appropriate person under the employment/grievance procedure

7. Informal resolution

Where appropriate, concerns should initially be raised with the person responsible for the relevant activity.

For example:

- concerns about an Associate Minister should normally be raised with the Incumbent;
- concerns about a parish activity may be raised with the person responsible for that activity;
- concerns about administration may be raised with the Parish Office or PCC Secretary.

Many concerns can be resolved quickly through a conversation, explanation, apology or practical action.

However, a person who wishes to make a formal complaint will **not** be required to attempt informal resolution first.

No person will be disadvantaged because they have chosen to make a formal complaint.

8. Formal complaints procedure

Stage 1 – Receipt and acknowledgement

The person receiving the complaint will:

- record the complaint;
- acknowledge receipt normally within **7 working days**;
- identify the person responsible for handling the complaint;
- determine whether another procedure, particularly safeguarding or clergy discipline, applies.

If the complaint falls outside this policy, the complainant will be told, where possible, which procedure or organisation is more appropriate.

Stage 2 – Investigation

The person appointed to investigate will:

- establish what has happened;
- consider relevant documents and records;
- speak to relevant people where necessary;
- give people who are the subject of a complaint a fair opportunity to respond;

- maintain appropriate confidentiality; and
- keep a written record of the investigation.

The investigator should remain impartial and should not normally investigate a complaint about their own actions.

Where the complaint concerns an Associate Minister, the Incumbent will normally oversee the investigation.

Where the complaint concerns the Incumbent, the PCC Chair should seek advice from the Archdeacon or Diocesan Office and identify an appropriate person to handle the matter.

Where the complaint concerns the PCC as a whole, the PCC may appoint an independent person to assist with the investigation.

9. Stage 3 – Outcome

The parish will normally provide a written response within **20 working days** of acknowledgement.

If more time is required because the matter is complex, the complainant will be informed of the reason for the delay and given an indication of when a response is expected.

The response will normally:

- summarise the complaint;
- explain the investigation undertaken;
- set out the findings;
- state whether the complaint is upheld, partially upheld or not upheld;
- explain any action the parish intends to take; and
- explain how the complainant may request a review if they remain dissatisfied.

An apology may be offered where the parish considers that an apology is appropriate. An apology does not necessarily mean that the parish accepts legal liability.

10. Outcomes

A complaint may be:

Upheld

The evidence indicates that the complaint is substantially justified.

Partially upheld

Some elements of the complaint are justified, while others are not.

Not upheld

The available evidence does not substantiate the complaint.

Unable to determine

There is insufficient reliable evidence to reach a clear conclusion.

Whatever the outcome, the parish will consider whether there are lessons to be learned.

11. Review / Appeal

If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the response, they may request a review.

A request for review should normally be made within **20 working days** of receiving the response and should explain why the complainant believes that:

- the procedure was not properly followed;
- relevant evidence was not considered;
- the conclusion was unreasonable; or
- significant new information is available.

The review should, wherever reasonably possible, be undertaken by someone who was not involved in the original investigation.

Where the original complaint concerned an Associate Minister

The review should normally be conducted by someone other than the person who undertook the original investigation. Where appropriate, advice may be sought from the Archdeacon or Diocesan Office.

Where the original complaint concerned the Incumbent

The review should be handled in consultation with the appropriate Diocesan authority rather than being determined solely by the PCC.

Where the original complaint concerned the PCC

The PCC Chair, or another person appointed by the PCC, should arrange for an appropriately independent review.

The reviewer may:

- uphold the original decision;
- amend the decision;
- request further investigation; or
- recommend further action.

The outcome of the review will normally be the final response from the parish under this procedure.

12. Complaints involving more than one member of the ministry team

Where a complaint concerns both the Incumbent and one or more Associate Ministers, or concerns the conduct of several members of the ministry team, the matter should not be divided artificially between individuals.

The PCC Chair should seek advice from the Archdeacon or Diocesan Office and agree an appropriate person or process for handling the complaint.

Where safeguarding or potential disciplinary matters arise, the relevant Church of England procedures will take precedence over this policy.

13. Complaints about the person responsible for complaints

If a complaint concerns the PCC Secretary, the complaint should be referred to the PCC Chair.

If a complaint concerns the PCC Chair, it should be referred to the Incumbent where appropriate, or to the Rural Dean, Archdeacon or Diocesan Office if the circumstances make that inappropriate.

If a complaint concerns the Incumbent, the PCC Chair should seek advice from the Archdeacon or Diocesan Office.

If a complaint concerns both the Incumbent and PCC Chair, the matter should be referred to an appropriate Diocesan authority for advice.

14. Vexatious or unreasonable complaints

The parish will seek to be open and responsive, but it is recognised that occasionally a person may make complaints that are abusive, threatening, repetitive or otherwise unreasonable.

Examples may include:

- repeated complaints about an issue that has already been fully considered;
- unreasonable demands for information or action;
- abusive, threatening or discriminatory behaviour towards parish representatives;
- refusing to accept a final decision without presenting significant new information; or
- deliberately providing misleading information.

Where this occurs, the PCC may restrict the manner or frequency of communication while ensuring that legitimate concerns can still be raised.

Any decision to restrict communication should be proportionate and should normally be approved by the PCC Chair or another appropriate senior parish representative.

15. Confidentiality and records

Complaints will be handled sensitively and information will be shared only where there is a legitimate reason to do so.

The parish will maintain appropriate records of:

- the complaint;
- correspondence;
- evidence considered;

- investigation and findings;
- the outcome; and
- any actions taken.

Records will be retained in accordance with the parish's data protection and records management arrangements.

Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed where information must be disclosed because of safeguarding concerns, legal requirements, statutory obligations or other overriding duties.

16. Support for complainants and respondents

The parish recognises that making or responding to a complaint can be stressful.

Where appropriate, the parish will:

- communicate clearly about the process;
- explain expected timescales;
- identify a suitable point of contact;
- make reasonable adjustments for disability or other accessibility needs; and
- signpost people to appropriate pastoral or other support.

Where a complaint involves a member of the ministry team, appropriate consideration should also be given to the wellbeing and support needs of that person while ensuring that the complaint is handled impartially.

17. Serious incidents

Where a complaint identifies a potentially serious incident involving the parish or PCC, the PCC will consider whether the matter needs to be reported to the Diocese, Charity Commission, police, local authority or another relevant body.

The complaints procedure must not be used to delay or prevent such reporting.

18. Learning from complaints

The PCC will periodically review complaints received in order to identify:

- recurring problems;
- weaknesses in procedures;
- training needs;
- communication issues;
- safeguarding or risk-management concerns; and
- opportunities to improve parish life and ministry.

The PCC may record anonymised information about complaints in its minutes or annual review, while respecting confidentiality and data protection requirements.

19. Malicious or deliberately false complaints

The parish will distinguish between a complaint that cannot be substantiated and one that is deliberately fabricated.

A complaint will not be treated as malicious merely because it is not upheld.

Where there is clear evidence that a person has knowingly made a false allegation with the intention of causing harm, the parish may take appropriate action and, where relevant, seek advice from the Diocese or other appropriate authority.

20. Policy review

This policy will be reviewed by the PCC at least every **three years**, or sooner if there are significant changes to Church of England guidance, legislation or parish arrangements.

The PCC will ensure that this policy remains consistent with applicable Church of England safeguarding requirements and diocesan procedures.

21. Contact Information

Parish of St Mary with Christ Church, Wanstead

Parish Office:

Mrs Ann Corne, Parish Manager

The Parish Office, Christ Church, Wanstead Place, E11 2SW

020 8530 8743 office@parishofwanstead.org

Incumbent:

Revd James Gilder

Parish Safeguarding Officer:

Mrs Avril Carnelley avril.carnelley@gmail.com

Diocesan Office:

The Diocese of Chelmsford, 53 New Street, Chelmsford, CM1 1GL

Archdeacon:

Ven Mike Power, Archdeacon of West Ham, a.westham@chelmsford.anglican.org

Date approved by PCC: 16th September 2026

Date of next review: September 2027