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**Safeguarding complaints policy and procedure**

The Diocese of Ely takes complaints about our work and quality of service in all aspects of safeguarding seriously. We view complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve the support that we offer to parishes. If you are not satisfied with the service you have received, please follow the process below.

Our aims are:

• to provide a fair procedure which is clear and easy to use

• to be open about how we will deal with complaints

• to ensure that all complaints are investigated in an equitable and timely way

• to resolve complaints as near to the point of service delivery as possible

• to learn from the process and thereby improve our service.

For the purpose of these procedures, a complaint is any formal expression of dissatisfaction, either verbal or written, about any aspect of the safeguarding service provided to you at a diocesan level. These procedures apply in relation to all safeguarding issues involving children or adults at risk of harm.

All information will be handled sensitively, sharing information on a ‘need to know’ basis and in accordance with the diocesan data sharing and confidentiality policy and procedure.

Overall responsibility for this procedure and its implementation lies with the Diocese of Ely through the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP). This policy will be reviewed periodically as required.

**Complaints procedure**

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with our service, whether justified or not, which calls for a response. The complainant must be the person directly affected by the issue and not a third party.

In many cases, a complaint is best resolved by the person responsible for the issue that is being complained about. If the complaint has been received by that person, we expect that all reasonable efforts will have been made to resolve it swiftly if possible and appropriate (informal resolution). However, we appreciate that this isn’t always possible or appropriate and therefore have the following three step process to deal with all such cases.

**Stage One**

Initially, the complaint should be made in writing to the Diocesan Secretary. If the complaint is about the Diocesan Secretary then the complaint should be made to the Chair of the Ely Diocesan Board of Finance. All communication, including telephone communication should be recorded in writing and shared with the complainant to ensure accuracy and transparency. The complaint will be acknowledged and responded to within two working weeks (i.e. 10 working days) and a copy of this complaints procedure will be supplied.

Within this timescale, the Diocesan Secretary (or Chair of the EDBF) will do the following:

* make all necessary and appropriate enquiries to establish the substance of the complaint and any attempts already made to resolve the matter informally
* form a view and decide who the best person to respond to the complaint would be
* initiate discussions or meetings with the complainant to fully understand their issue, seek clarity and be clear on what would constitute a resolution for them
* arrange any necessary mediation between the parties and any necessary, subsequent action(s).

It is hoped that an acceptable resolution can be found, and the complaint can be concluded to the complainant’s satisfaction at this level. However, if this is not the case, the complainant must inform the Diocesan Secretary (or Chair of the EDBF) within two working weeks (i.e. 10 working days) of his/her wish to initiate Stage Two. Stage Two will only be initiated by mutual agreement but, if this remains disputed, the Diocesan Secretary or (Chair of the EDBF) has the final word.

**Stage Two**

At stage two, the details of the complaint and actions taken at stage one will be passed to the Independent Chair of the DSAP.

The Independent Chair will:

* acknowledge receipt of the stage two complaint within two working weeks (i.e. ten working days)
* make it clear when a response can be expected. The aim will be for complainants to receive a definitive reply within four working weeks (i.e. 20 working days). If this is not possible because, for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a further communication will be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given.
* review all documentation and the actions taken so far and discuss with the complainant the situation from their perspective and why resolution has not yet been reached. All conversations will be recorded in writing and shared with the complainant for accuracy and transparency
* discuss the same with the Diocesan Secretary and other safeguarding professionals, if appropriate, and consider what, within the framework of diocesan policy and if necessary, the law, could be a way forward to resolve the issue at hand
* where necessary, take advice from the Diocesan Registrar in order to formulate a response for the complainant and any necessary action.

The reply to the complainant will inform them of the action(s) taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

Again, hopefully the complaint can be resolved at this level, but if not, then the complainant must notify the Independent Chair of the DSAP within two working weeks (i.e. 10 working days) that they wish to make a formal appeal against the outcomes, i.e. initiate Stage Three.

**Stage Three – Appeal**

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after the stage two process has been completed, they have the right to advise the Independent Chair of their desire to appeal to [Thirtyone:eight](https://thirtyoneeight.org/) (formerly the Churches’ Child Protection Advisory Service) as the independent appeal body. Thirtyone:eight work with the Diocese in an independent advisory capacity and will hear the appeal. Once the Independent Chair of the DSAP has notified thirtyone:eight of the need for stage three to be initiated, thirtyone:eight will acknowledge the request for appeal within two working weeks (i.e. 10 working days). The process and actions undertaken at stages one and two will be reviewed and the appeal chair may choose to talk to / meet with the parties concerned to gain clarification on the issues.

A final decision and any action deemed necessary will be communicated to the complainant and the Diocese within six working weeks (i.e. 30 working days).

**Statistical monitoring and learning from complaints**

The number and outcome of any complaints will be reported at least twice each year to the DSAP to identify any trends which may indicate a need to take further action.

**Recording complaints**

We will log all complaints we receive so that we can monitor the types of problems, the best way to sort them out and how long we are taking to deal with them. This also helps us to take a closer look at how we can improve our own service delivery.

We will handle your information in accordance with data protection legislation.