



FREEDOM CHURCH ROMSEY COMPLAINTS POLICY

Introduction & values:

The purpose of this policy is to set out the context, mechanism and guidance for handling complaints at Freedom Church, Romsey. This policy supports the wider Human Resources processes of Freedom Church and supports the Freedom Church Safeguarding Policy. This policy should be read in conjunction with other Freedom Church Romsey Policies. If a complaint is deemed to be inappropriate to be considered through this Policy then the Whistleblowing Policy should be used instead.

The overriding principles of the Complaints Policy include;

- Freedom Church aspires to continually improve and develop as an organisation, and accepts that investigating, responding to and learning from complaints is part of this process.
- Freedom Church seeks to ensure that all complaints are listened to and, as appropriate, acted upon, regardless of who the complaint is raised by.
- A complaint is simply an “expression of dissatisfaction about any of our operations”, whether justified or not. A complaint can be received verbally, by telephone, email or by letter.
- Freedom Church seeks to provide, in this policy, a clear mechanism for making and processing complaints.
- This policy covers **General Complaints, Data Protection Complaints, Fundraising Complaints** and **Safeguarding Complaints**.
- Good judgement should be used where this policy provides space for discretion.
- Where decisions are made at the discretion of the Executive Leader, the Executive Leader should seek appropriate advice / counsel from the Trustee Board.
- Where agreement is required email trails are sufficient.
- Freedom Church has a legal responsibility to comply with relevant legislation and guidance.

GENERAL COMPLAINTS

Policy Statement:

Freedom Church Romsey is committed to the highest standards of openness, probity and accountability. The Trustee Board and the Leadership Team recognize that an effective complaints' handling management system is a proven way of maintaining and building relationships between the charity members (employees, volunteers, congregants, associates) and other individuals or bodies with whom we interact.

Effective handling of complaints demonstrates our commitment to providing the best possible service. It helps us to find out how things have gone wrong, how to put them right, and to prevent future re-occurrences.

The Leadership Team and the Trustee Board commit to:

- Ensuring that everyone is treated equally, regardless of: age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation;
- providing a fair and easily understood procedure for dealing with complaints;
- publicising / making known the existence of this policy, together with relevant contact details and procedural guides, and to ensure that all who are responsible for Charity affairs understand what needs to be done should a complaint occur;
- ensuring that complaints are investigated fairly, promptly, and are resolved satisfactorily for all parties;
- being used as a source of information for future reference and improvements in process, where appropriate.

Scope of Policy:

Overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation lies with the Trustee Board. This policy should be available for:

- All staff and trustees;
- Associated personnel whilst engaged with work or visits related to the Charity,
- Other individuals including consultants; volunteers; contractors, etc.

All complaint information will be handled sensitively and confidentially, i.e. telling only those who need to know, and with due regard to data protection requirements.

Please note that Freedom Church Romsey has an established Whistleblowing Policy which can be requested from the Freedom Church Office Team. This is for the most serious types of complaint which may be deemed to fall beyond the scope of this policy.

Procedure to follow in the event a complaint is made:

Complaints should only be made to a member of the Leadership Team or a member of the Trustee Board. If you are unsure who to contact, in the first instance, please contact:

Name: Tim Parker (Executive Leader)
Address: Freedom Centre, Unit 20, Romsey Industrial Estate, Greatbridge Road,
Romsey, SO51 0HR
Phone: 01794 450451 (or see Church Suite)
Email: tim@freedomchurch.uk

Verbal complaints should be made by phone, or in person, to a member of the Leadership Team or a member of the Trustee Board.

Telephoned or verbal complaints must be recorded in writing by the recipient, with the following details:

- Name of the person receiving the complaint;
- Name, address and contact details of the person making the complaint;
- The relationship between the complainant and the charity;
- The facts of the complaint.

The individual providing the complaint should also be encouraged to put their complaint in writing so that a record in their own words can be kept.

At this point the person making the complaint must be told:

- That we have a complaints procedure; (offer to email them a copy)
- What will happen next; and (see below)
- How long it should take to be dealt with. (see below)

Once the member of the Trustee Board or member of the Leadership Team has recorded the details of the initial complaint, ideally, the person who is subject of the complaint should respond to the complaint in collaboration with their Line Manager, if it is possible and appropriate to do so. If this is not possible or appropriate, the complaint will be dealt with by the Executive Leader (see contact details above).

Whether resolved or otherwise, the complaint should be passed to the Chair of the Trustees within one week of the complaint being raised. The Chair of Trustees must record this.

Any individual who is the subject of the complaint (but not directly responding to it) must be informed and given the opportunity to respond.

The person making the complaint must receive an acknowledgement from the person responsible for the investigation within one week, with their estimate of the likely time-frame, and with a copy of the complaints policy.

The person making the complaint should receive findings or a progress report within four weeks, detailing the action(s) taken in the investigation, any conclusion and action resulting.

DATA PROTECTION COMPLAINTS

Please also refer to the Freedom Church Privacy Policy. If you wish to complain to the charity about:

- how your personal information has been processed;
- how your complaint has been handled, or
- appeal against any decision made following a complaint.

Please address your complaints to the Data Protection Officer (DPO), or person designated to deal with data protection, as follows:

Name: Tim Parker (Executive Leader)
Address: Freedom Centre, Unit 20, Romsey Industrial Estate, Greatbridge Road,
Romsey, SO51 0HR
Phone: 01794 450451 (or see Church Suite)
Email: tim@freedomchurch.uk

The procedure for handling data protection complaints:

Complaints regarding how your personal information has been processed should be submitted to the DPO (see above), who will acknowledge receipt within ten working days.

The DPO will review and respond in writing to your complaint, within twenty working days of receipt. If a complaint is complex and we cannot send a full reply within twenty working days, we will tell you the reason why and let you know when we will be able to reply in full. If an extension is required, this will be with the agreement of both parties and up to a maximum of a further twenty-eight working days.

If you are dissatisfied with the way in which your complaint has been handled, then you may contact us, outlining your concerns, and an independent member of the Leadership Team or the Trustee Board will respond to you within ten working days, to outline the next steps.

If you remain dissatisfied, you may forward your complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office (contact details can be found on their website at: <https://ico.org.uk/concerns/handling/>).

FUNDRAISING COMPLAINTS

Fundraising complaints are defined as an expression of dissatisfaction at any aspect of the Charity's fundraising activities, including administrative practices or procedures, and acts carried out by third party suppliers.

Freedom Church Romsey is committed to being open and honest in all our dealings with our supporters. It is important that those who give us support in any way, have access to a means of making a complaint. If you have a complaint, please contact the Executive Leader:

Name: Tim Parker (Executive Leader)
Address: Freedom Centre, Unit 20, Romsey Industrial Estate, Greatbridge Road, Romsey, SO51 0HR
Phone: 01794 450451 (or see Church Suite)
Email: tim@freedomchurch.uk

If you are not satisfied with the answer received, the Fundraising Regulator will deal with all complaints that are concerned with a breach of the Institute of Fundraising's Codes of Fundraising Practice, or a breach of the Fundraising Promise, provided that the complainant has first directed the complaint to the charity concerned.

Our procedures

Telephone complaints will be logged, and every effort will be made to resolve the matter over the telephone. The complaint will be summarised at the end of a call, and if you are satisfied, that will be the end of the matter; however, the complaint will still be recorded.

All complaints, either by telephone, post or email, will be acknowledged in writing within fourteen days. We will seek to resolve the complaint within thirty working days. At this stage, further contact with you will only be made when we have insufficient details to take the complaint forward.

The Executive Leader will consult with the Senior Leader and Chair of Trustees, and any other relevant staff or third parties involved (for example: a supplier, or partner) to inform them of the situation, and gather any relevant information. The Executive Leader will take care to record all information and decision making.

Having gathered all the relevant information, we will hold an assessment meeting with the Executive Leader, Senior Leader and the staff/ third parties concerned.

The assessment meeting will set out the nature of the complaint and determine any action that needs to be taken. We will state whether the complaint is about an alleged breach of the Institute of Fundraising's Codes of Fundraising Practice, and/ or the Fundraising Promise. The Fundraising Regulator will need this information if the complaint is referred to them.

If the complaint is justified

We will write to you to apologise, and to reassure you that the complaint will be used to improve on our fundraising activities in the future, and how this will be done. We will also instigate action to prevent any recurrence of the problem.

If the complaint is not justified

We will write to you to explain that we will not be changing our fundraising practices and give clear reason(s) for our position.

We always take complaints seriously and assure you the investigation will always be as thorough as possible. Accurate records will be kept of all the investigations which have been carried out.

Extension of information gathering period

In exceptional circumstances, we may need more time than thirty days to gather all the information (for example, if a key member of staff is on annual leave or is sick). If this happens, we will contact you in writing, with a copy to the Fundraising Regulator (if appropriate), outlining the situation.

If the complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction

If you are not happy with our response, you should contact the Fundraising Regulator within two months. We, in turn, will ensure that all correspondence is recorded, and can be made available to the Fundraising Regulator if the complaint is pursued further.

If you are still dissatisfied, you can ask the Fundraising Regulator to look again at your complaint. Their decision will be made within sixty days and will be final. The charity agrees to abide by decisions made by the Fundraising Regulator Board.

Contact details for the Fundraising Regulator

Fundraising Regulator staff are available to assist and advise members of the public, charities and fundraising organisations. The contact details are as follows:

Address: 2nd floor CAN Mezzanine Building, 49-51 East Road, London, N1 6AH
Phone: 0300 999 3407
Email: enquiries@fundraisingregulator.org.uk

Contact details for the Charity Commission

The Charity Commission should be contacted where your concerns relate to:

- dishonest handling of funds;
- misapplication of charitable funds;
- actions that contravene the Charity's Governing Document or charity law; and
- actions that threaten to bring the Charity into disrepute

Address: Charity Commission Direct PO Box 1227 Liverpool L69 3UG
Email: www.charity-commission.gov.uk

SAFEGUARDING COMPLAINTS

To be read in conjunction with the Freedom Church Safeguarding Policy.

Introduction

Protecting people through fulfilling our safeguarding responsibilities is a governance priority, and Freedom Church takes all reasonable steps to protect people who come into contact with the Church in any way, from harm. We acknowledge that it can be very hard for people to make a complaint, particularly in small, local organisations. It can be particularly hard to complain about people in positions of authority such as Leaders. We need to know if there is a problem in our organisation, therefore we will actively promote our complaints procedure and try and make sure, as far as possible, that there is some level of independent oversight. For any other complaint other than safeguarding, we would ask you to refer to the relevant other section of this complaints policy.

If, at any time, you have any concerns about the behaviour of a member of staff, a volunteer, a guest or an associate in any situation, it is vital that you tell us about it immediately, so that appropriate action can be taken.

We take all concerns and complaints seriously. If we have an incident or allegation of abuse, we will handle and record it in a secure and responsible way, and in accordance with any legal and statutory obligations. We will handle information in line with the Data Protection Act.

We will respect your confidentiality and keep your complaint confidential as far as possible. Any information about the complaint will usually only be shared with those who need to know, in order to help resolve it. There may however be occasions when we cannot provide absolute confidentiality; for example, in circumstances where a child or vulnerable adult may be at risk of harm, and any relevant information will be shared with others concerned in the safety and welfare of those involved.

We will report to the police if the incident or concern involves criminal behaviour. Where necessary, we will also refer to social services and report to other agencies (i.e. send a serious incident report to the Charity Commission).

The Freedom Church Safeguarding Complaints Procedure has:

- A named person to take responsibility for complaints.
- Information on whom to contact if the complaint is against the manager/person responsible for complaints.
- How the complaints procedure will be publicised, that people know complaints will be taken seriously and whom to contact to make one
- Arrangements for complaints to be investigated
- Arrangements for people who have made a complaint to be informed of the outcome
- And what to do if they are dissatisfied with it.

Outline Procedure

The person responsible for complaints is our Safeguarding Lead:

Name: Tim Parker (Executive Leader)
Address: Freedom Centre, Unit 20, Romsey Industrial Estate, Greatbridge Road, Romsey, SO51 0HR
Phone: 01794 450451 (or see Church Suite)
Email: tim@freedomchurch.uk

The current Safeguarding Lead's name and direct contact details (above) are advertised through our Safeguarding Policy and Safeguarding Posters. This encourages anyone visiting our congregation to make contact should they have any queries or concerns that they feel unable to chat about with the staff or leadership team there. If a complaint is received by anyone other than the Safeguarding Lead, the person receiving the complaint will record all relevant information and pass this with due haste to the Safeguarding Lead. The Safeguarding Lead will acknowledge your complaint within five days of receipt and will keep you informed throughout the process. The Safeguarding Lead will contact the Chair of Trustees for a decision as to whether to conduct an internal enquiry, or whether it is necessary to pass the information to another agency, such as the police, social services of the Local Authority Designated Lead (LADO).

In the event of the complaint being against the Safeguarding Lead, complaints should be made to the Safeguarding Officer or the Safeguarding Trustee: (who will process the complaint in the manner outlined above and below):

Name: Sim Dendy (Safeguarding Officer)
Address: Freedom Centre, Unit 20, Romsey Industrial Estate, Greatbridge Road, Romsey, SO51 0HR
Phone: 01794 450451 (or see Church Suite)
Email: sim@freedomchurch.uk

Name: Amanda Maxwell (Safeguarding Trustee)
Address: See Church Suite
Phone: See Church Suite
Email: See Church Suite

Following up a complaint or concern about a member of staff, volunteer.

The Safeguarding Lead will need to decide whether or not to refer the complaint to the statutory authorities for investigation. For example, any reports or suspicions that a volunteer or member of staff may have abused a child must be referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) through MASH or Children's Services, or the Police. A complaint that one child may have abused another also needs to be referred to Children's Services and the Police for a full investigation.

Freedom Church commits to follow up all concerns and complaints and work with all statutory agencies following Local Safeguarding Children's Board polices. If any Safeguarding Complaint is referred externally the Safeguarding Lead will ask the receiving agency to:

- Keep the Charity informed
- Be included in any strategy meetings which may be held.

Allegations against people who work with children should be routed through children's social care, so that they are dealt with alongside child welfare concerns in a coordinated manner, e.g. Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub - MASH.

The Local Authority Designated Officer works within a multi-agency system and should be alerted to all cases in which it is alleged that a person who works with children has:

- behaved in a way that has harmed, or may have harmed, a child
- possibly committed a criminal offence against children, or related to a child
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates s/he is unsuitable to work with children.

It is a possibility that a volunteer or member of staff may be temporarily suspended from their role if an allegation is made against them regarding a child or vulnerable adult, whilst an investigation takes place. The suspension does not indicate guilt; it is a form of good practice we will follow if necessary. We may be able to redeploy or support in some other way whilst an investigation takes place. We will always seek the advice of the LADO in these situations.

The LADO role applies to paid, unpaid, volunteer, casual, agency and self-employed workers. They capture concerns, allegations or offences emanating from outside of work. The LADO is involved from the initial phase of the allegation through to the conclusion of the case.

They will provide advice, guidance and help to determine whether the allegation sits within the scope of the procedures. The LADO helps co-ordinate information-sharing with the right people and will also monitor and track any investigation, with the aim to resolve it as quickly as possible.

Referring concerns to the Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS)

If there is a concern about any volunteer or staff member's behaviour towards a child or a vulnerable adult, we will take the appropriate action to ensure proper procedures are followed and all parties are supported as necessary.

If you are a member of the congregation, a parent or a member of staff or volunteer who has brought the complaint, we will aim to keep you informed where we can, subject to confidentiality issues. We will also offer pastoral support should you require it.

If you are the member of staff or volunteer who has had the complaint or concern brought against you, we may either redeploy you, ask you to step down, or you may voluntarily step down, resign or retire due to your behaviour. Under those circumstances we have a duty to refer our concerns to the Disclosure & Barring Service. You will be informed of our action to report those concerns and you will be given opportunities to explain your case via the DBS should you wish to.

Referring concerns to the Charities Commission

It is the responsibility of the Safeguarding Trustee to make the rest of the Trustee Board aware of all relevant information. The Charity Commission states that "if your charity encounters a serious incident or problem you must report it to the Charity Commission as soon as you become aware of it. (If Trustees fail to report a serious incident, the commission may consider this to be mismanagement and take regulatory action).

What we do if there is a serious complaint

If the complaint against any member of staff or volunteer or leadership team leads to any suspicion that a criminal offence may have been committed against a child the complaint will be referred to the police and LADO **BEFORE** any further investigation is carried out. Children's Services/MASH will also be contacted if required. We will inform the person making the complaint of what we did and what will happen next.

Each case is individual, and we will work with all parties to offer any pastoral support where that is helpful.

If a complaint that leads to a suspicion of abuse of a child that **does not** seem to be a criminal offence it will be referred to Children's Services/MASH, and they will refer to the Police if needed.

Depending on the seriousness of the complaint, once the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) has investigated the complaint, or internally followed up if appropriate, the Safeguarding Lead will meet with the complainant to tell them the outcome. Freedom Church will always work with and take the advice of the Police, LADO and other statutory agencies.

Should you be unhappy with the outcome of the action taken with your complaint then you will be able to put your complaint to the Chair of Trustees who will take the complaints process further.

Produced by: Tim Parker (Executive Leader)

Policy Adopted:

To be revised annually