

# Complaints Policy and Procedure

## Values Statement

The values and ethos of the Daughters of Charity flow from the inspiration of their founders, St. Vincent de Paul and St Louise de Marillac, both of whom worked **collaboratively** with each other, out of the same deep **Christian** commitment to **serve the very poorest** people in war torn 17th century France. Both Louise and Vincent were driven by the steadfast belief that: *“Whatever you do to one of the least important of these my brothers and sisters, you do to me”* (Matt 25:40).

This same conviction and commitment to works of **charity** and **justice through genuine relationships** with people experiencing poverty, continues to inspire and energise all the work of the Daughters of Charity today.

In order to live out their mission, the Daughters of Charity have, over their 150-year history in Great Britain, developed many charitable services carried out with **respect, dignity** and **compassion**. Their service is **inclusive**, it brings together employees, volunteers, advocates and concerned citizens, of many beliefs and faiths and from many backgrounds. It is evidence that the 400-year-old Vincentian inspiration is still vibrant in Britain today.

The Daughters of Charity commit to becoming, and continuing to be a “value-driven organisation” that embeds our Vincentian values in everything we do.



Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul CIO

## **Policy Purpose**

The Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul CIO (the Charity) will view 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.

The 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 the complaints procedure so that people know how to contact the Charity to make a complaint
- To make sure everyone at the Charity knows what to do if a complaint is received
- To make sure that 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 the Charity to improve its services.

## **Definition of a complaint**

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect of the Charity. This could include administration, a staff member, process or service – resulting from the Charity's failure to meet the individual's expectations.

An individual may make a complaint if they feel the Charity has:

- Failed to provide a service or an unacceptable standard of service, made a mistake in the way the service was provided or provided an unfair service
- Failed to act in a proper way.

This policy does not cover complaints from staff about other staff. These type of complaints are covered by the Charity's Grievance Policy.

## **Concern or Complaint**

It is important to establish the difference between a concern and a complaint. Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage will reduce the likelihood of their developing into formal complaints.

If you have any concerns about the work the Charity undertakes, please tell a staff member or their manager as soon as possible, so they can quickly understand your concerns and try to put things right.

If you are not happy with the response to your concern and/or you want to make a formal complaint, please follow the procedure below.

This policy only covers complaints about the administration, staff, systems, processes or service of the Charity. If your complaint is about another organisation that works with the Charity your complaint will have to be directed to them and help will be given to ensure the correct organisation's details are provided to you.

This policy does not cover safeguarding concerns. Any safeguarding concerns raised will be covered by the Charity's Safeguarding Policy.

## **Confidentiality**

All complaint information will be handled sensitively, telling only those who need to know and following any relevant data protection requirements.

## **Complaints Procedure**

The Charity want to make it easy for you to make contact and to provide feedback or make a complaint. These are the ways you can get in touch with the Charity:

1. You can call us on 0208 906 3777 and your complaint will be documented.
2. You can email us on: [secretariat@dcmillhill.org](mailto:secretariat@dcmillhill.org).
3. You can write to us at The Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul, Provincial House, The Ridgeway, Mill Hill, London, NW7 1RE.

In all instances where a complaint is made using the above means, you will be contacted within 7 working days of receiving the complaint. If you provide the Charity with a telephone number and/or email address you will be contacted by either of those means to discuss the matter further and to officially record all necessary details. Hopefully, the matter can resolve the immediately. However, if the issue is more complex and an investigation is required, the Charity will do the following:

- The person who receives the complaint will:
  - Record full details of your complaint
  - Record the complaint in the Charity's Complaints Register
  - Note down the relationship of the complainant to The Charity.
  - Take all necessary steps to investigate the matter
  - Contact you again within 14 working days of receiving the complaint to advise you of the Charity's findings or to give you an update on progress
  - Continue to keep you informed until the matter is resolved to your satisfaction or until all appropriate steps (in the Charity's reasonable opinion) to resolve the matter have been taken
- The Charity's Business Executive Officer will handle all complaints and if necessary, will escalate them to the Trustees, depending on the complexity or seriousness of the issue.

## **Resolving Complaints**

The Charity's commitment to you is to address each complaint in a sensitive, fair, transparent, equitable, professional and unbiased manner, through this complaints-handling process.

The Charity will operate at all times from the premise that any person is entitled to express their views on the services and that those views should be taken seriously and investigated when needed.

There are three stages to the Charity's complaints procedure:

- Stage One – the complaint/investigation
- Stage Two – appeal
- Stage Three – External

## **Stage 1 – the complaint and investigation**

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 Business Executive Officer within five working days.

On receiving the complaint, if not already resolved, the Business Executive Officer will 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 further opportunity to respond.

Complaints should be acknowledged by the person handling the complaint within Seven working days. 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 14 working days. If this is not possible because for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report should be sent to the complainant 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 2 - appeal**

If the complainant feels that the problem has not been satisfactorily resolved at Stage 1, they can request that the complaint is reviewed at Trustees level.

Appeals must be submitted within 28 days of our response to the complaint.

The appeal should be specific about why the individual feels the decision made was wrong and provide the facts and information necessary to demonstrate this.

At this stage, the complaint will be passed to the Trustees. The request for Trustees level review should be acknowledged within seven working days of receiving it. The acknowledgement should say who will deal with the case and when the complainant can expect a reply.

The Trustees may investigate the facts of the case themselves or delegate a suitably senior person within the Charity to do so. This may involve reviewing the paperwork of the case and speaking with the person who dealt with the complaint at Stage 1. The person who dealt with the original complaint at Stage 1 should be kept informed of what is happening.

If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a further opportunity to respond. Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within a month. 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.

A decision will be notified within 28 days and will be final.

## **External Assistance**

If both stages have been exhausted but a satisfactory resolution hasn't been reached, the Charity may decide to seek external assistance. However, the Charity will only take this step if appropriate to do so, for example the complaint is of a serious nature or there is a valid conflict of interest.

## **Withdrawal of the Complaint**

At any time during the process, a complainant may withdraw a complaint, by notice in writing to the responsible person handling their complaint. Upon such withdrawal, consideration of the complaint will normally be discontinued, unless the consequences of not following the procedure may result in harm to the individual or the organisation.

## **Anonymous complaints**

Anonymous complaints will be recorded and any facts available looked in to. However, in doing so we will be mindful that anonymous complaints can sometimes be malicious. Everyone involved in our work, even incidentally, has a right to complain and we will hold anyone accountable but, equally, individuals have a right to be protected from unsubstantiated and, potentially, malicious allegations.

Consequently, anyone wishing to complain is strongly encouraged to provide the information requested above and his or her contact details. This will also allow us to advise him or her of the outcome and to also seek further clarification if necessary.

## **Confidentiality and Whistleblowing**

To enable a full investigation to take place, it will be necessary for complainants to provide their name and contact details. However, in some instances, a complainant may wish to remain anonymous.

The Charity will always aim to keep a whistle blower's identity confidential where asked to do so, although this cannot be guaranteed. There may be situations where the Charity will have a duty to disclose identity for example to:

- The police, fraud prevention agencies, or other law enforcement agencies (to investigate or prevent crime, including fraud)
- The courts (court proceedings)
- Relevant authorities where there are safeguarding concerns
- The Charity's part of any investigations into issues around qualification delivery
- Other third parties, e.g., Regulators

## **Data Protection**

In line with the ICO's guidance and the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025, we have a dedicated process for handling complaints relating to personal data. Anyone who believes we have not handled their personal information appropriately may raise a data protection complaint with us.

We will:

- Provide a clear and accessible way for individuals to submit data protection complaints.
- Acknowledge receipt of such complaints within 30 calendar days.
- Take appropriate steps to investigate the complaint without undue delay, including making necessary enquiries and keeping the complainant informed throughout.
- Communicate the outcome of the complaint promptly and clearly, explaining any actions taken or decisions made.

All complaints will be handled fairly, transparently, and in accordance with our obligations under the Data Protection Act. If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may escalate the matter to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

## **Artificial Intelligence**

We accept the use of AI in drafting a complaint. However, it must still comply with this policy. You should also check it for accuracy, tone and relevance before submitting it, as this will help to ensure we are able to resolve your complaint as quickly as we can. The reason we ask you to do this is that AI makes mistakes and also can make things up (called hallucinating).

We believe that individuals are entitled to challenge, appeal or seek redress for a decision made by or with the help of an AI system. We will ensure:

- Human oversight of systems that allows decisions to be reviewed and, if appropriate, overturned.
- Transparency about how decisions are made and what data was used.

## **Lengthy or repetitive submissions**

Please note that we are a charity with limited capacity and we are not lawyers. If we were to receive a complaint that in our view includes:

- An excessive volume of correspondence.
- Repetitive or irrelevant submissions or.
- Overly long or unfocused documents.

We may ask you to help us to respond to your complaint by summarising it to focus on the key facts, what you feel is unsatisfactory and what you wish us to do in response, in no more than 300 words. We will pause the complaints process pending receipt of this.

## How to Contact the Regulators

If after the Charity has been through both stages and the complainant is still not satisfied with the result, they should be advised that there is no further right of appeal with the Charity but they can approach any of the following agencies for advice:

- The Charity Commission - <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-charity>
- Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) - <https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/>

This should be done within one month of receiving the outcome from the appeal.

## Review of this Policy and Complaints Received

This policy will be reviewed by the Trustees every 2 years and all complaints received (and compliments) will be brought before the Trustees for review at regular Trustees meetings. Through this process of regular review, the Charity will aim to improve its services to you and to ensure that any lessons learned are implemented, within the Charity as soon as possible.

## Variation of the Complaints Procedure

The Trustees 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 and/or Trustee involved as a person leading a Stage 2 review.

## Policy/Procedural guideline reference information

|                                           |                            |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Policy Number                             | Gov – C01                  |
| Date approved by the Trustees             | 26 June 2024               |
| Date updated                              | 16 July 2026               |
| Next review date                          | July 2028                  |
| Responsibility for Monitoring this policy | Business Executive Officer |

Sister Theresa Tighe

Signed on behalf of the Trustees

.. Dated: 16<sup>th</sup> July 2026

## Linked Policies

Safeguarding policy  
Serious Incident Policy