Argyle Community Church
External Complaints Handling - Policy and Procedures

1. Overview

Argyle Community Church (the Church) views third party complaints (complaints from outside the organisation) 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 Church is registered as a Charity and third-party complaints will be managed by the Trustees of the Charity.

Our policy is:

- to provide a fair external complaints procedure which is clear and easy to use for anyone wishing to make a complaint.
- to publicise the existence of our external complaints procedure so that people know how to contact us to make a complaint.
- to make sure everyone at the Church knows what to do if an external complaint is received.
- to make sure all external complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way.
- to make sure that external complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are repaired; and
- to gather information which helps us to improve what we do.

2. Concern or Complaint

It is important to establish the difference between a *concern* and a *complaint*. We are committed to take informal concerns seriously and resolve these at the earliest possible stage. This will reduce the likelihood of these developing into formal complaints.

Anyone with a concern about our work should talk to a ministry leader, or one of the Elders or Trustees as soon as possible, so they can quickly understand that concern and try to put things right. If the response to the concern is unsatisfactory and/or the individual raising the concern wants to make a formal complaint, the procedures outlined in this document should be followed.

3. Definition of a Complaint

An external complaint is any significant expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect of the Church/Charity.

External complaints may come from individuals who have had contact with the Church, or any other person or organisation with an interest in the Church and its activities. An external complaint can be received verbally, by phone, by email or in writing.

4. Anonymous complaints

Complaints received anonymously will be recorded and considered, but action may be limited if further information is required to ensure a full and fair investigation.

5. Confidentiality

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

6. Responsibility

Overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation lies with the Trustees of the Charity.

7. Making a Complaint

A complaint may be made by the means set out below.

- Complaints in writing may be posted to:
  Chair of Trustees
  Argyle Community Church
  Argyle Road, Reading, RG1 7YL
- Complaints by email may be sent to:
  chairoftrustees@argylecommunity.church
- Complaints by phone may be made by calling **0118 9010503.**
- Complaints in person may be made to any of the Elders of the Church or the Trustees of the Charity.

Note that should the complaint relate to the Chair of Trustees, the Trustee Secretary (**trusteesecretary@argylecommunity.church**) can be contacted in lieu.

8. Resolving Complaints

For complaints resolution there is a four-stage process illustrated in Appendix 1.

The stages are:

Stage 1: Record and acknowledge

Stage 2: Review and Investigate

Stage 3: Inform Complainant of Outcome

Stage 4: Review Learning and Close

9. Stage 1: Record and Acknowledge

All complaints should be recorded in the Complaints Register, however they are received. All complaints should be acknowledged without prejudice.

External 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 Church/Charity (e.g. donor, mailing list, member)
- Advise the complainant that we have a complaints procedure
- Tell the complainant what will happen next

Whenever possible, 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.

If the complaint has not already been resolved, it should be reviewed and investigated by a person appointed by the Chair of Trustees.

Complaints should be acknowledged by the person handling the complaint within a week of them being aware of it. . The acknowledgement should say who is dealing with the complaint and when the person complaining can expect a reply. A copy of this Complaints Policy should be attached.

The Chair of Trustees should determine whether to notify insurers as per terms of contract.

10. Stage 2: Review and Investigate

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

The Chair may investigate the facts of the case or delegate a suitably senior person to do so.

If the complaint relates to a safeguarding matter the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) – or their deputy if appropriate - will be contacted.

If required, the Trustees will seek further external expert advice as appropriate. A log of key decisions shall be prepared by the designated person.

11. Stage 3: Inform Complainant of Outcome

If possible, 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.

If the complainant feels that the problem has not been satisfactorily resolved at Stage 3, they can request that the complaint is reviewed by the Chair of Trustees. The Chair may investigate the facts of the case or delegate a suitably senior person to do so.

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

This may involve reviewing the paperwork of the case and speaking with the person who dealt with the complaint at Stage 2.

The decision taken at this stage is final, unless the Board of Trustees decides it is appropriate to seek external assistance with resolution.

12. Stage 4: Review Learning and Close

Any lessons learned from handling the complaint will be reviewed and considered to ensure that the lessons are applied and existing procedures, policies, training are adapted to apply these lessons.

All complaints will be reviewed annually to identify any trends which may indicate a need to take further action.

13. Variation of the Complaints Procedure

The Trustees may vary this procedure if it has good reason for doing so, such as a conflict of interest. For example, if the complaint was about the Chair, it would not be appropriate for the Chair to conduct a Stage 2 investigation.

14. Complaints to a Regulator

If the complainant is still not satisfied with the outcome of this procedure, they can contact the relevant regulator. The Trustees shall retain the decision log to address the possibility that the complainant contacts the relevant regulator

Charity Commission: Information about the kind of complaints the Commission can involve itself in can be found on its website:
https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission

Information Commissioners Office (ICO): If the complaint relates to the use of the complainant's personal information the complainant may complain to the ICO. Information about the kind of complaints the ICO can involve itself in and how it deals with complaints can be found on its website (https://ico.org.uk/)

In the event a regulator receives a complaint in relation to the Charity, the Charity will co-operate with that regulator as appropriate.

15. Data protection

Personal Identifiable information will be processed according to the data protection ACT 2018 and GDPR regulations. https://www.gov.uk/data-protection

To process a complaint the Charity will hold personal data about the complainant, which the individual provides, and which other people give in response to the complaint. We will hold this data securely and only use it to address the complaint.

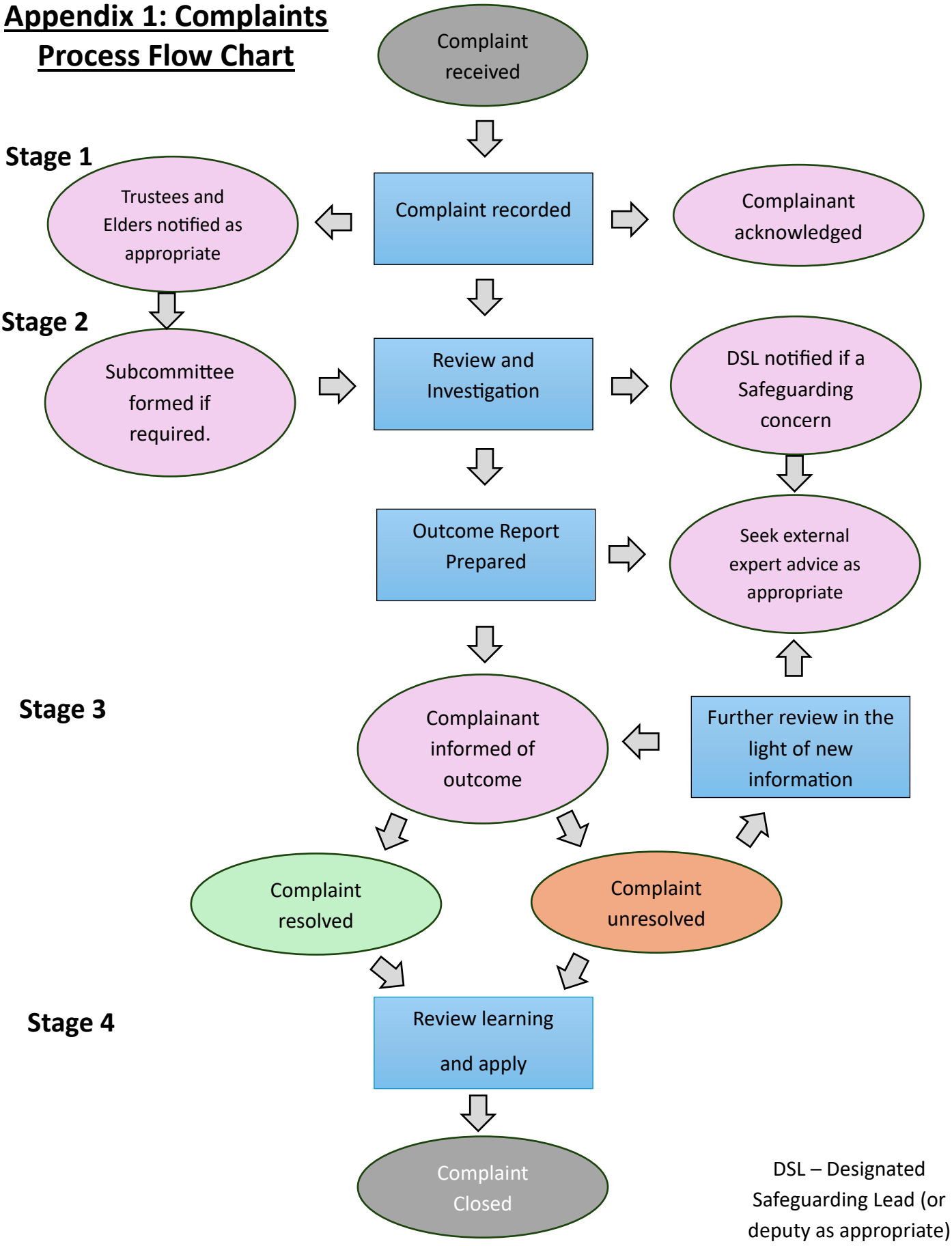
The identity of the person making the complaint will only be known to those who need to consider the complaint and will not be revealed to other people or made public. However, it may not be possible to preserve confidentiality in some circumstances, for example, where relevant legislation applied, or allegations are made which involve the conduct of third parties.

The charity will normally destroy complaints files in a secure manner six years after the complaint has been closed.

16. Policy Updates

This policy will be regularly reviewed and updated as appropriate.

Appendix 1: Complaints Process Flow Chart



DSL – Designated Safeguarding Lead (or deputy as appropriate)