

St John's Church Harpenden
PCC Complaints and Grievances Policy and Procedures

Policy Owners	Churchwardens
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Preamble

The Harpenden St John Parochial Church Council (PCC) is committed to its role which primarily includes cooperation with the vicar in promoting in the parish the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical. But there may be a time when parishioner or others need to complain.

This complaints policy and procedures is for those who are unhappy about matters for which the PCC is responsible that have affected them. Prior to using this formal procedure the PCC encourages an informal approach to the Vicar or a Churchwarden to see if the matter can be resolved in that way.

A complaint is a written or verbal expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet about an action, or lack of action, by a person acting on behalf of the church, or about the policies and procedures of the church.

When the complaint is made by someone who is deployed within the parish, whether paid or holding unremunerated office, it is usually referred to as a grievance.

A complaint or grievance may include an allegation that a person has behaved in an unacceptable way. Complaints and grievances against licensed or commissioned ministers (including Retired clergy, Readers, Lay Leaders of Worship) are handled through a separate Diocesan procedure. These complaints or grievances should be addressed to the Incumbent of the parish.

Policy

1. The aim always, when responding to complaints and grievances, is to enable them to be resolved informally, speedily and fairly by discussion, problem-solving, mediation and negotiation. Problems should therefore be brought direct to the person(s) deemed responsible for the area of dissatisfaction or disquiet, and will hopefully be resolved in this way.
2. If, however, a complaint or grievance relates to or includes an allegation that a child or adult who may be vulnerable has been harmed or is at risk of harm, or that an adult or another child may have caused harm to a child or adult who may be vulnerable, it must be responded to through the Diocesan procedures for handling allegations of abuse (see Safeguarding Policy).
3. If the complaint or grievance does not concern a child or adult who may be vulnerable, and the person bringing it is not satisfied with the outcome at the problem-solving stage, he/she may then invoke the formal procedure outlined below.
4. Our policy shall be reviewed and approved at least every three years, else more frequently if the PCC determines it is required.

Formal Procedure

Stage 1

1. A complaint should be submitted in writing to a Churchwarden of the parish (who is not him- or herself the subject of the complaint).
2. The person bringing the complaint has the opportunity to state his or her case; and to be accompanied, if they wish, at any meeting by a friend or other supporter.
3. The Churchwarden to whom the complaint has been submitted will select an additional Churchwarden or PCC-appointed deputy warden to hear the complaint (again neither should be the subject of the complaint). Hereafter these two people are termed the "Hearing Wardens".
4. The Hearing Wardens will meet with the complainant to listen to and note the facts of the complaint or grievance. They will then give to the subject of the complaint or grievance the facts relating to it.
5. The Hearing Wardens will then interview the subject of the complaint or grievance, who may also be accompanied by a friend or other supporter if they wish, to listen to their response to the complaint or grievance brought against them. The Hearing Wardens may then interview any other relevant parties.
6. The Hearing Wardens then draw conclusions and informs the complainant and the subject of the complaint or grievance of the outcome, ideally within a week of the complaint or grievance being made.

Stage 2

7. If the reply given at stage 1 does not satisfactorily resolve the complaint or grievance, the Hearing Wardens should provide notification of the complaint or grievance in writing to the PCC. The PCC will form a panel of three of its members who have not previously been involved in the process.
8. The panel will establish why the complainant continues to feel aggrieved, and receive all the documentation from the previous investigation at stage 1. The panel will then meet with the complainant and his/her supporter, the subject of the complaint or grievance and his/her supporter, and the Hearing Wardens who investigated the complaint at the first stage. Witnesses may be called.
9. The panel members will then sit alone to form a judgement and make a decision about the complaint or grievance. They will inform the complainant and the subject of the complaint or grievance of the outcome within a month of the complaint being made.
10. The decision of the panel representing the PCC will be final.

A written record of all meetings should be made and agreed.