DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

Safeguarding Service Complaints Policy

Responsible officer	Head of Safeguarding
Date first approved by Trustees	14 December 2022
First Review date	7 December 2023
Approved by Trustees	13 December 2023
Next review date	June 2028
Author	M Anderson

Detail of specific reviews and key changes made:

Reviewer (s)	Date	Review Actions	Approved by Board
Meriel Anderson	March 2025	Numerous amendments to align policy more closely to Diocesan complaints policy.	March 2025
R Anderson	August 2025	Layout revised at request of Trustees	September 2025
I Colling	June 2026	Reference to Canon and statutory laws removed.	June 2026

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

1. **Purpose**

   To describe the policy for the management of complaints about the safeguarding service.

2. **Scope**

   This Policy covers complaints about how the Diocesan Safeguarding Service has carried out all aspects of its work.

3. **Policy Statement**

   All complaints concerning the work of the Safeguarding Service will be dealt with efficiently and with regard to Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency Policies and Procedures and the policies and Procedures of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle.

4. **Attachments**

5. **Other relevant policies/procedures/documents**

   - RC Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle Safeguarding Service Complaints Procedure

Safeguarding Service Complaints Procedure

Responsible officer	Head of Safeguarding
Date first approved by Trustees	14 December 2022
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Rose Anderson	August 2025	Layout revised at request of Trustees	

1. **Purpose**

   To describe the procedure for the management of complaints about the safeguarding service.

2. **Scope**

   This procedure covers the management of complaints about how the Diocesan Safeguarding Service has carried out all aspects of its work.

3. **Procedure**

   a. This Procedure is underpinned by the Diocesan Values of: Trust, Service, Respect, Integrity and Compassion and is intended to be consistent with the relevant provisions of the Code of Canon Law (1983).

   b. The Diocese will aim to address complaints as quickly and efficiently as possible in a personalised, fair, transparent way, respecting confidentiality insofar as it is able. All complaint information will be handled sensitively, telling only those who need to know, and following any relevant data protection requirements.

   c. How to complain;

   i. Complaints about an employee or a volunteer of the Diocese in relation to safeguarding service should be addressed to:

   Chief Operating Officer
   Diocese of
   Hexham and
   Newcastle
   St Cuthbert's
   House
   West Road
   Newcastle upon
   Tyne NE15 7PY

   Email: chiefoperatingofficer@diocesehn.org.uk

   ii. Complaints relating to a Trustee or Non-Trustee Members of the Safeguarding Committe should be addressed to the Bishop:

   Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle
   Bishop's House
   St Aidan's
   Coach Lane
   Benton
   Newcastle upon Tyne
   NE12 8AD

   Email: bishop@diocesehn.org.uk

d. Resolving Complaints Informally

In the first instance, the complainant should contact the person with whom the complaint is associated. If this does not achieve the desired outcome, the complainant may contact the person's line manager who would also try to deal with the complaint informally.

e. Resolving Complaints Formally

The Diocese anticipates that the informal approach will be the appropriate response in most instances. If, however, an informal approach does not resolve the matter, or is not an appropriate course of action, the complainant should follow the formal process.

At all stages of the Safeguarding Service Complaints Process, complainants are advised to include as much information as possible about what happened, when, where, who was involved, what the outcome was and what they would like the person they are contacting to do.

Stages of the Formal Complaints Process.

Stage 1

i. The Vicar General, Chief Operating Officer, Bishop or Bishop's Appointee will appoint an appropriate person(s) as Investigating Officer(s). The Investigating Officer's role will be to establish the facts relevant to the complaint, carry out a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint, and prepare a report for the Vicar General, Chief Operating Officer, Bishop or Bishop's Appointee which presents findings, conclusions and recommendations.

ii. A further communication will be sent to the complainant within 10 working days of the acknowledgement of receipt, by the Vicar General, Chief Operating Officer, Bishop or Bishop's Appointee. This contact will assure the complainant that their complaint will be taken seriously; who is dealing with the complaint; and when the Investigating Officer will be in contact with the complainant.

iii. The Investigating Officer will contact the complainant to assure them that they will be listened to, and to establish how the investigation will proceed, including that they will be provided with updates on the process as it is underway. The complainant will be given a copy of the Diocesan Privacy Notice and informed that their identity and the detail of the complaint will be shared with the subject(s) of the complaint. When the Investigating Officer meets with the complainant, it will be to clarify matters such as the nature of the complaint and to establish what the complainant considers would put things right. A full written record will be made of the discussion or meeting. A copy of the record will be provided to the complainant to allow them to confirm accuracy.

iv. If the complaint relates to a specific person(s), the Diocese will share details of the complaint with this person(s) and will disclose the name of the complainant. The person against whom the complaint is being made will be kept informed of the progress of the investigation and they will

be given an opportunity to respond. A copy of the notes of the meeting at which the details were shared will be provided to the person against whom the complaint has been made to allow them to confirm accuracy.

v. If at any point the complainant's expectations are considered to be excessive, they will be informed of this and the reasons why.

vi. After an investigation has taken place, the Investigating Officer will prepare a report in which they will highlight their findings, conclusions and recommendations. On receipt of the Investigating Officer's Report, the Vicar General, Chief Operating Officer, Bishop, or Bishop's Appointee will agree with the Investigating Officer the content of a letter which will be sent to the complainant, ideally within 35 working days of the Investigating Officer agreeing with the complainant the detail of the complaint. If this is not possible because, for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, an update should be sent to the complainant by the Investigating Officer with an indication of when a full response will be given.

vii. Whether the complaint is upheld or not, the reply to the complainant from the Vicar General, Chief Operating Officer, Bishop or Bishop's Appointee should describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions and recommendations from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint. The reply should advise the complainant that they can refer their complaint to the Charity Commission at any stage, noting that the Charity Commission expects complaints to be made to the Diocese in the first instance, or for there to be a reason why this could not be done.

f. Stage 2 - Appeal

i. If the complainant remains dissatisfied at the end of Stage 1, their complaint may be progressed to Stage 2 which is an Appeal to the Board. Such an Appeal will only be considered if the Vicar General, Chief Operating Officer, Bishop or Bishop's Appointee determines that either new and compelling information relating to the original complaint has come to light, or that the Stage 1 investigation process has not been appropriately applied.

ii. The request for an Appeal will be acknowledged by the Vicar General or Chief Operating Officer within 5 working days of receiving it.

iii. If the request for an Appeal is agreed, the Bishop or the Bishop's Appointee will advise the complainant accordingly within 10 working days of the request for the Appeal being acknowledged. The complainant will be advised who will be investigating the Appeal.

iv. The person about whom the Stage 2 Appeal is being invoked will be informed and given a further opportunity to respond.

v. The Investigating Officer for the Stage 1 complaint will be kept informed of what is happening.
Ideally, a complainant whose request for an Appeal has been agreed should receive a definitive reply within 35 working days of the detail of the appeal being agreed with them. If this is not possible because, for example, the appeal investigation has not fully completed, an update should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given.

vi. Whether the Stage 2 Appeal is upheld or not, the reply to the complainant from the Bishop or Bishop's Appointee should describe the action taken to investigate the new and compelling information relating to the complaint, and/or whether or not the Stage 1 process was correctly followed, the conclusions and recommendations of the Appeal, and any action taken as a result.

g. Stage 3 - Referral to the Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency.

Referral to Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (CSSA) who will only investigate when the church body's complaint process has been exhausted and only investigate whether the Safeguarding Service Complaints Policy has been followed.

To make a complaint to the CSSA, please see the process at:

https://catholicsafeguarding.org.uk/contact-us-and-other-information/complaints-against-the-church/

h. Other Actions

The Bishop, Bishop's Appointee, Vicar General or Chief Operating Officer may at any stage and in exceptional cases deem it appropriate to appoint someone unconnected with the Diocese, for example an expert in a particular area, to undertake either the Stage 1 investigation into a complaint or the Stage 2 Appeal.

i. Withdrawal of a complaint

If a complainant chooses to withdraw their complaint, they will be asked to confirm this in writing.

j. Managing Multiple Complaints

Where more than one person is making the same complaint, this may be conducted by the Investigating Officer as a single investigation. Separate feedback will however be provided to each complainant.

k. Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints

The Diocese will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the organisation. However, in line with the Diocesan Values of integrity, respect, trust, service and compassion, the Diocese will not tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect Trustees, employees and volunteers from such behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

l. External Stage

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Charity Commission at any stage if they consider that the Diocese, its beneficiaries, or its assets are at serious risk of significant harm or abuse. However, the Charity Commission requires complaints to be made to the Charity in the first instance or for there to be a reason why this could not be done. Further information about the kind of

complaints the Charity Commission can involve itself in can be found on their website at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-charities

4. **Other relevant policies/procedures/documents**
   - RC Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle Safeguarding Service Complaints Policy
   - RC Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle Complaints Policy and Procedure

5. **Attachments**
   a. **Definitions**
   b. **Complaints concerning Priests, Deacons, Vicar General and Bishop**
   c. **Examples of Serial and Unreasonable Complaints**

Attachment 1 - Definitions

1.1 "The Diocese" refers to the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle including its constituent Parishes and Partnerships.
1.2 The "Board" refers to the Diocesan Board of Trustees/Directors.
1.3 "Diocesan Personnel" means Employees, Volunteers or Trustees exercising a function or delivering a service on behalf of the Diocese.
1.4 A complainant is a person or organisation making a complaint.
1.5 Safeguarding Service Complaint is a formal expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about the way in which Diocesan Personnel have acted, or failed to act in the delivery of a safeguarding service.
1.6 Serial and unreasonable complaints are those which hinder the Diocese's consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact.
1.7 Safeguarding Lead the most senior lay role in the Safeguarding Department, e.g. Safeguarding Coordinator.
1.8 Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (CSSA) an independent agency who offer assurance to the public and drive safeguarding standards in the Church.

Attachment 2 - Complaints concerning Priests, Deacons, Vicar General and Bishop

Safeguarding Service Complaints against Priests, Deacons, Vicar General and Bishop. They are not covered by this Policy and Procedure and are considered according to the provisions of Canon Law which states that informal resolution should be sought by the parties in the first instance, when that is appropriate. If the Priest or Deacon belongs to another Diocese or to a Religious Institution, the complaint may have to be passed to their Superior.

For complaints about Priests and Deacons please contact:

Vicar General
Diocese of Hexham and
Newcastle St Cuthbert's House
West Road
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE15 7PY
Email vg.north@diocesehn.org.uk
vg.south@diocesehn.org.uk

For complaints about the Vicar General please contact:

Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle
Bishop's House
St Aidan's Coach Lane
Benton
Newcastle upon Tyne NE12 8AD
Email: bishop@diocesehn.org.uk

For complaints about the Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle please contact

Archbishop of Liverpool
Archbishop's House
19 Salisbury Road
Cressington Park
Liverpool
L19 0PH
Email; archbishop.liverpool@rcaol.org.uk
Complaints may also be made to the Papal Nuncio or directly to the Dicastery for Bishops in Rome.

Attachment 3 - Examples of Serial and Unreasonable complaints.

a. These include where the complainant

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance.
- refuses to co-operate with the complaint's investigation process.
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the Safeguarding Service Complaints Policy and Procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the Safeguarding Service Complaints Policy and Procedure or with good practice.
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales.
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced.
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the Diocese's Safeguarding Service Complaints Policy and Procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed.
- seeks an unrealistic outcome, makes excessive demands on Diocesan time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- uses threats to intimidate.
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence.

- knowingly provides falsified information.
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public fora.

b. Complainants should limit their communication with the Diocese to that which relates to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed.

c. If the behaviour continues, the Vicar General or Chief Operating Officer will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unacceptable. For complainants who excessively contact the Diocese causing a significant level of disruption, methods of communication may be specified and the amount of contacts may be limited.

d. In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the Diocese will immediately inform the police and communicate its actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from any premises of the Diocese.