

PUBLIC COMPLAINTS POLICY

1 Opening Statement

Belfast City Vineyard (the “Church”) recognises that from time to time the quality of services provided by the Church may not meet up with the standards that individuals have come to expect. The Church 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.

2 What is the purpose of this policy?

- To provide a fair complaints procedure which is clear and easy to follow for anyone wishing to make a complaint.
- To make sure everyone at the Church knows what to do if a complaint is received.
- To make sure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely manner.
- To make sure that complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are repaired.
- To gather information which helps us to improve what we do.

We believe that it is best to follow the Scriptural principles of reconciling differences wherever possible before resorting to this formal complaint process. However, we recognise that, from time to time, there may be occasions when there will be no alternative but to resort to a formal complaint. This formal procedure should only be

instigated when attempts to resolve the issue informally have failed or where, due to the nature of the complaint, it is not appropriate to address it with the person concerned.

3 Complaint Focus

The types of complaints that will fall under this policy will include:

- conduct of our trustees, staff, volunteers and/or senior leaders,
- the standard of service we provide as a local church,
- discrimination,
- provision of inaccurate information,
- poor administration including delays in responding to enquiries, or
- financial mismanagement.

Safeguarding Concerns

This policy is not intended to be used for raising safeguarding concerns regarding allegations of abuse against children and/or vulnerable adults.

All safeguarding concerns should be directed to the Safeguarding Lead at andyshields@belfastcityvineyard.com

Any complaint received that contains a safeguarding concern will be dealt with in accordance with the Church's Safeguarding Policy.

4 Responsibilities

When a complaint is made the Church's responsibility will be to:

- acknowledge the formal complaint in writing or by email as soon as possible;
- respond within a stated period of time (within 25 working days maximum);
- deal reasonably and sensitively with the complaint; and
- act where appropriate.

A complainant's responsibility is to:

- bring their complaint, in writing, to the Church's attention normally within 8 weeks of the issue arising;
- raise concerns promptly and directly with a member of staff in the Church;
- explain the problem as clearly and as fully as possible, including any action taken to date;
- allow the Church a reasonable time to deal with the matter, and
- recognise that some circumstances may be beyond the Church's control.

5 Complaints Procedure

Stage 1 - Informal Resolution

Wherever possible it is always better to try and resolve any disagreements/grievances informally before making a formal complaint. If it is appropriate to do so, we would always encourage people to reach out to an individual or team that is responsible for causing a grievance and ask them to address this with you.

In most cases, complaints and grievances that can be resolved informally usually bring about reconciliation in a speedy and fair way by mutual discussion.

We recognise however, that it is not always possible, nor appropriate, to address a matter informally first. In such cases. It may be necessary to raise a formal complaint by following the process outlined below.

Stage 2 – Formal Complaint Process

- Your complaint should be made in writing (or by email), marked “Private & Confidential”, and sent to the Responsible Person: Senior Pastors (if the complaint is about a member of staff or volunteer, but not the Senior Pastors, andy@belfastcityvineyard.com) or the Chair of the Board of Trustees (if the complaint is about the Senior Pastors, trustees@belfastcityvineyard.com); who will acknowledge it in writing or by email (normally within 7 days). You should provide as much detail as possible about your complaint. If you have previously submitted your complaint to an affiliated church, please indicate this and explain your reasons for now bringing the complaint to the Church. Remember to keep a copy of your letter.
- The Responsible Person will then assess your complaint and either:
 - a) arrange for your complaint to be investigated or
 - b) contact you to explain why your complaint will not be investigated.
- The results of the investigation will be communicated to you within a reasonable time – normally 25 working days.

Stage 3 – Appeal

[Please note – if the first stage will be conducted by the church’s trustees it may be appropriate to make stage 4, below, stage 3]

- You have the right – if dissatisfied with the results of the investigation – to appeal by putting your case in writing to the Church’s Board of Trustees.
- The trustees will appoint an appeal panel to review the complaint and ensure that no one previously involved in the complaint is a member of that panel.
- The result of any appeal will be communicated to you in writing or by email and their decision will be final.

Stage 4 – Referral to VCUKI

As an affiliated church of Vineyard Churches UK and Ireland (VCUKI), the Church comes under the spiritual governance and oversight of the Vineyard national denomination. If following an investigation by the Church, you are not satisfied that the Complaint Policy was properly and fairly followed, or the investigation was not carried out in an appropriate way you may refer the matter to VCUKI.

VCUKI will then review the process followed by the Church and may decide to conduct its own investigation of the matter raised.

To contact VCUKI about an ongoing complaint please go to <https://www.vineyardchurches.org.uk/vcuki-complaints-policy/>

6 Confidentiality and record keeping

The Church will make every effort to handle all complaints with a high degree of integrity and confidentiality. However, confidentiality cannot always be guaranteed. The nature of the circumstances of the complaint may be such that it is not possible to maintain complete confidentiality throughout the investigatory process. By detailing the complaint made against an individual, so that they may give their response, it is possible that the identity of the complainant could be surmised. If this is likely to be the case, the situation will be explained to the complainant before further action is taken.

All formal complaints and responses made to the Church will be recorded and filed in a secure place in accordance with the Church's Data Protection Policy.

7 Monitoring and learning from complaints

Complaints are reviewed annually to identify any trends which may indicate a need to take further action.

8 Charity Commission

The complainant can complain to the Charity Commission at any stage. Information about the kind of complaints the Commission can involve itself with can be found on its website at <https://www.charitycommissionni.org.uk/concerns-and-decisions/submit-a-concern-about-a-charity/>

9 Initial Contact:

Complaints should be sent to the appropriate Responsible Person

- a. Senior Pastor

Email address: andy@belfastcityvineyard.com

Postal Address:

92-114 Cavehill Road,

Belfast,

BT15 5BT

- b. Chair of Board of Trustees

Email address: trustees@belfastcityvineyard.com

Postal Address:

92-114 Cavehill Road,

Belfast,

BT15 5BT

Review

Type of Review	Date of Review	Date Approved by Board
New policy	October 2023	December 2023
Reviewed	January 2025	03/02/2025