Effective Date: October 2026
Review Frequency: Biennial

Complaints Policy and Procedures

1. Introduction

Countess Free Church, Ely, is committed to ensuring that complaints are addressed in a fair, transparent, and timely manner. As a church, our aim is to follow biblical principles in how we relate to one another. When something goes wrong, we work towards restoring the relationship as much as possible, recognising that both justice and mercy are important. Hearing complaints also helps us to learn from our mistakes.

The overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation rests with the Minister and the Church trustees.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all trustees, employees, and volunteers who act on behalf of the Church and may receive or handle complaints.

2.1 Important Exception:

- **Safeguarding:** This policy is not intended to deal with any issues related to the safeguarding of children or adults at risk. These must be addressed in accordance with the Church's safeguarding policies. **Please contact Helen Atkinson, Safeguarding Lead, immediately at 01353 662396.**
- **Employment Grievances:** Where an employee wishes to raise a concern regarding their employment, this should be addressed in accordance with their employment contract and standard ACAS guidelines, rather than as a general complaint under this policy.

3. Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect of church life, where the complainant wishes to receive a response. This can be about the actions or behaviour of a person or persons, an activity or group, or a service provided by the Church.

By raising a formal complaint with the Church, a complainant asks the Church to devote time and resources to properly address their concerns. A formal complaint should usually only be raised after other methods of resolution have been exhausted. Raising a formal complaint should preferably be the last step, not the first.

4. Making a Complaint

Complaints should be addressed to the Minister, the nominated person. If you wish to lodge a complaint, you can do so by sending it to the Church office at **minister@countessely.co.uk.**

If your complaint is about a minister, please raise the matter with the elders in the first instance. The elders' contact information can be obtained from the church office by emailing the administration at **admin@countessely.co.uk**. Furthermore, where a complaint relates to a minister who is also a member of staff or an individual trustee, the Church may need to conduct its investigation in accordance with its internal employment, HR, and governance policies and procedures.

When a complaint is made, the complainant must set out:

- Their name and contact details.
- The date of the incident or decision that the complaint relates to.
- The nature of the complaint and who is involved.
- The nature of the complainant's relationship with the Church.
- Whether there is any other information that the Church should be aware of.
- What steps have they taken so far to resolve the matter, if any?
- What actions or outcomes are they looking for from the Church?

5. Receipt and Initial Review

- All complaints will be logged in the Church's designated complaints record upon receipt. Complaint records will be kept securely and retained in line with the Church's data retention policy.
- The Church will formally acknowledge the complaint within 5 working days, except in exceptional circumstances.
- The trustees or nominated person will carry out an initial review to confirm that the complaint falls within the scope of this policy.
- An initial response will be provided within 14 working days of the complaint being acknowledged, outlining who will investigate the complaint and the likely time frame for a response.

6. Investigation and Resolution

A trustee or a designated person will be nominated to conduct the investigation. In all cases, the investigator must be free of conflicts of interest. No person who is the subject of a complaint will participate in investigating, managing, or deciding the outcome of that complaint.

- The investigator will gather all necessary information and work towards a satisfactory resolution of the issues raised.

- Sensitive information about the complainant will only be shared with a named individual to the extent that it is necessary to do so for the complaint to be properly investigated. The identity of the complainant will be kept confidential as far as is practically possible and will not be shared with the subject of the complaint unless legally required or strictly necessary for a fair investigation.

Depending on the nature of the complaint, the complainant will usually be notified of the steps the Church has taken to investigate, the conclusions drawn, and any actions taken as a result.

7. Appeal and Further Steps

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint or the way in which it has been handled, they should send a written appeal to the trustees or the nominated person, in this case, the minister of the church, within 28 working days of being informed of the outcome. If the appeal relates to a complaint about the minister, the written appeal should be sent directly to the elders. They will aim to notify the complainant of the appeal outcome in writing within 28 working days of receiving the appeal.

- The trustees/nominated person will identify someone external to the church membership, other than the original investigator to lead the appeal process.
- This person will review the original evidence, the investigation report, and the grounds for the appeal to assess whether the original decision was reasonable based on the available evidence.
- The appeal decision will be considered final.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the internal appeal, or if the complaint involves a serious risk of harm to the Church or the public, they may escalate their complaint to the relevant external authorities.

For churches based in England and Wales, serious concerns can be reported directly to the **Charity Commission for England and Wales**. The Charity Commission will typically only investigate if a charity is:

- Not doing what it claims to do.
- Losing significant amounts of money or assets.
- Harming people.
- Being used for personal profit or gain.
- Involved in illegal activity.

Information on how to report a serious concern can be found on their official website: **www.gov.uk/complain-about-charity**.

Please note that the Charity Commission does not investigate all types of complaints. Depending on the nature of the issue, you may need to contact a different organisation:

- **Fundraising:** Complaints regarding how you have been asked for donations or the behaviour of fundraisers should be directed to the **Fundraising Regulator**.

- **Employment:** Internal employment rights, pay, or contractual disputes are not investigated by the Charity Commission and must be resolved internally or via ACAS.
- **Criminal Activity:** If you suspect fraud or illegal activity, you should contact the police on 101 or report it to Action Fraud.

Countess Free Church, Ely

Formal Complaint Registration Form

We are committed to addressing complaints fairly, transparently, and in a timely manner. Please use this form to register a formal complaint so that we have all the necessary information to review and investigate your concerns.

Important Notice:

- **Safeguarding:** If your concern relates to the safeguarding of children or adults at risk, do not use this form. **Please contact Helen Atkinson, Safeguarding Lead, immediately on 01353 662396.**
- **Employment:** If you are an employee raising a workplace grievance, please refer to your employment contract and standard ACAS guidelines.

Section 1: Your Details

Full Name:

Contact Telephone Number:

Email Address:

Postal Address:

What is your relationship with the Church?

(e.g., Church Member, Regular Attendee, Volunteer, Member of the Public)

Section 2: Details of the Complaint

Date(s) of the incident or decision your complaint relates to:

Please describe the nature of your complaint. (Please provide as much detail as possible, including what happened, where it happened, and the names of any individuals involved regarding their actions or behaviour.) (Please use an additional page if needed)

Is there any other information that the Church should be aware of? (e.g., Witnesses to the incident, relevant context, or attached documents) **[] []**

Section 3: Resolution and Outcomes

What steps have you taken so far to resolve the matter, if any?

(e.g., Informal conversations with the individuals involved or church leaders)

What actions or outcomes are you looking for from the Church?

(e.g., An apology, a change in procedure, mediation, or a specific action)

Section 4: Submission Instructions

Please submit this completed form to our nominated person, **the Minister**, by emailing it to **minister@countessely.co.uk**.

Exceptions: If your complaint is about the minister, please direct your complaint to the elders in the first instance. You can obtain the elders' contact information from the church office.

Data Protection and Confidentiality Statement: All complaints are logged in the Church's designated complaints record upon receipt. Your records will be kept securely and retained strictly in line with the Church's data retention policy. Your identity will be kept confidential as far as is practically possible and will not be shared with the subject of the complaint unless it is legally required or strictly necessary for a fair investigation to take place.