

## **King's Church Kendal Complaints Policy**

King's Church Kendal views complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve for the future, as well as a chance to put things right for the person or organisation that has made the complaint.

Our policy is:

- To provide a fair complaints procedure which is clear and easy to use for anyone wishing to make a complaint
- To make available the existence of our complaints procedure so that people know how to contact us to make a complaint
- To make sure Staff, Elders and Trustees at King's Church Kendal know what to do if a complaint is received
- To make sure all complaints are investigated fairly, impartially, in a timely way, and proportionately to the complaint
- To make sure that complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are repaired. In all cases, complainants will receive a response to their complaint detailing action taken
- To gather information which helps us to improve what we do

### **Definition of a Complaint**

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect of King's Church Kendal, its Elders or staff. Unreasonable behaviour or language by complainants towards church staff or representatives will not be tolerated.

### **Where Complaints Come From**

Complaints may come from any person or organisation who has a legitimate interest in King's Church Kendal. A complaint can be received verbally, by phone, by email or other writing. When complaints are made orally, it is important to properly identify if the individual is actually making a complaint. Guidance on this is detailed below in the Appendix.

All complaint information will be handled sensitively, telling only those who need to know and following any relevant data protection requirements.

### **Responsibility**

Overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation lies with the Board of Trustees.

### **Response**

Anyone making a complaint will receive a response in line with the Complaints Procedure below.

## Complaints Procedure

Written complaints may be sent by email to [kckoffice777@gmail.com](mailto:kckoffice777@gmail.com) or [ed@kingschurchkendal.net](mailto:ed@kingschurchkendal.net) or by letter to King's Church Kendal, The Shakespeare Centre, Yard 76, Highgate, Kendal LA9 4HE. Verbal complaints may be made in person to any member of staff, leaders, or trustees at the above email address or at any of our meetings or activities.

### Receiving Complaints

Complaints may arrive through channels publicised for that purpose or through any other contact details or opportunities the complainant may have. Complaints received by telephone or in person need to be recorded in a contemporaneous written note for record.

The person who receives a phone or in person complaint should:

- Establish whether or not the individual wishes to make a complaint rather than just bringing something to our attention
- Write down the facts and circumstances of the complaint and any relevant background information
- Take the complainant's name, address and telephone number
- Note down the relationship of the complainant to the Church e.g. visitor, regular attendee, office holder in the local community, etc.
- Tell the complainant what will happen next and how long it will take. This will usually require the complaint recipient to revert to the complainant.
- Normally but where appropriate, ask the complainant to send a written account by post or by email so that the complaint is recorded in the complainant's own words. For further guidelines about handling verbal complaints, see Appendix 1.

## Resolving Complaints

### Stage One:

In many cases, a complaint is best resolved by the person responsible for the issue being complained about. If the complaint has been received by that person, they may be able to resolve it swiftly and should do so if possible and appropriate.

Whether or not the complaint has been resolved, the complaint information should be passed to the Operations Manager within one week.

On receiving the complaint, the Operations Manager will record it in a complaints log. If it has not already been resolved, they will assess if there are grounds for further investigation. It may be decided at this stage that there are no grounds for the complaint to have been made and no further investigation is necessary. In this case, the complainants must be informed within 1 week of why no further investigation is being undertaken. Otherwise, the Operations Manager, after consultation with an Elder and/or Church trustee where an Elder

is involved, may delegate an appropriate person to investigate the complaint further and to take appropriate action.

If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a fair opportunity to respond. Nobody will be given responsibility to investigate a complaint about themselves.

If the complaint is about the Operations Manager, the complainant will be passed to an Elder and/or Church trustee to investigate.

Complaints should be acknowledged by the person handling the complaint within a week. The acknowledgement should say who is dealing with the complaint and when the person complaining can expect a reply. A copy of this complaint procedure should be attached.

Complaint communication must be in writing with a clear audit trail. Verbal communication needs to be summarised in writing.

Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within four weeks. If this is not possible because for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given.

Whether the complaint is justified or not, the reply to the complainant should describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

#### Stage Two:

If the complainant feels that the problem has not been satisfactorily resolved at Stage One, they can request that the complaint is reviewed at Trustee level. At this stage, the complaint will be passed to the Chair of Trustees.

The request for Trustee level review should be acknowledged within a week of receiving it. The acknowledgement should say who will deal with the case and when the complainant can expect a reply.

The Chair of Trustees may investigate the facts of the case themselves, if they were not involved in stage one, or delegate an uninvolved suitably senior person or other Trustee to do so.

Exceptionally, the Chair of Trustees may ask an experienced individual from outside King's Church Kendal to perform this role. This may involve reviewing the paperwork of the case and speaking with the person who dealt with the complaint at Stage One.

The Chair of Trustees will inform the board of Trustees an investigation is underway and the investigator will report their findings to the Trustees.

If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a further opportunity to respond.

The person who dealt with the original complaint at Stage One should be kept informed of what is happening.

Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within four weeks. If this is not possible because for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given.

Whether the complaint is upheld or not, the reply to the complainant should describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

The decision taken by the Trustees at this stage is final, unless the Trustees decide it is appropriate to seek external assistance with resolution.

#### External Stage

The complainant can complain to the Charity Commission at any stage. Information about the kind of complaints the Commission can involve itself in can be found on their website at:

<https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-charity>

#### Variation of the Complaints Procedure

The trustees may vary the procedure for good reason. This may be necessary to avoid a conflict of interest, for example, a complaint about the Chair should not also have the Chair as the person leading a Stage Two review.

## **Appendix 1 - Practical Guidance for Handling Verbal Complaints**

- Remain calm and respectful throughout the conversation
- Listen - allow the person to talk about the issue in their own words. Sometimes a person just wants to "let off steam"
- Don't debate the facts in the first instance, especially if the person is angry
- Show an interest in what is being said
- Obtain details about the issue before any personal details
- Ask for clarification wherever necessary
- Show that you have understood the comments made by reflecting back what you have noted down
- Acknowledge the person's feelings (even if you feel that they are being unreasonable) - you can do this without making a comment on the matter itself or making any admission of fault on behalf of the organisation e.g. "I understand that this situation is frustrating for you".
- If you feel that an apology is deserved for something that was the responsibility of the Church, then apologise
- Ask the person what they would like done to resolve the issue.
- Identify that the Church has a Complaints Procedure and ask if they would like their issue to be treated as a Complaint.
- Request that, if possible, the complainant should express their complaint in their own words in writing to ensure there is no misunderstanding or incorrect representation of their comments.
- Be clear about what you can do, how long it will take and what it will involve.
- Don't promise things you can't deliver
- Give clear and valid reasons why requests cannot be met
- Make sure that the person understands what they have been told

- Wherever appropriate, inform the person about the available avenues of review or appeal
- Alert the Operations Manager to any complaint that is likely to be made in writing, where a verbal complaint has been made that will not be followed up in writing, and/or any concern you may have that any request to write down and send the complaint may have become a barrier to the complaint being lodged.