

Clergy Complaints Policy

This policy applies to all licensed Clergy within the Diocese of Sheffield. It does not apply to SDBF Clergy employees. This policy does not confer any contractual rights and can be amended at any time.

Last review	NEW POLICY	Next review	07/03/2028
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1. Introduction

This policy is our diocesan commitment to encouraging and sustaining a healthy ministry practice within the Diocese of Sheffield. Those who are ordained as ministers in the Church of England are called to '*set the example of the Good Shepherd always before them as the pattern of their calling.*' The Good Shepherd is Jesus Christ who responded in love and sought to serve all of God's children. However, we recognise that there are occasions when ordained ministers may fall short of this standard.

We want to know about these occasions so that we can make good the problem and plan to avoid its repetition. If you have a complaint, we would like you to tell us about it.

2. Statement from Bishop of Sheffield

A high standard of integrity and service is expected of all those who are volunteers or employees in the Diocese of Sheffield — and all the more so of those who are office holders, called to the ordained ministry. Mostly that standard is met, but occasionally any individual may fall short of what is expected of them. This is so even when we are sincerely seeking to offer our lives in the service of God after the pattern of the Lord Jesus. None of us is perfect; we all share the tendency to mess up. Sometimes actions, or a lack of action, can cause concern or give offence; whether we are worried about a vulnerable person who may be at risk, an illegal or illicit activity which might cause someone or the diocese as a whole harm, or a personal wrong that has been done by poor behaviour, misjudgment or mistake.

Raising a complaint, grievance or allegation with the Diocese of Sheffield is an opportunity for all of us to learn and improve our practice for the future, as well as a chance to put things right for the person or organisation that has made the complaint.

Our aims are to:

- provide a fair complaints procedure which is clear and easy to use;
- make sure everyone who is working as an office holder or employee for the Diocese of Sheffield knows what to do if a complaint is received;
- make sure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way;
- make sure that complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are repaired and processes improved;

- to deal with any complaint in a manner that respects both the complainant and those complained against.

Thank you for your concern and collaboration in this regard.

3. Scope of Policy

The scope of this policy covers all Diocese of Sheffield Clergy Office Holders. This includes ministers, vicars, priest, readers and any other party licensed and authorised by the Bishop of Sheffield. For clarity, SDBF clergy employees have their own internal process for complaints separate to this policy, though a dual process may commence should a complaint be received in relation to clergy misconduct. A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction about an action or inaction by a Clerk in Holy Orders who is licensed or authorized by the Bishop of Sheffield. This is true whether that person is paid a stipend or is self-supporting.

4. What complaints are not dealt with by this policy?

- Complaints relating to local parochial matters, where the matter should be referred to the Parochial Church Council (PCC) of the relevant parish church
- It is not normally diocesan policy to investigate anonymous complaints
- Complaints should be made within six months of the matter complained of, unless the bishop considers it fair and proportionate to extend that period

5. Our Commitment

There should be no difference in the principles that apply to the approach between those who are ordained (known as clergy, ministers, vicars, priests, Oversight Ministers or formally as a Clerk in Holy Orders), Readers and other licensed, authorised and commissioned lay ministers. Nonetheless, this policy and its procedures relate to those who are ordained members of clergy who have been given a license or authorisation by the Bishop of Sheffield. If your complaint does not relate to an ordained member of the clergy of the Diocese of Sheffield there are other policies available [here](#).

If you are not sure which policy to use please contact us for confidential advice. The best person to contact is one of either: the Diocesan Secretary, the Bishop's Chaplain, HR Manager, the Archdeacon of Sheffield and Rotherham, or the Archdeacon of Doncaster. Contact details can be found at <https://www.sheffield.anglican.org/our-diocese/who-we-are/our-team/>

We are committed to ensuring that:

- The process should be fair, transparent, and just
- Help and support should be offered to those making the complaint and those subject to the complaint
- Confidentiality will be respected
- Where it is appropriate, the possibility of reconciliation should be explored

- There should be the possibility of correcting any errors that resulted in the complaint being made
- Wherever possible the aim is to resolve complaints locally rather than centrally and informally rather than formally

6. What is a complaint?

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about the action or in-action of a Clerk in Holy Orders.

7. Who can make a complaint?

Complaints can be brought by any person or organisation about the conduct, actions, or in-action of a Clerk in Holy Orders. A complaint can be received by email, or in writing (via letter – not via social media), verbally, or by phone.

8. An allegation of misconduct under the Clergy Discipline Measure (CDM)

Please note that this document is the, 'Diocese of Sheffield Complaint and Procedures' policy. The process set out in this document is an internal process that is rigorous, thorough and fair. It is possible to undertake a formal allegation against clergy under the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003 a description of which can be found at <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/legal-resources/clergy-discipline> . This is a legal process that can be undertaken after the procedures laid out in this document, or instead of the procedures outlined here.

Informal Process:

When responding to complaints, the aim is always to enable the complaint to be resolved informally, speedily and fairly by discussion, problem-solving, mediation and negotiation where this is appropriate. Problems should therefore be brought directly to the Clerk in Holy Orders responsible for the area of dissatisfaction or disquiet, with the goal of resolving them in this way. The minister who is responsible should be willing to listen, to discuss the matter with the complainant, and to seek to satisfy the concerns, where justified. Formal records will not be kept of informal complaints which are resolved in this manner, but ministers are expected to note and implement learning points as part of their continuous improvement and to communicate them during their Ministerial Development Review where appropriate.

If the person with the complaint is not satisfied with the outcome at the problem-solving stage, they may then invoke the formal procedure set out below.

Formal Process for complaints against Clergy:

Stage 1:

1. A complaint should be submitted to the Bishop's Chaplain, or in the case of a complaint against the Bishop's Chaplain or a complaint against an Archdeacon or Suffragan Bishop then the complaint should be referred straight to the Diocesan Bishop. If the complaint is against the Diocesan Bishop it should be referred to the Chair of the Board of Finance.
2. A record of the complaint shall be kept, including the name and contact details of the complainant, the date the complaint was made, the nature of the complaint and the complainants desired outcome.
3. The complaint will be acknowledged as soon as possible, usually within one working week (5 working days) and a copy of this procedure will be supplied. This acknowledgement will set out the time frame for when a substantive response will be made. This will usually be within one calendar month.
4. On receiving the complaint, the Bishop's Chaplain/Diocesan Bishop will decide the best person to respond to the complaint. Where the complaint is received by the Bishop's Chaplain, he or she should consult the Diocesan Bishop. The appropriate person to respond will ordinarily be the relevant Archdeacon.
5. The person investigating the complaint will ensure that all appropriate enquiries are made to establish the substance of the complaint, including collecting information regarding any previous attempt to resolve the matter informally. This will also usually include a written account of the details of the complaint which is to be provided by the complainant. Following this there may be discussions or meetings with the complainant to fully understand the issue and be clear on what would constitute a resolution for the complainant. The complainant may be accompanied at any meeting by a friend or supporter if they wish. Any person who is subject of a complaint (respondent) may also be accompanied by a colleague or trade union representative at any meeting to discuss the facts of the complaint and their response to it.
6. The person investigating the complaint may then arrange appropriate mediation between the complainant and respondent and any subsequent actions, which may include an apology and/or commencing disciplinary proceedings in accordance with the Clergy Discipline Measure.
7. The person responding to the complaint will then inform the complainant, the respondent, and the Bishop of Sheffield of the action taken to investigate, the conclusions, any action taken as a result, if the complaint was or was not upheld and the reasons why. This should be done in writing by the date stated in the initial acknowledgement. Any delay should be communicated to those involved as soon as possible, along with the reason for the delay and a revised due date.
8. The response may include one or more of the following:

- a. An explanation of events
- b. A recognition that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- c. An explanation of the steps that have been taken to try to ensure that it will not happen again, if appropriate.
- d. An undertaking to review policies in light of the complaint
- e. An explanation, with reasons, that there was insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, with the result that the complaint has not been upheld
- f. An explanation, with reasons, that the evidence did not substantiate the complaint, with the result that the complaint has not been upheld
- g. An acknowledgement that the complaint was substantiated in part, with a brief description of the remedial and preventative action being taken and reasons why the remainder of the complaint was not substantiated
- h. An acknowledgement that the complaint was substantiated in full, with a brief description of the remedial and preventative action being taken.

It should not include any details of any disciplinary or other action, procedures or outcomes against a member of clergy. If necessary, the response should state that following investigation, further confidential procedures are being followed.

None of the above will constitute an admission of negligence or an acceptance of liability on the part of the Sheffield Diocesan Board of Finance or the Bishop.

A full record of the investigation will be kept and given to the Bishop's Chaplain to keep with the initial complaint. This should include the original complaint, a note detailing how the complaint was investigated including reference to any documents reviewed, a written record of any interview undertaken, the conclusions of the investigation and any action taken.

Stage 2:

It is hoped that an acceptable resolution can be found and that the complaint is concluded to the satisfaction of all interested parties at the end of Stage 1 of the process. Should this not be the case, the Clergy Discipline Measure may be invoked. In this case the original complainant should be informed of the process, the first step of which is to submit the details of the complaint in writing to the Bishop of Sheffield. More information can be found at <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/legal-resources/clergy-discipline>

9. Complaints Process

For clarity, there are a number of processes for *clergy* within the Diocese of Sheffield, depending on whether they are an office holder, an employee with the SDBF or a licensed individual (for those who are not ordained there is a distinct complaint policy). The below outlines which remit each of these scenarios may fall under:

My complaint is against:	How to bring a formal complaint:
An SDBF clergy employee	Depending on the nature of complaint, raise this with the Bishops Office. The Bishops Office will then allocate the case to the HR Manager at the SDBF to investigate as part of internal processes e.g. SDBF Complaints Policy, SDBF Disciplinary Policy etc.
A member of the clergy	This policy is the one that applies and should be followed. It is possible, once this process has been undertaken, to escalate further and make an allegation of misconduct under the <i>Clergy Discipline Measure</i> .
A licensed reader or licensed lay minister	See page 6 of https://www.sheffield.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Reader-Good-Practice-2024-version-PMR-rev.pdf

10. Unreasonable and Vexatious Complaints

If the person receiving or investigating the complaint considers it to be vexatious, frivolous, a repeat of a previous complaint or otherwise unreasonable, they may notify the complainant and, if relevant, the person who received the complaint, that the complaint will not be investigated or that the investigation will be terminated. This outcome will then be recorded with the details of the complaint.

If the complainant is dissatisfied with this decision, they may write to the Diocesan Secretary to ask for the decision to be reviewed. If the decision is made that the complaint should be investigated, a person shall be appointed to investigate who was not previously involved in the decision that the complaint was unreasonable.

If unreasonable behaviour from the complainant continues, the Diocesan Secretary may write to the complainant to ask them to desist. For complainants who excessively contact the diocese, causing significant levels of disruption, the Diocesan Secretary may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. Any such plan would usually be reviewed after 6 months.

11. Dignity in Ministry & At Work

The Diocese of Sheffield has a separate policy for Dignity in Ministry and at Work, applicable to all PCC's/Church's within the Diocese. Should you not feel comfortable raising a complaint via our formal routes, you may wish to speak with our Anti-Harassment Advisors (AHA) in the first instance. These are voluntary roles who are trained professionals across the Diocese who can arrange a conversation with you, offer support and provide reassurance on next steps should you require this.

(NOTE: SDBF employees who have a complaint about an SDBF clergy employee should refer to the HR Manager in the first instance. The SDBF also has a separate policy for Dignity at Work.)

12. Safeguarding

If you believe that the matter you are concerned about is a safeguarding concern – that is that you have a concern about a child or at-risk adult who you believe may be at risk of harm - please see the Diocesan Safeguarding Page <https://www.sheffield.anglican.org/support/safeguarding/>. If you are not sure if the matter involves safeguarding or not you should contact the Diocesan Safeguarding team. If anyone is at immediate risk of harm, then you should contact the police.

13. Confidentiality

The Diocese of Sheffield will treat all matters made under this policy and its accompanying procedure as confidential, recognising that if safeguarding issues arise there may be occasions where confidentiality has to be breached.

All complaint information will be handled sensitively and shared only with those who need to know. Maintaining confidentiality is essential and security of data relating to individuals will be protected in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the diocesan data protection policies. No confidential information relating to complaints will be disclosed to any third party unless the SDBF has the individual's consent or some other lawful authority.

Find out more

SDBF Disciplinary Policy and Procedure

SDBF Complaints Policy and Procedure

Code of Conduct for Clergy

Dignity in Ministry & at Work Policy

14. Appendices

How might the situation be swiftly resolved with no need of a formal process?
 Asking the complainant what outcome they would like may result in a simple resolution, for example

- It may be that it was simply necessary to flag an issue - 'get it off their chest' - no further action
- It may be that a verbal/written apology is the outcome - and the respondent may be happy to give this
- The complainant may want a simple action to be taken to correct the issue, e.g., the church grass is mowed
- The complainant may just want the bishop to know - no further action
- The respondent may be willing to reflect on the issue and agree that they will do all they can to ensure that a situation like this does not happen again.

A complaint is made or report of an incident

Within 48 hours the complaint should be acknowledged. Following this there will be full and clear guidance (including being sent the relevant policy) within 5 working days

If the issue cannot be quickly resolved with an informal process the formal process will be adopted.

Please note that if the complaint is against the diocesan bishop care must be taken to ensure the proper process. It should be referred to the Chair of the Board of Finance who will inform the Archbishop of York

Does the complaint or issue raised involve some aspect of Safeguarding concern?

not sure

The Diocesan Safeguarding Team will be informed, who will share the information with the bishops

Safeguarding Team will collaborate with the person who received the report to assess and decide if it does reach threshold

Has the Safeguarding team decided that this reaches the threshold of a Safeguarding concern?

Yes

The safeguarding team will follow the correct process as described in Canon C30

The bishop will be informed - it may be necessary, depending on severity, to suspend pending investigation.

Is this issue about a lay person or an ordained person (if not sure, please ask to ascertain)

Ordnained Person

The complaint will follow either the 'Diocese of Sheffield Process and Policy for those who are Ordained' or/and the Clergy Discipline Measure

Archdeacon or Bishop's Chaplain takes the lead on the process described in the 'Diocese of Sheffield Process and Policy for those who are Ordained', or chooses to delegate. The Archdeacon etc. could progress straight to CDM

If the complainant does not feel the issue has been resolved following the Diocese of Sheffield Complaint Policy and Procedure for those who Ordained they can make a CDM allegation. This begins a legal process

Lay Person

Does the person have a lay license or some sort of authorisation (if not sure please ask to ascertain)

Yes

The oversight minister (incumbent of the relevant parish) should seek to resolve the complaint informally. If this is not possible...

Director of Mission and Ministry takes the lead on the investigation or chooses to delegate. This will be as per the process described in the Lay Ministry Good Practice Guide.

Are they employed by the Diocesan Board of Finance?

Yes

The Diocese of Sheffield Executive Assistant will be informed and will allocate the appropriate person to investigate under the Diocese of Sheffield Complaints Policy and Procedure for those who are Employees

Refer to other appropriate agency (typically the PCC who will investigate the complaint using their own complaint policy, etc)

No

No

No

No

No

No

No

No

No

No

No

No

No

No

No