THE PARISH OF
ST WILFRID
HARROGATE

Disagreeing Well

Policy for promoting good relations and handling complaints

Introduction

Disagreements and arguments occur - even in the best of families. It's a natural part of life. Most of the time, heated words are quickly forgotten, and relationships restored.

Disagreements and arguments are not bad in themselves. They often help us come to a better position or understanding. We have to face truths or realities – the nature of which we might not otherwise be prepared to hear or see.

Simply 'sweeping things under the carpet' or 'trying to keep everyone happy' can often have a destructive or negative effect. If we do nothing, we find that resentments simmer. Then emotional outbursts cross the line of what we would normally consider 'reasonable' behaviour.

This document sets out what we believe is reasonable or unreasonable behaviour as a Christian family and church. It provides a clear procedure for dealing with any complaints.

It should go without saying that, as a church we should hold ourselves, and each other, to account. We should strive to achieve high standards of behaviour, courtesy and mutual respect.

We should provide for an environment in which everyone can feel safe, where everyone can voice his or her views (even with passion at times) and be heard - without the fear of prejudice or intimidation.

Our commitment is as follows:

- To treat each other with the highest degree of courtesy and respect and to remember the adage: 'good manners cost nothing'.
- Even when we disagree with each other - any discussion or argument should be kept open, honest and factual. We should never resort to personal attacks.
- Whilst we recognise that we are called to love each other, there may be times when we don't like each other. Physical or verbal aggression, deliberate unwarranted rudeness, bullying, sexism, racism or deliberate character assassination/s are not acceptable forms of behaviour at St Wilfrid's.

We will deal with both informal and formal complaints within a reasonable procedure in which strong encouragement will be given to individuals to:

- Seek open and honest dialogue and resolution with each other; and
- A realistic understanding of where and why things have gone wrong; and
- Humility in seeking forgiveness; and
- A procedure to ensure that, in the event of any escalation in bad behaviour, there is provision for the use of censure only as a last resort.

The complaints procedure

A formal letter or notice of complaint should be addressed to either:

- A church warden; or
- The Team Rector

The person to whom the complaint is addressed (hereinafter referred to as "the adjudicator") may ask to refer the determination of the complaint to another adjudicator.

The adjudicator must satisfy themself that the complaint is justified – and not frivolous/vexatious, inconsequential or a 'moan'. If the latter, whilst listening to the complainant, it can be very positive at that point to make it clear that there are no real grounds to progress the complaint.

The adjudicator may be justified in asking the complainant to reflect on his/her own motives for making the complaint. It may be that he/she comes to recognise that their concerns are not justified.

If the adjudicator is satisfied that there is, at the very least, a *prima facie* justifiable complaint, then the following procedure should be followed for complaints against:

- members of staff; and
- officer holders or PCC/congregational members:

Informal Dispute Resolution ("IDR")

The complainant should be encouraged to meet with and talk through their complaint with the person against whom the complaint has been made. Whilst we recognise that this can be a daunting prospect, it is nevertheless important, particularly if they have not spoken to one another before a complaint has been made.

There may be those very serious cases where IDR is not appropriate; in those cases, external organisations may, or should be, involved.

Formal complaints procedure

If the persons concerned cannot resolve the issues between themselves, then the formal complaints procedure must be followed:

1. The adjudicator nominated to deal with the complaint must request statements from both parties.
2. S/He should then assess the evidence; seek clarification from any party and may also ask for any further evidence of the complaint or response (e.g. any documents/ statements in support of either or both parties).
3. The adjudicator may then either uphold or dismiss the complaint.
4. The adjudicator will write to both parties setting out the reasons for his decision and any subsequent action to be taken.

Right of appeal

Either party has a right of appeal to another adjudicator, who must be independent of the initial complaint. S/He will review the evidence before the original adjudicator. S/He may ask for further evidence. S/He will either uphold or dismiss the appeal.

Judgements against members of staff:

The adjudicator may:

- Ask the member of staff to apologise to the complainant either orally or in writing; and/or
- Draft the terms of an arrangement in which contact between the parties is supervised.

In the event that the adjudicator concludes that the complaint is of a significantly serious nature, he may issue a recommendation to the member of staff's line manager that a:

- Verbal warning is issued to the member of staff; or
- Written warning is issued to the member of staff; or
- Final written warning is issued to the member of staff.

The nature of the recommendation will depend on the adjudicator's assessment of the seriousness of the complaint.

In the most serious cases, the adjudicator may conclude that the complaint merits dismissal. If this is the case, the adjudicator must satisfy the member of staff's line manager and the Team Rector (if he is not the line manager) that the complaint merits dismissal. This is a matter of last resort and only in those cases where the complaint and subsequent action can be legally justified.

Judgements against officer holders and PCC/congregation members:

The adjudicator may:

- Ask the officer holder or PCC/congregational member to apologise to the complainant either orally or in writing.
- Draft the terms of an arrangement in which contact between the parties is supervised.

In the event that the adjudicator concludes that the complaint is of a significantly serious nature, s/he may recommend to the Team Rector one of the following:

- Formal suspension or dismissal from his/her duties – for those office holders/members whose appointment is at the discretion of the Team Rector.
- Pass a motion of censure of the office holder/member at a PCC meeting.
- Suspend the office holder from the office or PCC where legally permissible.
- Pass a vote of 'no confidence' in the office holder/member. This would place a moral obligation on that person to resign from his/her office.
- Invocation of any higher disciplinary procedure to remove the person from his/her office.
- Invocation of any formal or informal legal process designed to limit, prohibit or restrict contact, attendance or influence of the office holder/member.

For members of the clergy falling outside the IDR procedure, the clergy discipline procedure may be invoked.

In all cases, the adjudicator must be satisfied that the complaint is serious and justified. There must be due regard to all the evidence in support of the course of action chosen. All the relevant documentation must be retained throughout the complaints procedure.

Other matters:

Any complaint must be made within three months of the complainant's date of knowledge. We will not generally investigate anonymous complaints.

We will not accept complaints made by a third party (save for parents/carers) unless:

i. he/she is a direct witness; and
ii. the complainant agrees to his/her complaint being made on his/her behalf.

We will not accept complaints that are broadly or substantively the same as an earlier complaint made under this procedure.

We will not progress those complaints that we determine to be frivolous, malicious or vexatious.
Where the adjudicator determines that a complainant is serially repetitious, malicious or vexatious, s/he may:

i. Issue a notice to 'cease and desist'; and/or
ii. Impose one of the penalties referred to above; and/or
iii. Instigate a complaint against the person concerned.

Approved by the PCC:	19th June 2025
Review date:	May/June 2026
Signed: PCC Chairman	
Signed: PCC Secretary	