



COMPLAINTS POLICY AND GUIDELINES

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HIGHFIELDS CHURCH COMPLAINTS POLICY

Dec 25

Introduction & values:

The purpose of this policy is to set out the context, mechanism and guidance for handling complaints at Highfields, Cardiff. This policy supports the wider policies of Highfields, and also the Safeguarding Policy. This policy should be read in conjunction with other Highfields Policies.

The overriding principles of the Complaints Policy include;

- Highfields aspires to continually improve and develop as an organisation, and accepts that investigating, responding to and learning from complaints is part of this process.
- Highfields seeks to ensure that all complaints are listened to and, as appropriate, responded to, regardless of who the complaint is raised by.
- A complaint is simply an “expression of dissatisfaction about any of our operations”, whether justified or not. A complaint can be received verbally, by telephone, email or by letter.
- Highfields seeks to provide, in this policy, a clear mechanism for making and processing complaints.
- This policy covers Service User Complaints and Data Protection Complaints. Safeguarding Complaints should be directed as per the safeguarding Policy.
- Good judgement should be used where this policy provides space for discretion.
- Where decisions are made at the discretion of the Church Manager, the Church Manager should seek appropriate advice / counsel from the Trustee Board.
- Where agreement is required email trails are sufficient.
- Highfields has a legal responsibility to comply with relevant legislation and guidance.

What kind of complaint can I make using this procedure?

You can make a complaint about:

1. The services that the church provides.
 - a. For example, toddler groups, baptisms, weddings and funerals. Poor service might include problems with the supplied facilities or other health & safety requirements.
2. The behaviour of a church employee, trustee or volunteer that has affected you or someone for whom you are responsible.
 - a. For example, inappropriate language or behaviour; sexual harassment or unlawful discrimination.

3. The application of church policies and procedures, or decisions made by the church, which affects you or someone for whom you are responsible.
 - a. For example, withdrawal of activities, or engagement in specific group activities which are restricted for some reason, e.g. age.

You should report any safeguarding concern to the church's safeguarding officer. See Safeguarding Policy.

What kind of complaints are not suitable for this procedure?

Safeguarding concerns relating to child or adult protection.

1. Any safeguarding concern should be reported to church's safeguarding officer following the church's safeguarding procedure:
<https://www.highfieldschurch.org.uk/members/policy-documents/safeguarding-policy/view>
2. An employment grievance.
 - a. The church has a staff grievance procedure which is set out in the employee's Staff handbook. Employment-related grievances should be dealt with in accordance with that grievance procedure.

Vexatious Complaints

If the church concludes that your complaint is vexatious and you are a church member, the church may consider exercising church discipline.

If you are not a church member, the church may not answer any further complaints you make.

GENERAL COMPLAINTS

Policy Statement:

Highfields is committed to the highest standards of openness, probity and accountability. The Trustees and the Leadership Team recognize that an effective complaints handling management system is a proven way of maintaining and building relationships between the charity members (employees, volunteers, congregants, associates) and other individuals or bodies with whom we interact.

Effective handling of complaints demonstrates our commitment to providing the best possible service. It helps us to find out how things have gone wrong, how to put them right, and to prevent future re-occurrences.

The Leadership Team and the Trustee Board commit to:

- ensuring that everyone is treated justly;
- providing a fair and easily understood procedure for dealing with complaints;
- publicising / making known the existence of this policy, together with relevant contact details and procedural guides, and to ensure that all who are responsible for Charity affairs understand what needs to be done should a complaint occur;
- ensuring that complaints are investigated fairly, promptly, and are resolved satisfactorily for all parties;
- being used as a source of information for future reference and improvements in process, where appropriate.

Scope of Policy:

Overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation lies with the Trustees. This policy should be available for:

- All staff and Trustees;
- Associated personnel whilst engaged with work or visits related to the Charity;
 - Other individuals including consultants; volunteers; contractors, etc.

All complaint information will be handled sensitively and confidentially, i.e. telling only those who need to know, and with due regard to data protection requirements.

Please note that Highfields has an established Whistleblowing Procedure which can be requested from the Highfields Office. This is for the most serious types of complaint which may be deemed to fall beyond the scope of this policy.

Procedure to follow in the event a complaint is made:

Complaints should be made in the first instance to the club/activity leader, or, if the complaint is about that person, the Church Manager, to a member of the Leadership Team or a member of the Trustee Board. If you are unsure who to contact, in the first instance, please contact:

The Church Manager or email churchmanager@highfieldschurch.org.uk

Or contact our Chair of Elders Jason Phillips, email jason.phillips@highfieldschurch.org.uk

Telephoned or verbal complaints must be recorded in writing by the recipient, with the following details:

- Name of the person receiving the complaint;
- Name, address and contact details of the person making the complaint;
- The relationship between the complainant and the charity;
- The facts of the complaint.

The individual providing the complaint should also be encouraged to put their complaint in writing so that a record in their own words can be kept. At this point the person making the complaint must be told:

- That we have a complaints procedure; (offer to email them a copy)
- What will happen next; and (see below)
- How long it should take to be dealt with. (see below)

Once the member of the Trustee Board or member of the Leadership Team has recorded the details of the initial complaint, ideally, the person who is subject of the complaint should respond to the complaint in collaboration with their Line Manager, if it is possible and appropriate to do so. If this is not possible or appropriate, the complaint will be dealt with by the Trustees, initially by the Chair of Trustees.

Whether resolved or otherwise, the complaint should be passed to the Chair of the Trustees within 2 weeks of the complaint being raised. The Chair of Trustees must record this.

Any individual who is the subject of the complaint (but not directly responding to it) must be informed and given the opportunity to respond.

The person making the complaint must receive an acknowledgement from the person responsible for the investigation within 2 weeks, with their estimate of the likely timeframe, and with a copy of the complaints policy.

The person making the complaint should receive findings or a progress report within four weeks, detailing the action(s) taken in the investigation, any conclusion and action resulting.

DATA PROTECTION COMPLAINTS

If you wish to complain to the charity about:

- how your personal information has been processed;
- how your complaint has been handled, or
- appeal against any decision made following a complaint.

Please address your complaints to the Data Protection Officer (DPO), or person designated to deal with data protection, as follows:

Church manager or email churchmanager@highfieldschurch.org.uk.

The procedure for handling data protection complaints:

Complaints regarding how your personal information has been processed should be submitted to the DPO (see above), who will acknowledge receipt within ten working days.

The DPO will review and respond in writing to your complaint, within twenty working days of receipt. If a complaint is complex and we cannot send a full reply within twenty working days, we will tell you the reason why and let you know when we will be able to reply in full. If an extension is required, this will be up to a maximum of a further twenty-eight working days.

If you are dissatisfied with the way in which your complaint has been handled, then you may contact us, outlining your concerns, and an independent member of the Leadership Team or the Trustee Board will respond to you within ten working days, to outline the next steps.

Contact details for the Charity Commission

If the complaint is of a financial nature, and you have not been satisfied with the answer from the complaints procedure, the Charity Commission should be contacted where your concerns relate to:

- dishonest handling of funds;
- misapplication of charitable funds;
- actions that contravene the Charity's Governing Document or charity law; and
- actions that threaten to bring the Charity into disrepute

Email: www.charity-commission.gov.uk

SAFEGUARDING COMPLAINTS

Please see the Highfields Safeguarding Policy.