

Safeguarding Complaints Procedure

Introduction

The primary aims of Manchester Diocese's safeguarding service are to protect children and vulnerable adults from harm, promote their welfare, and minimise risk wherever possible by raising awareness and providing a robust structure whereby any concerns can be reported and receive a prompt and efficient response.

No individual or organisation is perfect and in pursuing these vital aims it is possible that mistakes can be made, either in process or communication or in some other way. In recognition of this, Manchester Diocese has put in place the following clear, accessible and active process for dealing with complaints.

The key principles on which we base our complaints handling are:

- Open and easy access to the process
- The timely resolution of complaints wherever possible
- Respect for complainants and for their voices to be listened to
- A shared commitment at all levels to welcome complaints and comments as an opportunity to improve the service we provide
- Positive action by the diocese in response to complaints which are upheld
- The impartial review of complaints
- For all information regarding a complaint to be treated in strictest confidence
- A commitment to ensuring that wherever possible, complaints are resolved and the relationships are repaired and reconciliation explored
- A commitment to and understanding of cultural equality and diversity.

It is important to note that in responding to complaints, as in all of the activities of the diocese, the welfare of children and the interests of vulnerable adults will always be paramount.

Overall responsibility for this procedure and its implementation sits with the Diocesan Board of Finance.

The scope of this procedure

This complaints procedure is for the use of anyone wishing to complain about how a safeguarding issue has been handled by the Diocese of Manchester.

Any complaint should relate to the process followed in dealing with a safeguarding matter, not to the original incident which gave rise to the allegation. Complaints which are covered by this procedure will usually relate to the response made to one of the different parties involved in a safeguarding referral – the child or vulnerable adult, the parent or carer of the child or vulnerable adult, or the alleged perpetrator.

This complaints procedure is to be used where it has not been possible for you to resolve your complaint by other means. In many cases, a complaint is best resolved directly by the person responsible for the issue that is being complained about. The Diocesan Safeguarding Officer (DSO) will be pleased to meet with you to discuss your concerns to help achieve this. If it is not possible to resolve the complaint in this way, you may use this complaints procedure.

Your complaint must state how you consider there has been a failure to comply with proper procedures. If possible, it will be helpful to refer to national or diocesan safeguarding policy and guidance. It is not enough to say that you disagree with the professional decisions which have been made in your case.

Making a complaint

The complainant must be the person directly affected by the issue. You may ask someone – for example a close relative - to complain on your behalf, but in these circumstances the complaint must be accompanied by a signed written confirmation from you saying that you agree to that person acting for you.

A complaint should be sent to the independent chair of the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP) at the following email address

safeguardingcomplaints@manchester.anglican.org

or contact made by phone in the first instance to our switchboard on 0161 828 1400.

You should make your complaint within twelve months of the event or outcome that you are complaining about. In exceptional circumstances this time limit may be waived. If the DSAP Chair decides that a complaint cannot be considered out of time, this will be communicated to the complainant, with reasons, along with the steps to be taken to deal with the issues raised.

This aspect of the Safeguarding Complaints Procedure should not be confused with the right of anyone to raise historic safeguarding concerns about the conduct of an individual or an agency. In these cases, the diocese's safeguarding procedures should be followed.

The complaint must include:

- Your full name and contact details
- Details of your specific complaint including what you think went wrong.

If you make a complaint by phone, the DSAP Chair will make a note of the conversation and send you a copy to ensure it has been correctly understood. If necessary, the DSAP Chair will arrange to meet with you at that stage for the purpose of clarifying the details of your complaint.

How we will deal with your complaint

You will receive an acknowledgement to confirm receipt of your complaint from the DSAP Chair, usually within five working days of it being received. At this stage, the DSAP Chair will also make it clear when a full response to your complaint can be expected. The aim will be for a definitive reply to be sent to you within four working weeks of you making the complaint. If it has not been possible to meet this deadline because, for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a further communication will be sent explaining the reasons for the delay and indicating when a full response will be given.

The DSAP Chair will assess whether or not your complaint relates to a safeguarding matter. If it is determined that your complaint falls within this procedure, the DSAP Chair will first determine whether the Safeguarding Team accepts the validity of your complaint. If not, the DSAP Chair will ensure that it is investigated thoroughly and objectively by a suitably qualified person with no previous knowledge of, or involvement in the matter. There may be circumstances where it is appropriate for the DSO to investigate your complaint, for example if your complaint relates to a historic issue which the DSO was not directly involved in. If so, this option will be discussed with you to ensure that you agree with this approach.

The appointed person will meet with you to ascertain the full details of your complaint and also read any relevant documentation. The appointed person will look objectively into your complaint. This will include seeking the views of any person who is the subject of your complaint. The appointed person may seek advice from others.

The appointed person will complete a report which will be sent to the DSAP Chair with their recommendation as to whether the complaint should be upheld. The DSAP Chair will review the report and may seek additional advice to assist in coming to a decision.

The DSAP Chair will then write to you, stating whether the complaint has been upheld and also summarising the findings and recommendations of the report and outlining the actions that will be taken to address your complaint.

Wherever possible, you will also be provided with a copy of the investigation report. Where the DSAP Chair determines that it is not appropriate to share the investigation report with you, the reasons for this will be communicated to you.

You will be offered the support of an independent person to assist you with progressing your complaint. This will be separate from any support provided to you in dealing with your original safeguarding issue.

Where a member of staff has been the subject of a complaint, they will also receive feedback from the DSAP Chair and this will be followed up in writing. Again, where possible, a copy of the investigation report will be shared with the member of staff, and where this is deemed not to be appropriate, the reasons for this will be communicated to the member of staff. Support will also be offered to employees who are the subject of the complaint.

Where disciplinary action is deemed to be appropriate, the reply to the complainant will not state this or give details relating to an individual employee's employment record as this information is confidential to the employer and the employee.

The DSAP Chair's written reply will be the final response to your complaint, unless new evidence or another compelling reason which has not previously been considered emerges.

Other issues

The diocese's safeguarding service operates within a multi-agency arena and there are cases where delays in dealing with safeguarding issues will occur due to processes outside the control of the diocese. In these situations, it would not be appropriate for this procedure to be invoked. However, every attempt will be made – within the confines of professional confidentiality – to explain to the complainant the reasons for any delay.

The submission of a complaint under this procedure should not impede or delay or have an influence on any other processes which may be taking place in response to a safeguarding concern, for example, the suspension of an individual or commencement of action under the Clergy Discipline Measure.

In some circumstances, the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the diocese may be deemed to be unreasonable or vexatious. If so, the DSAP Chair will consult with the COO/Diocesan Secretary and will then write to the complainant to explain why their complaint will not be progressed.

Amended December 2024