

## **Wilton Community Church Complaints Policy**

### **1. What counts as a complaint and a grievance?**

A complaint is a written or verbal expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet about an action, or lack of action by a person acting on behalf of the church, or about the policies and procedures of Wilton Community Church ("the Church").

1.1 When the complaint is made by someone who is deployed within the church, whether paid (for instance, paid pastors and administrators) or holding unremunerated office, it is usually referred to as a grievance.

1.2 A complaint or a grievance may include an allegation that a person has behaved in an unacceptable way.

### **2. Purpose and Scope**

2.1 There may be occasions, where the actions of the Church, unintentionally do not meet the expectations of the public, members, service users or partners. This procedure is therefore designed to ensure appropriate consideration is given to each complaint in a way that is as fair and impartial as possible.

2.2 The Church aims to handle all complaints fairly and honestly regardless of who makes a complaint. The Church treats all members of the community equitably and will not show bias to any particular individual or group. Information can be made available in alternative formats on request. This procedure is designed to ensure proper consideration is given to each complaint in a way that is as fair and impartial as possible.

2.3 The Church will endeavour to follow best practice for confidentiality and data protection throughout the complaints procedure, and this would also be expected of any complainant.

### **3. Complaints Procedure**

3.1 The Church's desired method of dealing with conflict or disagreements is through a Biblical process. This informal process is based on Matthew 18:15-17, "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established'. And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church." Problems should therefore first be brought direct to the person(s) deemed responsible for the area of dissatisfaction or disquiet, and will hopefully be resolved in this way.

3.2 If a resolution is not obtained, many complaints can be resolved informally by discussing the issue with a member of the Church Council Leadership.

3.3 If, however, a complaint or grievance relates to or includes an allegation that a child or adult who may be vulnerable has been harmed or is at risk of harm, or that an adult or

another child may have caused harm to a child or adult who may be vulnerable, local police may be brought in for the handling of allegations of abuse.

3.4 If, after discussing any concerns with someone from the Church Council, the complainant remains dissatisfied he or she can make a formal complaint. Matthew 18:17 states that anything not resolved informally should be taken to the church. Formal complaints must therefore be made writing by letter or email to one of the Pastors.

3.5 In order to avoid ambiguity, the complainant should make it clear at this stage that they wish it to be taken as a formal complaint by stating so clearly in the first line of the letter or email.

#### **Suggested Format**

In order to make the complaint clear and coherent, below is a suggested format: Begin your letter or email by stating "I am writing to make a formal complaint. This complaint is regarding..." and then detail your specific concern. Detail the incident or series of events that give context to the complaint, with dates.

Explain what actions you have taken to attempt to resolve this complaint (if any) prior to this formal communication. Indicate the outcome you are seeking (however, complainants should note that the outcome may be different from the one sought).

3.6 If complaints or comments are received that do not meet the criteria outlined above, or are not intended to be formal complaints, the Church retains the right to deal with those comments via its formal process if deemed appropriate.

### **4. Timeframes & Process**

The process should be as follows:

4.1 The relevant Pastor will send a written initial acknowledgement to the complainant within 10 working days of written receipt of the complaint.

4.2 The conduct a face to face interview with the complainant, to be followed up by any written evidence where appropriate.

4.3 The Pastor will then gather relevant information and evidence from other sources, including face to face interviews with the person or the leader of the project that the complaint is specifically regarding, and any potential witnesses.

4.4 There will then be further opportunity for the Pastor to go back to the complainant for more information or clarification where appropriate.

4.5 During all meetings, both parties are to have an appropriate representative of their choice present to ensure accountability. The Pastor may have a member of the Council to

accompany them and the complainant may have a friend or a family member to accompany them. Minutes of each meeting must be agreed afterwards by both parties.

4.6 The Pastor will aim to send a full response to the complainant within 30 working days of receiving the complaint. However, in some circumstances, for instance where the issues are particularly complex or where it is a particularly busy period of the year, then the response may take longer

## **5. Appeals**

5.1 If the complainant is unhappy with the initial decision, the complainant may lodge an appeal against the decision or outcome to the Church Council. In this instance, the Church Council will undertake an independent process following similar timescales as described above. They will write to the complainant and to the relevant Pastor within 10 working days of the appeal, and will aim to send a full response to the complainant and the Pastor within 30 working days.

April 2018