Shankill
Parish
Lurgan

Complaints
Policy & Process

SHANKILL PARISH CHURCH LURGAN - COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCESS

The Church of Ireland is committed to ensuring the safety and welfare of all members and to try to ensure that children have a positive and enjoyable experience when participating in church activities. Children, parents/carers, staff and volunteers should be facilitated in raising a concern or complaint.

This complaints procedure aims to cover any situation which may arise, when children or their parents/carers are not happy with the way children were treated while they were at an activity run by the church. For example:

• An alleged breach of the code of behaviour by a staff member or volunteer.

• Perceived poor attitude of a staff member or volunteer.

• A child feeling unhappy about an incident or an event.

• A parent/carer feeling unhappy about an incident or event involving their child.

• Dissatisfaction in relation to an aspect of the service being provided.

Any serious complaints regarding the conduct of bishops or clergy must be referred to the Complaints Administrator (contact RCB). This may trigger the complaints procedure as laid out in Chapter VIII of the Constitution of the Church of Ireland, which will then follow that process.

Every possible effort will be made to resolve complaints locally.

It is important that if anyone has a concern about a breach of the Code of Behaviour by church personnel, that this is reported to the Parish Panel, or at an appropriate level to avoid any conflict of interest, as follows:

• Where the concern relates to a Panel member, reports should be made to another Panel member or the Incumbent.

• Where the concern relates to the Incumbent or other member of the clergy, reports should be made to the Bishop.

• Where the concern relates to a bishop, reports should be made to the Archbishop of the Province or, in his or her absence, to the Archbishop of the other Province and the Chief Officer in Church House.

• In the case of a complaint against an Archbishop, it should be made to the Archbishop of the other Province or, in his or her absence, the next most senior bishop.

WHAT COMPLAINTS ARE NOT ACCEPTED?

1. Complaints involving child protection concerns must be dealt with in accordance with reporting procedures as set out in Guidance 2.1 A of the Church of Ireland

Safeguarding Policy (see Shankill Parish website) and not through this Complaints Procedure.

2. Serious complaints relating to a member of the clergy are dealt with through the clergy discipline procedure.

There are basic rules for the acceptance of complaints:

• Complaints must be raised within three months of the complainant knowing the facts.

• The Church does not generally investigate anonymous complaints.

• Complaints that are broadly or substantively the same as a previous complaint, which have already been addressed, will not be accepted.

• Complaints which are believed to be vexatious or malicious will be refused.

WHO CAN MAKE A COMPLAINT?

Complaints can be made by:

• Children who are involved in church activities.

• Parents/carers.

• Staff members, volunteers or member of the clergy.

• Other advocates on behalf of children.

HOW TO MAKE A COMPLAINT

1. If the complaint is in relation to the safety and welfare of children, the complaints should be made to the Parish Panel.

2. Other complaints should be made to the member of church personnel in charge of the group of which the child is a member, with whom the complainant should raise the concern orally (informal complaint).

3. If the complainant does not want to discuss the matter with the member of church personnel in charge of the group, if the member of church personnel cannot answer the complainant's concern, if the complainant is dissatisfied with the initial response of the member of church personnel to a complaint, or the complaint is more serious the complaint can be made in writing to the Parish Panel (formal complaint).

INFORMATION THE COMPLAINANT NEEDS TO PROVIDE

Complaints should be made, in the first instance, orally to the member of church personnel in charge of the group and provide them with the following information to allow them to investigate the complaint:

• Name of child affected and the group or event they were involved in.

• The name and contact details of the person making the complaint.

• Exactly what the complainant is dissatisfied with and identification of the person(s) against whom the complaint is made.

• The name of the staff member/volunteer who dealt with the matter the complainant is dissatisfied with.

Complaints made in writing should be made on the Complaints Form which accompanies this policy document and give as much factual details as possible to allow the matter to be investigated.

HOW WILL A COMPLAINT BE DEALT WITH?

The complaint will be dealt with fairly and objectively in a positive and pro-active manner and expect resolutions and outcomes to contribute to a process of continuous improvement.

Informal Complaint

The member of church personnel in charge of the group will likely need to speak to a number of other people about the complaint but will endeavour to be able to provide a response to the informal complaint within ten days.

If the member of church personnel in charge of the group is unable to respond to the informal complaint substantively within this time frame, they will endeavour to revert to the person who made the complaint to update them on the situation.

Formal Complaint

It may take time to process a complaint; however, the person who raised the complaint will be kept informed of the progress of the complaint with an acknowledgement of a formal complaint within seven days.

Endeavours will be made to provide a response to the complaint within four weeks. However, where it is not possible to respond to the complaint within four weeks, the person who made the complaint will be provided with an update within that period and the matter resolved at the earliest possible opportunity.

The member of church personnel in charge of the group or Parish Panel member may need to speak to the person who made the complaint and a number of other people to fully understand the complaint and the circumstances surrounding it. Ultimately the member of church personnel in charge of the group or Parish Panel member will decide about the complaint and inform the person who raised the complaint whether it is upheld or not and the actions that will be taken as a result.

ACTIONS THAT MAY BE TAKEN IN RESPONSE TO THE INVESTIGATION OF A COMPLAINT:

Responses to a complaint might include:

• An apology (either verbal or written) to the complainant and/or the member.

• An explanation provided to the complainant and/or member, e.g. as to why something happened.

• A review of a decision made.

• An assurance that any poor practice identified in the investigation will be addressed at future activities.

• A meeting with the person who is the subject of the complaint and the complainant in order to resolve the situation.

• Compulsory attendance by the person who is the subject of the complaint at a specific training event.

• A period of supervision of the person who is the subject of the complaint by other members of church personnel involved in the group.

• In the case of a serious incident the suspension or dismissal of the member of church personnel (in line with disciplinary procedures – see below

This list is not exhaustive and in the individual circumstances of a specific complaint the response to that complaint may include one or more of the above items or may not include any of them.

WHAT IF THE PERSON WHO HAS MADE THE COMPLAINT IS NOT SATISFIED WITH THE OUTCOME?

If the person who raised the complaint is not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint or the way in which it was handled, they may appeal.

Any appeal must be made within 21 days of being given the decision and outcomes of the complaint.

The appeal must be formally lodged in writing to the Parish Panel.

In the appeal, you must clearly explain the basis of the appeal and the preferred outcome to resolve the issue.

The Panel will consider the process undertaken to handle the original complaint and the outcome of the original complaint.

The person who made the complaint will be kept informed of the progress of the appeal with an acknowledgement of the appeal within seven days and a response within four weeks.

Where it is not possible to complete the appeal within four weeks, the person who made the complaint will be provided with an update within that period and the matter resolved at the earliest possible opportunity.

The Panel may need to speak to the person who made the complaint and a number of other people to fully understand the appeal and the circumstances surrounding the investigation of the complaint.

The Panel will make a decision about the appeal and will inform the person who made the complaint whether the appeal is upheld or not and the actions that will be taken as a result.

DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES IF A VOLUNTEER IS FOUND IN BREACH OF THE CODE OF BEHAVIOUR

Each breach of the Code of Behaviour will be assessed in line with the Complaints procedure above. If a volunteer is deemed to be in breach of the Code of Behaviour the following procedures should be followed:

Informal Process Stage:

At this early stage, the main aim of the procedure is to help the volunteer achieve the required standard of performance or behaviour. It is the Parish's aim to be able (where possible) to resolve issues at this stage and not invoke any formal procedures.

However, depending on the nature of the matter it is up to the Parish Panel to decide whether or not to initiate this procedure.

It can be in the form of a supervision meeting and the Panel will:

• Informally meet with the volunteer to discuss with them the unacceptable behaviour or underperformance.

• Agree on improvement measures and the timeframe for these improvements.

• Offer to support and coach the volunteer in improving their performance.

• Decide on a date to review the progress.

• Inform the volunteer in a clear manner of the next steps in the procedure if agreed standards of improvement are not achieved.

• Maintain a record of the meetings held.

Formal Process Stage:

This disciplinary procedure allows for warnings to be given for failure to meet standards of Code of Behaviour where the matter cannot be dealt with at the informal process stage.

Disciplinary meetings:

Disciplinary meetings will be held with the volunteer so that they can respond. The Parish Panel will never give a warning or decide on the level of a warning until after this meeting takes place and the volunteer is given a fair hearing under the principles of natural justice. The meeting will always be adjourned, and all aspects considered before a discipline or warning is imposed.

A discipline/warning may not be imposed if the volunteer's response is satisfactory.

Stage One - Verbal Warning:

The Panel will convene a disciplinary meeting. The volunteer will be given the opportunity to state their case. The meeting will be adjourned to decide what course of action will be taken, the volunteer and their representative will be asked to re-join the meeting, and they will be informed of the decision.

The verbal warning should be given by the Panel (more than one Panel member should be present for this). The Panel will inform the volunteer:

1. What the issue/matter is.

2. What action or improvement is required from the volunteer.

3. Set a date for review meeting.

4. What will happen if there is no improvement made by the volunteer.

The verbal warning will be issued verbally and in writing and in duplicate, a copy of which the volunteer will be asked to sign. This should be returned to the Panel.

This verbal warning remains active for a period of 6 (six) months.

All warnings issued can be appealed, please see below for the appeals process.

Stage Two - Written Warning:

If the matter is not resolved at stage one, stage two is initiated. The same process as stage one is applied; however, the warning is in writing and remains active for a period of 12 (twelve) months.

Stage Three - Final Written Warning:

If the matter is not resolved at stage two, stage three is initiated. The same process as stage two is applied.

Stage Four - Removal from Role:

If there are further breaches of discipline after the third stage or if an incident is so serious that the matter cannot be dealt with at stages 2 or 3, then the panel may decide to remove the volunteer from their role. The process for dismissal is:

1. An appropriate investigation and consideration by the Panel.

2. A meeting with the Panel, the volunteer and their representative in order to dismiss the volunteer.

3. Outline the parish position to the volunteer.

4. Consideration to be given by the Panel to the volunteer and their representative's position.

The dismissal will be issued in writing and will include information on the appeals process.

Volunteers Rights:

At each stage of the disciplinary procedure, volunteers have the right:

• To be informed of the complaint against them and be given sufficient opportunity to present their case and call witnesses to support their case, as appropriate.

• To be accompanied to disciplinary meetings by a representative (this can be in the form of a colleague or friend).

• To be given an opportunity to present their case before a decision regarding the discipline to be imposed is reached.

• To be informed and encouraged to use the right of appeal.

Appeals Process:

An appeal should be made by the volunteer to the Incumbent in writing within two weeks of the disciplinary action having been taken.

An appeals panel will be set up to investigate the appeal. This panel will consist of members from the Select Vestry. The person hearing the appeal should not have a previous knowledge of the matter.

A meeting will take place within two weeks of the application to appeal the disciplinary decision.

The outcome of the appeals process will be issued to the volunteer in writing within one week.

If a serious allegation of abuse is made against a volunteer the procedure for dealing with an allegation should be followed as outlined in Guidance 2.1A (Safeguarding).

IF A STAFF MEMBER IS FOUND IN BREACH OF CODE OF BEHAVIOUR

Each breach of the Code of Behaviour will be assessed in line with the Complaints Procedure outline above. If a staff member is deemed to be in breach of the Code of Behaviour the disciplinary procedures in the staff member's contract or staff handbook shall be followed where it is a serious incident which may potentially warrant suspension or dismissal of the staff member. If a serious allegation of abuse is made against a member of staff the procedure for dealing with an allegation should be followed as outlined in Guidance 2.1A (Safeguarding).

Adopted by Select Vestry on *22nd September 2026*