

PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL OF GUILDFORD EMMANUEL, St FRANCIS & St CLARE

MAKING A COMPLAINT

The PCC recognises that complaints may arise. Complaints may relate to things that have been said or done, behaviour, policies and procedures, or the way a concern or issue has been dealt with. This procedure enables individuals to raise a complaint about any matter for which the PCC is responsible and that has affected them personally.

Prior to using this procedure, the PCC encourages an informal approach to the Vicar or a Churchwarden to see if the matter can be resolved in that way.

If your complaint is about:

Safeguarding of Children or Vulnerable Adults; please in the first instance contact the Parish Safeguarding Officer at safeguarding@emmanuelchurch.co.uk or 07421 443031.

The Vicar or another minister;

please raise the matter initially with the Vicar at vicar@emmanuelchurch.co.uk or 01483 561603.

If the matter remains unresolved you may contact the Archdeacon, at

Catharine.Mabuza@cofeguildford.org.uk or 01483 790366

You may wish to read the leaflet "I have a complaint about misconduct by a member of the clergy – what can I do?" at churchofengland-makingacomplaint.pdf

Bullying or Harassment (by adults); you may find it helpful to consult the Diocesan policy on this at Diocese of Guildford-dignity-at-work-policy.pdf

Your employment by the PCC; if you are a PCC employee please refer to and follow the grievance procedure provided within your staff handbook.

Making a complaint to the PCC

Complaints should be made in writing or by email to the PCC Secretary whose contact details are set out below. The PCC Secretary will ensure that your complaint is:

- treated seriously.
- handled fairly without bias or discrimination.
- treated confidentially.

You should complain within 3 months of the event that you are complaining about. You need to set out:

- your full name and address
- what you think went wrong and how it has affected you, including enough details to show why you are aggrieved.
- what (if anything) you think the PCC should do to put it right

If someone else complains on your behalf, the PCC will require written confirmation from you authorising that person to act on your behalf.

The full policy in the pages overleaf explains in detail how a complaint will be handled.

PCC Secretary,
c/o Parish Office, 1 Shepherds Lane,
Stoughton
Guildford, GU2 9SJ
PCC.secretary@emmanuelchurch.co.uk

The Reverend Thom Jee, Vicar,
c/o Parish Office, 1 Shepherds Lane,
Stoughton
Guildford, GU2 9SJ
vicar@emmanuelchurch.co.uk

The Churchwardens,
c/o Parish Office, 1 Shepherds Lane,
Stoughton
Guildford, GU2 9SJ
church.wardens@emmanuelchurch.co.uk

How the Process Works

The PCC seeks to resolve concerns in a proportionate, fair and pastoral manner. Most concerns can be addressed through listening, discussion and problem-solving without the need for formal investigation. Complaints are managed through a staged process:

Stage 1 – Informal Complaint

- Discussion and problem-solving.
- Aim: to resolve concerns quickly and constructively.

Stage 2 – Formal Complaint and Mediation

- A formal complaint is considered.
- Mediation is offered where appropriate.

Stage 3 – Formal Complaint and Investigation

- For serious matters or where mediation is unsuccessful or unsuitable.
- An investigating officer is appointed.

Stage 4 – Appeal and Review

- Review of process and outcome by the Vicar (or Archdeacon where appropriate).

At any stage, more serious concerns may move directly to a later stage.

Complaints Policy

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The PCC recognises that complaints might arise from members of the public, our congregation and from our staff or volunteers.
- 1.2 The PCC is committed to listening to those who express concerns and responding swiftly and appropriately.
- 1.3 The purpose of this policy is to ensure a fair, transparent and proportionate complaints process that is accessible to those wishing to raise a concern or make a complaint.
- 1.4 The policy follows a staged approach, beginning with informal resolution wherever possible and progressing to more formal stages only when appropriate or necessary.
- 1.5 This policy does not form part of the PCC's staff employment contracts and may be changed from time to time to reflect the latest legislation.

2 Scope

- 2.1 This Complaints Policy applies to complaints made about the PCC, or the PCC staff, including staff and volunteers who are working on behalf of or representing the PCC in an employed or volunteer role.
- 2.2 Complaints that will not be dealt with under this policy include

- Complaints or matters relating to safeguarding will be dealt with under the Church of England's Safeguarding Policy and Practice Guidance and should be referred to the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor at safeguarding@cofeguildford.org.uk or 01483 790379.
- Complaints about a member of clergy or licensed lay ministers – refer to the options listed on the cover page.
- Complaints raised internally by staff concerning issues associated with their employment will be dealt with under the terms and conditions outlined in the staff handbook.

3 Definitions

- 3.1 A **complaint** is an expression of dissatisfaction about the policies, practices or procedures of the PCC or the parish. A complaint may include an allegation that an individual has behaved in an unacceptable way.
- 3.2 A **complainant** is anyone who makes a complaint.
- 3.3 A **respondent** is the individual or body against whom the complaint has been made. In respect to complaints relating to a policy, practice or procedure, the respondent will be the PCC.
- 3.4 An **informal complaint** is one that is dealt with through Stage 1 of this procedure, with the aim of resolving the matter through discussion or problem-solving without the need for formal investigation. If resolution is not achieved, the complaint may proceed to Stage 2.
- 3.5 A **formal complaint** is a complaint that cannot, or has not, been resolved informally during Stage 1 and is being managed under Stage 2 or Stage 3 of this procedure.
- 3.6 An **investigating officer** is an individual appointed by the Standing Committee to investigate formal complaints.

4 Principles

This policy is based on the following principles:

- 4.1 All complaints will be taken seriously, will be listened to and managed fairly and transparently. Wherever possible, complaints will be resolved through a positive process of listening, understanding and dialogue.
- 4.2 A complaint should usually be made by the individual directly affected by a concern or issue, not by a third party, unless the individual affected is unable to represent themselves. The PCC does not normally accept anonymous complaints, unless related to safeguarding.
- 4.3 Whilst all complaints will be listened to, the PCC will not follow up on or investigate complaints that cannot be substantiated with appropriate evidence.
- 4.4 The complaints process should be clear and easy to follow, with clear stages which ensure a proportionate response to the concerns raised.
- 4.5 This policy follows a staged process. Wherever possible, concerns will be addressed through listening, discussion and problem-solving before progressing to formal investigation. Formal stages are intended to be proportionate to the seriousness of the complaint and not every complaint will proceed through every stage.

- 4.6 All those who raise concerns, as well as those who are subject to a complaint will be treated with dignity and respect, and confidentiality will be respected by all parties.
- 4.7 If the complaint is against an individual, the respondent will be made aware that a complaint has been made. The content and nature of the complaint will be shared with them once a process has been agreed with the complainant, to be determined by the investigating officer. The complainant, the respondent and the respondent's line manager will be kept informed of progress throughout the complaints process. If the complaint concerns systems, procedures or general issues, the respondent will be the PCC. The Operations Director may be appointed to represent the PCC during the complaints process.
- 4.8 An appropriate level of support will be offered to the complainant and the respondent. The nature of the support will be determined on a case-by-case basis and may include pastoral support from line manager or other leaders.
- 4.9 Appropriate and corrective actions will be taken to deal with and to close a complaint, where it is upheld. Where appropriate, errors of judgment or behaviour will be acknowledged, and apologies issued to those impacted.
- 4.10 A review of key lessons learnt will be carried out upon the conclusion of each complaints process.
- 4.11 If the complaint is against the PCC Secretary, then the complaint will be handled by the Vicar. In such cases, wherever PCC Secretary is referenced in this policy, the Vicar would be substituted.

5 Submitting a Complaint

- 5.1 All written complaints should be sent to the PCC Secretary by email, or by post – refer to the cover page for contact details.
- 5.2 Any complaints received by PCC staff or volunteers should be forwarded to the PCC Secretary to ensure this procedure is followed.
- 5.3 Any complaint should ideally be raised as soon as possible, normally no more than 3 months after any incident, unless in exceptional circumstances such as bullying or harassment cases.
- 5.4 The PCC Secretary will acknowledge all complaints received in writing within 10 working days of their receipt.
- 5.5 The PCC Secretary will inform the Standing Committee of the PCC, who will convene as soon as possible to assess the nature of the complaint.
The Standing Committee will assess the nature and seriousness of the complaint and determine the appropriate stage of the process. In most cases, concerns will begin at Stage 1 (Informal Resolution). More serious complaints may commence at Stage 2 or Stage 3.
- 5.6 Where a complaint involves a member of the Standing Committee, the Committee will convene without that member to assess the complaint. Individual members of the Standing Committee will immediately step aside if they subsequently discover they have been involved in any way with the circumstances surrounding the complaint.
- 5.7 If a verbal complaint is made, or where the complainant is unable to clearly articulate their complaint, the Standing Committee will delegate a senior staff member to meet with the complainant to document and summarise their complaint.

6 Stage 1: Informal Complaint

- 6.1 The Standing Committee will review the complaint to evaluate whether it should be dealt with informally, with advice from the Operations Director where the complaint involves employed staff. The Standing Committee will appoint a senior staff member or a suitably experienced senior member of the church to conduct the informal procedure.
- 6.2 When responding to an informal complaint, the aim is always to resolve it informally, speedily and fairly through discussion or problem-solving.
- 6.3 The complaint will be raised with the staff concerned (respondent) and their line manager or the Operations Director. The respondent and line manager should be willing to listen, to discuss the matter with the complainant and to seek to find a solution to the concerns through discussion and/or problem solving.
- 6.4 Any previous complaints regarding similar issues that are still on an employee's record will be considered at this stage.
- 6.5 If the issue is not resolved informally through discussion and/or problem-solving, the informal complaints process will cease. The Standing Committee will assess if the seriousness of the complaint and lack of resolution warrants Stage 2 (formal complaint and mediation) being initiated. Both the complainant and respondent will be informed of the outcome of Stage 1 in writing.
- 6.6 For informal complaints which are resolved at this stage, the PCC Secretary will keep a record of the informal complaint and the Standing Committee will implement any learning in the interest of continual improvement.

Stage 2: Formal Complaint and Mediation

- 7.1 The Standing Committee will review the formal complaint to ensure that it includes the following before proceeding:
 - The name and contact details of the complainant.
 - The date on which the original complaint was made.
 - The date on which the complaint progressed from Stage 1 to Stage 2 (where applicable).
 - The context and nature of the complaint, including documented evidence to substantiate the complaint.
 - The name of the respondent.
 - The relationship of the complainant to the respondent, or to the PCC more generally.
 - The complainant's desired outcome.
- 7.2 The PCC Secretary will confirm by letter to the complainant that Stage 2: Formal complaint and mediation has been initiated, except in the circumstances listed below, where Stage 3: Formal complaint and investigation should be followed:
 - Where allegations of discrimination, bullying or harassment have been made.
 - Where an employee is alleged to have acted in a way which breaches PCC policies, whether it would then be deemed as misconduct or gross misconduct.
 - Where it is alleged that a crime has taken place.

- 7.3 The respondent will be made aware that a complaint has been made, but the nature of the complaint will not be shared with them until either mediation, or a formal stage 3 investigation has been agreed with the complainant.

7 Mediation

- 8.1 Mediation is a voluntary process, and both parties should agree to participate. An independent third-party mediator will be appointed by the Standing Committee to conduct the process in an objective and impartial way. The mediator will not determine a resolution for the parties but will create a framework for the parties involved to seek a resolution.
- 8.2 The purpose of the mediation process is to bring the complainant and respondent together with the aim of enabling the complainant to be heard and to reach a mutually agreeable resolution through open and honest discussion without the need for formal investigation.
- 8.3 In the letter to the complainant confirming that Stage 2: Formal complaint and mediation has been initiated, the PCC Secretary will set out the timeline and process for the stage and request that they participate in a process of mediation. A copy of this Complaints Policy will be forwarded to the complainant with the letter. The complainant will be requested to respond in writing to the request to participate in mediation within 7 working days. (working days in this context being Monday-Friday)
- 8.4 If the complainant does not respond within 10 working days, the PCC Secretary will write to the complainant requesting a response to the request to participate in mediation and asking if they have decided to withdraw their complaint. If the complainant confirms that they will not participate in mediation, the PCC Secretary will request them to confirm their reasons for not participating in mediation. If the complainant does not reply, the PCC Secretary will write to him/her confirming that, if they do not reply within a further 10 working days, the complaint will be deemed to have been withdrawn.
- 8.5 If the request to participate in mediation is agreed to, the mediation process will be initiated.
- 8.6 If either the complainant or respondent do not agree to participate in mediation, the formal complaints process may cease at this point. The Standing Committee will assess whether the seriousness of the complaint warrants the initiation of Stage 3 of the formal complaints process.

8 Stage 3: Formal Complaint and Investigation

- 9.1 If the seriousness of the complaint means that mediation is not appropriate, the Standing Committee will appointment an investigating officer. This will normally be a senior staff member or senior member of the church community, regarded in high standing, who has not previously been involved in the complaint. In exceptional circumstances an independent third-party investigator may be appointed.
- 9.2 The PCC Secretary will write to the complainant to confirm that Stage 3: Formal complaint and investigation will be initiated unless the complainant wishes to withdraw the formal complaint. The letter will set out the terms of reference of the investigation including:
- The name of the proposed investigating officer

- A request for permission to share confidential information concerning the complaint with the investigating officer
- The timeline within which the investigation should be completed, which will normally be within one calendar month of the start of stage 3.
- The names of witnesses or third parties who will be interviewed as part of the investigation. The complainant will be advised to not approach or influence witnesses or third parties.
- The context and nature of the complaint, including the documented evidence that has been provided to substantiate the complaint.
- Any steps already taken to try to resolve the complaint informally or through mediation.

9.3 The investigating officer will determine the detail and practicalities of how the investigation will be undertaken and contact both parties regarding this, making clear the timeline of the investigation and the immediate next steps. Electronic recording of interviews, by any party will not be allowed. Having completed their investigation, they will provide a written report detailing their findings and conclusions to the PCC Secretary and Standing Committee.

9.4 Following receipt of the report from the investigating officer, the Standing Committee will review the findings and make a recommendation on the proposed actions to be taken and the timeline within which the actions should be completed. Where the complaint is related to staff, the recommendations should be reviewed with both the line manager and Operations Director.

9.5 The PCC Secretary will confirm the outcome of the investigation to the respondent. This may include one or more of the following:

- An explanation of the background to the situation or event/s.
- A statement about whether or not the complaint was substantiated in full or in part.
- If the complaint is not upheld, an explanation, with reasons, why there was insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, with the result that the complaint has not been upheld or an explanation, with reasons, that the evidence did not substantiate the complaint or an acknowledgement that the complaint was substantiated in part, with a brief description of the remedial and preventative action being taken and reasons why the remainder of the complaint was not substantiated.
- If the complaint is upheld, a brief description of the remedial and preventative action being taken.
- A recognition, if appropriate, that the situation could have been handled differently or better.

9.6 If the complaint is upheld, the PCC Secretary will confirm to the person against whom the complaint has been made if disciplinary or capability procedures are to be initiated.

9.7 If the complaint is not upheld, this will be confirmed in writing to the respondent and any lessons learnt from the complaint will be discussed with them. The respondent may be offered support in terms of development, training or pastoral support, depending on the circumstances.

9.8 The PCC Secretary will also write to the complainant to confirm the outcome of the investigation, and the response will include one or more of the following:

- An explanation of the background to the situation or event/s.
- A statement about whether or not the complaint was substantiated in full or in part.
- If the complaint is not upheld, an explanation, with reasons, why there was insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, with the result that the complaint has not been upheld or an explanation, with reasons, that the evidence did not substantiate the complaint or an acknowledgement that

the complaint was substantiated in part, with a brief description of the remedial and preventative action being taken and reasons why the remainder of the complaint was not substantiated.

- If the complaint is upheld, a description of the remedial and preventative action being taken.
- A recognition, if appropriate, that the situation could have been handled differently or better.

- 9.9 The response to the complainant should not include any details of any disciplinary or capability process or outcomes against a PCC staff member or volunteer. If appropriate, the response should state that, “following investigation, further confidential procedures are being followed”.
- 9.10 None of the above will constitute an admission of negligence or an acceptance of liability on the part of the PCC.
- 9.11 The PCC Secretary should ensure that full records of the investigation are kept confidential and secure, including:
- A copy of the original complaint letter, email or written notes.
 - Details of how the complaint was investigated, identifying any documents that were reviewed or taken into account.
 - The names of all those who were interviewed in the investigation.
 - Written notes of any interviews undertaken.
 - Results and conclusions of the investigation.
 - Summary of key actions taken as a result of the investigation and who is responsible for following through on the actions.
- 9.12 The PCC Secretary will record the outcome and any response from the complainant in a complaints log, file the records securely in line with GDPR and consider what learning points should be addressed by the PCC. Refer to the PCC staff handbook for details of how long a complaint will remain on a staff record.

9 Stage 4: Appeal

- 10.1 It is hoped that an acceptable resolution can be found through the three-stage procedure set out above, and any formal complaint is concluded to the complainant’s satisfaction. If either the complainant or the respondent believes that the complaints procedure has not been followed fairly or that the outcome is unreasonable, they may exercise a right of appeal by informing the PCC Secretary in writing within 10 working days of receiving the outcome letter.
- 10.2 An appeal will involve escalation to the Vicar. (In cases where the Vicar has been involved in the process previously, the complainant has ultimate right of appeal to the Archdeacon).
- 10.3 The Vicar will acknowledge receipt of the appeal within 10 working days. If the Vicar is not available during this period, the PCC Secretary will notify the complainant of the date by which the appeal will be acknowledged. The acknowledgement will set out who will deal with the appeal and the time within which a substantive response will be made, which ordinarily should be no longer than one calendar month from the date the appeal was made.
- 10.4 The Vicar will decide whether to deal with the appeal personally or to delegate it. No person dealing with the appeal will have had any previous involvement in the complaint or the process.
- 10.5 The Vicar will review all documentation from the investigation, the recommendation and any actions taken to date. The Vicar may choose to meet with the complainant and his/her

accompanier to discuss the situation from their perspective and to ascertain why the appeal has been raised. The Vicar may also meet with the respondent and his/her accompanier. In these meetings the role of any accompanier is to provide support to the complainant/respondent but is not entitled to represent them.

- 10.6 Notes will be taken of all conversations and, a written record will be shared with those present for accuracy and transparency. Electronic recordings of meetings by any party will not be permitted.
- 10.7 The Vicar may discuss the matter with the Operations Director or Archdeacon to consider what, within the framework of PCC policies and Diocesan rules, could be a way forward to resolve the issue at hand, to formulate a response to the complainant and to discuss any necessary actions.
- 10.8 The Vicar may hold a hearing as well as or instead of any of the meetings described above. Any hearing will be conducted confidentially.
- 10.9 Upon conclusion of the appeal, the Vicar will inform the PCC Secretary and Standing Committee of the outcome of the findings, confirm whether the complaint will be upheld and put forward recommendations on actions to close out the investigation. The decision of the Vicar is final.
- 10.10 The Standing Committee will review the recommendations from the Vicar on actions to close out the investigation.
- 10.11 The PCC Secretary will inform the respondent of the outcome of the appeal and any necessary actions to be taken. This may include an apology or the commencement of disciplinary proceedings according to the guidelines set out in the staff handbook. It may also include any recommended training or development arising from the nature of the complaint.
- 10.12 The Vicar or PCC Secretary will inform the complainant of the outcome of the appeal, and the response will include one or more of the following:
 - A statement about whether or not the appeal was substantiated in full or in part.
 - If the appeal is not upheld, an explanation, with reasons, why there was insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, with the result that the complaint has not been upheld or an explanation, with reasons, that the evidence did not substantiate the appeal or an acknowledgement that the appeal was substantiated in part, with a brief description of the remedial and preventative action being taken and reasons why the remainder of the complaint was not substantiated.
 - If the appeal is upheld, a brief description of the remedial and preventative action being taken – please refer to 10.14.
 - A recognition, if appropriate, that the situation could have been handled differently or better.
- 10.13 This should be done in writing by the date stated in the initial acknowledgement. If that is not possible, the complainant should be advised of the reason for the delay and the revised date by which they can expect a response.
- 10.14 The response to the complainant should not include any details of any disciplinary or other action or outcomes against a PCC staff member, volunteer or trustee.
- 10.15 None of the above will constitute an admission of negligence or an acceptance of liability on the part of the PCC.
- 10.16 The PCC Secretary should ensure that full records of the appeal are retained with the records of the initial complaint, including:

- Details of how the appeal was managed, identifying any documents that were reviewed or taken into account.
- The names of all those spoken to or involved in the appeal.
- Written records of any interviews undertaken.
- Results and conclusions of the appeal.
- Summary of key actions taken as a result of the appeal and who is responsible for following through on the actions.

10.17 The Standing Committee will identify any key lessons learnt and recommendations as a result of the appeal. This may include recommended changes to policies or procedures, where appropriate.

10 Charity Commission

- 11.1 Complaints can be made to the Charity Commission at any stage. Information about how to make a complaint to the Charity Commission, and the grounds on which the complaint can be made, can be found on the Charity Commission website - www.gov.uk/complain-about-charity.
- 11.2 The Charity Commission generally expects complaints to have been raised with the charity first but may investigate serious concerns relating to charity governance or misconduct.

11 Confidentiality

- 12.1 All complaint information will be handled sensitively and shared only with those identified in this policy. Maintaining confidentiality is essential and security of data relating to individuals will be protected in accordance with UK GDPR legislation and the PCC's Data Protection Policy. No confidential information relating to complaints will be disclosed to any third party unless the PCC has the individual's consent or are required to do so due to legal obligations.
- 12.2 The records will be held securely by the PCC Secretary. Any subject access requests should be addressed to the Data Controller in accordance with the PCC's Privacy Statement. Please contact the Parish Office as per the Privacy Statement in the first instance.

12 Review and monitoring

- 13.1 This policy will be reviewed annually, to take account of any updated legislation.

Version history

251006	Draft version for SC review
251007	Minor revisions incorporated
260209	Circulated to SC for review
260223	Initial version adopted
260609	Circulated to PCC for review and amended
260616	Minor PCC revisions incorporated

The PCC endorses this policy and shares a commitment to effectively implement its objectives in the event of any complaints.

Signed.....
(Vicar)

Signed.....
(PCC Secretary, on behalf of GEFC PCC)

Date.....16/06/26.....

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Next review: June 2027