Complaints Policy

Approved by	The Parochial Church Council of the Ecclesiastical Parish of Ewell
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Complaints form

1. Information about our complaints process

1.1. Principles

Our policy should be read alongside the Guildford Diocese' Dignity at Work Policy, and in particular its statement of commitment calling us to create a loving community that models Christian values in which all are able to flourish.

We understand the value of listening to concerns, and that this an opportunity to reflect on and improve what we do.

1.2. The difference between a concern and a complaint

A concern is as '*an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'*. A complaint is '*an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action*'.

In our experience, with constructive engagement the majority of concerns can be resolved quickly and informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure.

1.3. Anonymous concerns or complaints

A church warden will determine, following consultation with the Diocese, whether an anonymous complaint warrants an investigation.

When submitting their complaint, a complainant should explain whether it is their preference for their identity to be withheld during the investigation process, and the reasons for this.

However, complainants should understand that, in order to be able to investigate each aspect of their complaint, it is likely that questions and information will need to be asked of and shared with third parties involved in the complaint, from which the identity of the complainant might possibly be inferred. Therefore, complainants should not enter into the process with an expectation that their identity can be kept confidential.

The contents of any concerns or complaint forms will not be shared with anyone other than the investigator.

1.4. Timescales

A complainant must raise their complaint **within three months** of the alleged incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will not consider complaints made outside of this time frame unless exceptional circumstances apply.

1.5. Scope of our complaints policy

Our complaints policy will be used in respect of complaints regarding:

- The provision of any services or activities of St Mary the Virgin
- An employee of the parish
- A volunteer of the parish
- A member of the laity.

The following subjects will not be investigated using our Complaints Policy, but instead through other policies:

- Investigations into complaints about misconduct by employees or volunteers; these will be undertaken using our disciplinary procedures. Anyone can submit a complaint about an employee or volunteer of St Mary's. We will not inform the complainant of any disciplinary action taken as a result of a complaint. However, we will acknowledge the complaint and provide an appropriate level of information consistent with our legal duty of confidentiality.

- Disclosures about malpractice made in the public interest from employees and volunteers; these should be made using our Whistleblowing Policy.
- Staff grievances; Grievances from employees will be dealt with in accordance with our grievance procedures
- Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use church premises/facilities; please contact the provider directly, who will use their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about their service.

If you have a complaint against a member of clergy or licensed lay minister please contact the Diocesan Registrar or Bishop. They will make a judgement as to whether this should be dealt with under the Clergy Discipline Measure or our complaints policy.

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority safeguarding teams or employment tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this policy or result in the process being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

If a complainant commences legal action against us in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

1.6. Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, the main aim is to resolve the complaint. We will always provide a clear finding in respect to each aspect of your complaint.

In addition, depending on the findings, we may offer one or more of the following:

- An apology, or an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better.
- Recommendations to inform future practice, including timescales for implementation.

1.7. Confidentiality

Anyone lodging, subject to, or questioned as part of a complaint investigation must both:

- Keep the complaint confidential
- Not speak to anyone other than the investigator regarding the complaint

Furthermore, the written responses to any complaint must be kept confidential.

1.8. Accessibility

In accordance with the Equality Act, we will make reasonable adjustments to enable concerned parties to access and complete this complaints procedure.

1.9. Withdrawal of a complaint

If a complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing or via email.

2. Informal: concerns

We encourage anyone with concerns to raise these informally in the first instance. This is the fastest and most effective way to resolve your concerns.

A concern may be communicated in person, in writing, by email or by telephone to the parish office. However, we recognise and accept that there are a range of people that someone expressing a concern might feel comfortable approaching, depending on the subject matter.

We will do our best to acknowledge the concerns as quickly as possible, and will respond within **Fourteen days**. We will always endeavour to respond as soon as possible.

If, after this, your concern has not been resolved to your satisfaction, then the parish office will provide you with a copy of our complaint form, which you can use to lodge a formal complaint.

3. Formal: stage one

Formal complaints must be submitted using our stage one complaint form.

We will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 48 hours.

A church warden will be appointed to investigate the complaint.

The investigator (church warden) may delegate aspects of the investigation to another member of the St Mary the Virgin Parochial Church Council (PCC) to provide assistance, but remains accountable for determining the outcomes of the complaint. This PCC member must have no prior knowledge of or involvement in the complaint.

The investigator will then seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, what remains unresolved, and what outcome(s) or action would in the complainant's view constitute a satisfactory resolution to their complaint.

They will consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most suitable way of doing this, allowing the complainant to be accompanied at any such meeting if they wish.

The investigator will keep a written record of any meetings in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the investigator will provide a formal written response within **six weeks** of the date of receipt of the complaint. If the investigator is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The written response will determine a clear outcome for each aspect of the complaint. They may also include recommendations based upon these findings that will help inform future practice.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may request to escalate their complaint. The investigator will decide whether to approve any request. Any requests must:

- Identify which aspects of the complaint remain unresolved, and explain why;
- Be submitted within **three weeks** of receipt of the stage one response; we will not accept requests to escalate complaints made outside of this time frame unless exceptional circumstances apply.

4. Formal: stage two

A request to escalate to stage two must be submitted **using our stage two complaint form**. A link to this online form will be provided in the written response from stage one.

We will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 48 hours

This is the final stage of the complaints procedure, and its purpose is to;

- Attempt to achieve reconciliation
- Review those aspects of the complaint that remain unresolved
- Make recommendations to put right things that may have gone wrong

4.1. Mode and scope of review

The PCC will appoint a panel, which will hold a meeting to determine the outcomes from the complaint on the basis of:

- The evidence and documentary material from stage one
- The complainant's request for escalation to stage two
- Verbal submissions during the panel meeting.

The panel **will not** reinvestigate the complaint, review any new complaints, or consider any evidence not already considered at previous stages of the complaint. However, in advance of the panel meeting, the panel chair may at their discretion commission a new investigation of the original complaint if, in their view, the facts in relation to any aspect of the complaint were not adequately established at stage one. This investigation will be delegated to a member of the PCC, who must have no prior knowledge of or involvement in the complaint.

Any new complaints must be dealt with from stage one of our policy.

4.2. Panel constitution

The PCC will appoint a panel consisting of the following members:

- A church warden that was not previously involved at stage one
- Two members of the PCC with no prior knowledge or involvement in the complaint

4.3. Panel arrangements

We will convene a panel meeting within **six weeks** of receipt of the stage three request. If this is not possible, we will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

We will write to the complainant to invite them to the meeting, and propose a date for the meeting. If the complainant rejects the offer of proposed dates three times, without good reason, then we will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

The meeting will be held in person, unless:

- The complainant does not wish to meet in person.
- The panel chair determines that there are circumstances in relation to personal conduct that make a remote meeting more appropriate. In making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.

A complainant may bring someone along to the panel to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Neither party should bring legal representatives to the panel meeting. (say we won't permit recordings of meetings, but check potential legal exposure)

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least **two weeks** before the meeting, we will:

- Confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates as previously agreed by all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;
- Request that any further written material must be submitted at least **one week** before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least **one week** before the date of the meeting. We will **not** normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not permitted. A live transcription tool may be used if a complainant's own disability or special needs require it in order to be able to participate in the meeting.

4.4. Panel outcomes and actions

The panel will:

- Determine the outcome for each aspect of the complaint that remains unresolved
- Decide upon any recommendations that will help inform future practice and prevent similar problems from recurring

Within **two weeks** of the panel meeting the panel will email the complainant to provide a full explanation of their decisions and the reasons for it.

A written record will be kept of all complaints, including, at each stage, whether a complaint was resolved or escalated.

All correspondence statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential.

5. Serial and unreasonable complainants

We do our best to be helpful to people who contact us with a concern, complaint, or a request for information. However, in cases where we are contacted repeatedly by an individual making the same points, or who asks us to reconsider our position, we will need to act appropriately.

If a complaint has completed all stages of the complaint procedure, but the complainant continues to contact us again on the same issues, then the correspondence may be labelled as 'serial' or 'unreasonable' and we may choose not to respond.

St Mary the Virgin, Ewell - Complaint Form

Your details

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Email:

If anyone else is involved in raising this complaint or are you raising the complaint on behalf of someone else, please give details:

About the complaint

Date(s):

Person(s) involved:

Complaint about: (please clearly describe the nature of your complaint)

Supporting information:

• State the matter or name of the person who is the subject of the complaint.

• What happened, when and where.

• Provide the contact details or statements of any witnesses.

• If complaining about a decision, explain what the decision was about, when it was taken, and who made it.

Explain what impact this decision has had, or you may fear will have, and upon whom.

• Provide any additional information that you believe would be helpful.

Q1. Have you tried to resolve this matter informally? YES/NO

If YES, please move to Q2.

If NO, please explain briefly why you decided not to try to resolve the matter informally, then move to Q3.

Q2. If you tried to resolve this matter informally, what happened?

State who you dealt with, when and where, what information you provided to them, and what you felt was unsatisfactory about the outcome.

Q3. What actions are you wanting the church to take and what outcomes are you seeking?

Whilst the PCC cannot promise to do what you ask, it would be helpful to understand what resolution you are seeking.

The church will treat your data carefully and in accordance with the church's data protection Policies – St Mary's Ewell. The church cannot guarantee to keep the fact and details of your complaint confidential if it is necessary and proportionate to share your data to review and resolve your complaint.

Signature of complainant:

Date: