



The United Reformed Church (Northern Province) Trust Limited

Registered Charity 1132154 (England) : Company 134549 (England) : Limited by guarantee

Complaints Policy

The United Reformed Church (Northern Province) Trust Limited 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 publicise the existence of our complaints procedure so that people know how to contact us to make a complaint
- to make sure everyone at the Trust knows what to do if a complaint is received
- to make sure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way
- 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.

Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect of the Trust.

Where Complaints Come From

Complaints may come from:

- directors
- Synod officers or members
- denominational or local church officers or members
- members of the public

A complaint can be received verbally, by phone, by email or in writing.

This policy does not cover complaints *from staff*, who should use the Trust's Discipline and Grievance policies.

This policy also does not cover complaints *about ministers*, which should be made to the Synod Moderator or the General Secretary of the United Reformed Church under the Ministerial Disciplinary Process:

www.urc.org.uk/images/the_manual/O-Disciplinary-Process-June-2015.pdf

This policy also does not cover complaints *about the United Reformed Church Northern Synod*, except to the extent that they relate to actions of Directors or employees of the Trust.

Although the Trust does not generally deal with children, young people or vulnerable adults, it is planned to adopt a safeguarding policy, which would have its own procedures.

Confidentiality

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 directors.

Review

This policy is reviewed regularly and updated as required.

Adopted on: 14 April 2016

Last reviewed: 14 April 2016

This policy and the procedure which follows are based on a model produced by the Good Governance Hub www.governancecode.org.



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Complaints Procedure

Publicised Contact Details for Complaints

Written complaints may be sent to the United Reformed Church (Northern Province) Trust Limited at **4 College Lane, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 8JJ** or by email at office@urc-northersynod.org.

Verbal complaints may be made by phone to **0191-232 1168** or in person to any of the Trust's staff, volunteers or trustees at the address above or at any of our events 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.

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

- write down the facts of the complaint
- take the complainant's name, address and telephone number
- note down the relationship of the complainant to the Trust (for example: director, church member, member of the public)
- tell the complainant that we have a complaints procedure
- tell the complainant what will happen next and how long it will take
- 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 Trust Secretary within one week.

On receiving the complaint, Trust Secretary records it in the complaints log. If it has not already been resolved, they delegate an appropriate person to investigate it and to take appropriate action.

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

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

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 Board level. At this stage, the complaint will be passed to the Trust Chair.

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

The Trust Chair may investigate the facts of the case themselves or delegate a suitably senior person to do so. This may involve reviewing the paperwork of the case and speaking with the person who dealt with the complaint at Stage One.

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 at this stage is final, unless the Board decides 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: www.charitycommission.gov.uk/publications/cc47.aspx.

Variation of the Complaints Procedure

The Board 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.

Monitoring and Learning from Complaints

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

Appendix 1 – Practical Guidance for Handling Verbal Complaints

- Remain calm and respectful throughout the conversation
- Listen – allow the person to talk about the complaint 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 complaint before any personal details
- Ask for clarification wherever necessary
- Show that you have understood the complaint 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 complaint itself or making any admission of fault on behalf of the organisation, eg, "I understand that this situation is frustrating for you"
- If you feel that an apology is deserved for something that was the responsibility of your organisation, then apologise
- Ask the person what they would like done to resolve the issue
- 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



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Appendix 2 – Complaints Handling Form

| | |
|---|--|
| Date complaint received | |
| Name of person initially receiving complaint | |
| Name of complainant | |
| Complainant's relationship to the Trust | |
| Contact details for complainant | |
| Details of complaint (continue on another sheet if necessary) | |

| | |
|--|--|
| Details of any apology given | |
| Details of resolution requested by complainant | |
| Details of any promises made re: resolution and timescales | |
| Complainant informed of procedure? | |
| Any other relevant details | |
| Date complaint passed to Trust Secretary | |

See overleaf for formal procedure

| | |
|---|--|
| <u>Stage One</u> | |
| If not resolved, person appointed to investigate complaint | |
| Date Trust Secretary informed complainant of procedure | |
| Conclusion of investigation | |
| Action taken | |
| Date Trust Secretary informed complainant of investigation, conclusion and any action taken | |
| <u>Stage Two</u> | |
| Date complainant requested Board level review | |
| Date Trust Chair acknowledged complainant's request | |
| Person appointed to review complaint | |
| Conclusion of review | |
| Action taken | |
| Date Trust Chair informed complainant of investigation, conclusion and any action taken | |