



## Safeguarding complaints policy and procedure

The Diocese of Bristol take complaints about our work and quality of service in all aspects of safeguarding seriously. We view complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve the support that we offer to parishes. If you are not satisfied with the safeguarding service provided to you directly by employees or volunteers of the Bristol Diocesan Board of Finance Ltd, please follow the process below.

Our aims are:

- to provide a fair procedure which is clear and easy to use
- to be open about how we will deal with complaints
- to ensure that all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way
- to resolve complaints as near to the point of service delivery wherever possible
- to gather information in order to improve our service.

For the purpose of these procedures, a complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction about any aspect of the safeguarding service provided to you at a diocesan level. A complaint will only be considered if made by someone who is a direct recipient of the Diocese of Bristol's safeguarding service.

All information will be handled sensitively, sharing information on a 'need to know' basis.

Overall responsibility for this procedure and its implementation lies with the Diocese of Bristol through the Diocesan Safeguarding Steering Group (DSSG). The resolution of an allegation of abuse is not covered by this complaints policy and procedure. Please refer to the Diocese of Bristol's Allegations Management Procedure.

This policy will be reviewed periodically as required.

### Complaints procedure

In many cases, a complaint is best resolved by the person responsible for the issue that is being complained about. If the complaint has been received by that person, we expect that all reasonable efforts will have been made to resolve it swiftly if possible and appropriate (informal resolution). However we appreciate that this isn't always possible or appropriate and therefore have the following three step process in order to deal with all complaints raised.

## **Stage One**

Initially, the complaint should be made to the Bishop's Safeguarding Lead, the Deputy Diocesan Secretary. This can be in writing or by telephone. All telephone conversations will be recorded in writing and shared with the complainant to ensure accuracy and transparency. The complaint will be acknowledged and responded to within two working weeks (i.e. 10 working days) and a copy of this complaints procedure will be supplied.

Within this timescale, the Deputy Diocesan Secretary will do the following:

- make all necessary and appropriate enquiries to establish the substance of the complaint and any attempts already made to resolve the matter informally
- form a view and decide who the best person to respond to the complaint would be
- initiate discussions or meetings with the complainant to fully understand their issue, seek clarity and be clear on what would constitute a resolution for them
- arrange any necessary mediation between the parties and any necessary, subsequent action(s).

It is hoped that an acceptable resolution can be found and the complaint can be concluded to the complainant's satisfaction at this level. However if this is not the case, the complainant must inform the Deputy Diocesan Secretary within two working weeks (i.e. 10 working days) of the decision to initiate stage two, which will be progressed as follows:

## **Stage Two**

At stage two, the details of the complaint and actions taken at stage one will be passed to the Chair of the Diocesan Safeguarding Steering Group (DSSG).

The Chair will:

- acknowledge receipt of the stage two complaint and that they are reviewing details within two working weeks (i.e. ten working days)
- make it clear when a response can be expected. The aim will be for complainants to receive a definitive reply within four working weeks (i.e. 20 working days). If this is not possible because, for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a further communication will be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given.
- review all documentation and the actions taken so far and discuss with the complainant the situation from their perspective and why resolution could not be reached. All conversations will be recorded in writing and shared with the complainant for accuracy and transparency
- discuss the same with the Deputy Diocesan Secretary and the Diocesan Safeguarding Team (where appropriate) and consider what, within the framework of diocesan policy and if necessary, the law, could be a way forward to resolve the issue at hand

The reply (within 20 working days where possible) to the complainant will inform them of the action(s) taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

Again, hopefully the complaint can be resolved at this level, but if not then the complainant must notify the Chair of the DSSG within two working weeks (i.e. 10 working days) of the decision to move to stage three, which will be progressed as follows.

### **Stage Three – Appeal**

If the complainant remains unsatisfied after the stage two process has been completed, they have the right to advise the Chair of their desire to appeal to Thirtyone:Eight. Thirtyone:Eight work with the Diocese in an independent advisory capacity and will hear the appeal. Once the Chair of the DSSG has notified Thirtyone:Eight of the need for stage three to be initiated, Thirtyone:Eight will acknowledge the request for appeal within two working weeks (i.e. 10 working days). The process undertaken at stages one and two will be reviewed and the appeal chair may choose to talk to / meet with the parties concerned to gain clarification on the issues.

A final decision and any action deemed necessary will be communicated to the complainant and the Diocese within ten working weeks (i.e. 50 working days).

### **Monitoring and learning from complaints**

The number and outcome of any complaints will be reported at least twice each year to the DSSG to identify any trends which may indicate a need to take further action.

NB The complainant must be the person directly affected by the issue and not a third party.

### **Complaints Process**

- **Informal stage** (where appropriate)
- **Stage One** (Deputy Diocesan Secretary)
  - Initial response within one week (five working days)
  - Decision within two weeks (10 working days)
  - If complainant not satisfied, request for Stage Two to be received by Deputy Diocesan Secretary within two weeks (10 working days)
- **Stage Two** (Chair of DSSG)
  - Initial response within one week (five working days)
  - Decision within four weeks (within 20 working days)
  - If complainant not satisfied, request for Stage Three to be received by Independent Chair of DSSG within two weeks (10 working days)
- **Stage Three** (Appeal to independent body – Thirtyone:Eight)
  - Initial response within two weeks (10 working days)
  - Decision within ten weeks (50 working days)