

## THE PCC OF ST MARY DE HAURA, NEW SHOREHAM COMPLAINTS & GRIEVANCE POLICY AND PROCEDURE

*This policy and procedure was formally adopted at a meeting of the PCC on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2024. It will be reviewed in the light of any complaints or grievance, and at least every three years if not complaint or grievance has been made.*

### **Purpose of the policy and procedure and their scope**

1. We are committed to doing all that we reasonably can to ensure that everyone involved in the church and its activities feels safe, is respected and is treated fairly. The purpose of this policy and procedure is to set out how someone may complain or raise a grievance when this doesn't happen.
2. A complaint or grievance is a concern about something which has happened or something which has not happened, which has caused dissatisfaction, disquiet or upset; or inconvenience or offence. It may be an allegation that someone has behaved in an unacceptable way.
3. This policy and procedure do not apply to:
  - a complaint or grievance about a member of the clergy: that will be dealt with using the procedure set out in the Clergy Discipline Measure. Any complaint or grievance which does concern a member of the clergy will be referred to the Archdeacon or the Bishop;
  - a complaint or grievance which raises a safeguarding concern. In this case the matter will be referred to the church's Safeguarding Officer in the first instance for advice about how best to deal with it; or,
  - any other matter for which there is either a statutory complaints or investigatory procedure or if it covered by Diocesan policies and procedures.

### **Principles and procedure**

4. This policy and procedure are based on these five principles:
  - (i) The complaint or grievance will, wherever possible, be dealt with informally, speedily and fairly through discussion and, where necessary, by problem-solving, mediation and negotiation. This is not to minimise any issue, but to encourage people to draw attention to something they feel isn't right as early as possible, rather than wait until it becomes a bigger concern. We have indicated how long we would expect each stage of the procedure to take however this is indicative because sometimes for a variety of reasons it may not be able to deal with a complaint as swiftly as we would like.
  - (ii) We will take all complaints and grievances seriously and deal with them as swiftly as we can. However, if it is found that a complaint or grievance is unfounded and has been made maliciously, we will take action to address that breach of this policy.
  - (iii) We will ensure that the matter is dealt with by someone who is not connected to the issue the matter concerns and that they will seek to resolve the matter to everyone's satisfaction by taking into account all the relevant information.
  - (iv) Confidentiality is key. It is important that everyone involved in making and dealing with complaints and grievances treats the information and issues confidentially.

- (v) The policy and procedure are based upon everyone involved treating one another with courtesy, due respect and honesty.

5. As indicated, if something isn't right and causes a concern it is best to raise this sooner rather than later, before it could become more problematic. So, in most cases we will seek to deal with a complaint or grievance informally. To raise a concern, speak first to whomever is responsible for or is organising the event or activity at which the concern arose or, if that person is the subject of your concern, speak to one of the Churchwardens. If it happens that both Churchwardens are implicated, speak to the Vicar.

6. In seeking to resolve complaints or grievances informally, either one of the Churchwardens or a member of the PCC, will be asked to speak with you. This will give you the opportunity to explain your concern fully. It may require the person to whom you speak to seek further information or advice. They will also ask you what outcome you would like to see. A successful outcome of the informal process is that all sides are content. Formal records will not be kept of complaints or grievances resolved informally. We would expect the procedure for dealing with complaints informally to be dealt with within one week.

7. If a complaint or grievance cannot be dealt with informally, or if you are not content with the outcome of the informal procedure and wish to pursue the matter, we will ask you to put your complaint or grievance in writing (if you haven't already). This statement should also include what you are seeking as the outcome of making your complaint or grievance. This will be the start of the formal procedure. Your written complaint or grievance should be sent either to the Vicar ([vicar@stmarydehaura.org.uk](mailto:vicar@stmarydehaura.org.uk)) or to the Churchwardens ([churchwardensmdh@gmail.com](mailto:churchwardensmdh@gmail.com)). In the unlikely event that all three are the subject of or directly implicated in your complaint or grievance, you should send this to the Parish Administrator ([smdh.office@gmail.com](mailto:smdh.office@gmail.com)).

8. The Vicar will appoint someone not involved in the matters raised in the complaint to look into your complaint or grievance. This may be the Vicar herself/himself, or one of the Churchwardens or a member of the PCC. It might also be someone who is not a member of the PCC if their objectivity and skills may best suit them to the role. This person will gather all the relevant information and meet you and anyone else whose knowledge may help clarify any issues. At the meeting with you, you may choose to be accompanied by someone to support you – but this person's role is not to represent your views or argue your case.

9. The objective of this inquiry will be to establish all the relevant facts and to see how all the parties involved in the complaint or grievance can be reconciled, preferably through a mutually accepted resolution. The outcome of the inquiry, which we would expect to be completed within two weeks if that is practicable, will be:

- a decision either to uphold your complaint in whole or in part, or to find it unfounded with the reasons for that decision;
- an account of what action has been taken to reach a resolution; and, if it is appropriate,
- in the light of what has been established any recommendations to ensure the same or a similar issue does not recur, and a clear action plan for the implementation of those recommendations.

10. You will be informed of the outcome at a meeting with the person who has looked into the matter and you will be given a letter which sets out the outcomes. If it is, for practical reasons, not possible for this meeting to take place, the letter will be sent to you.

11. If you are not content with the outcome, you may appeal. To do this you will be required to set out in writing the reasons you are not content with the outcome and what remedy you are seeking. Subject to whoever carried out the inquiry and who was involved, the Vicar or Churchwardens will arrange for three people, probably members of the PCC who have not been involved in the first inquiry and who are not directly involved in any of the issues the complaint raises, to review the case. This review will, unless circumstances prevent it, will involve a meeting with you, where you may again be accompanied by someone to support you. The appeal process will involve looking again at all the relevant information, considering your reasons for appealing against the original inquiry's finding(s), and seeking a mutually acceptable resolution.

12. The outcome of the appeal, which we would expect to be reached also within two weeks if that is practicable, will be a decision which either upholds your appeal either in full or in part or dismisses it. The decision may vary the conclusions and recommendations, replace them with alternatives or consider them sound. Whatever the outcome, reasons will be given for the decision reached, and a written copy of the decision will be given to you.

13. Where an inquiry into any complaint or grievance identifies anything which suggests that a disciplinary or criminal offence may have been committed, the inquiry will be suspended and the matter referred to the appropriate authorities.

### **Whistleblowing**

14. In the unlikely event that you think that you have either exhausted the complaints/grievance procedure or because you have good grounds for believing that your complaint or grievance will not be taken seriously, you have the option of using the 'whistleblowing' procedure. To invoke this procedure, you should contact the Archdeacon of Brighton & Lewes, whose email and telephone number can be obtained from the diocesan website (<https://www.chichester.anglican.org>).