

Leeds Area Quaker Meeting

of The Religious Society Of Friends

Registered Charity 1134542

COMPLAINTS POLICY & PROCEDURE

'No dispute is resolved unless the requirements of both justice and reconciliation have been met as far as possible'

1 POLICY

It is the policy of the Area Meeting to have in place a procedure by which disputes between Friends and between Friends and the LM or AM may be resolved. To this end, the AM appoints a Group of Friends to which complaints may be referred. The procedure is to be applied with as much confidentiality as is possible. The emphasis towards resolution should be on mediation and conflict transformation.

2 INTRODUCTION

What counts as a complaint and a grievance?

A **complaint** is a written or verbal expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet about an action, or lack of action by a person acting on behalf of the Area Meeting, or about the policies and procedures of the Area Meeting. When the complaint is made by someone who is either employed by or appointed to serve within the AM (for instance, Clerk, Elders, Overseers), it is usually referred to as a **grievance**.

A complaint or a grievance may include an **allegation** that a person has behaved in an unacceptable way.

We treat all complaints and grievances very seriously.

The aim always, when responding to complaints and grievances, is to enable them to be resolved informally, speedily and fairly by discussion, problem solving, mediation and negotiation. Problems should therefore be brought direct to the person(s) deemed responsible for the area of dissatisfaction or disquiet, and will hopefully be resolved in this way.

Safeguarding: If, however, a complaint or grievance relates to or includes an allegation that a child or adult who may be vulnerable has been harmed or is at risk of harm, or that an adult or another child may have caused harm to a child or adult who may be vulnerable, it must be responded to through the Area Meeting procedures for handling allegations of abuse.

Harassment and Bullying is addressed in the AM Harassment and Bullying policy. Reference to that should be made if a complaint or allegation relates to behaviour described therein.

The AM has established a Group to hear complaints in the event that they are not resolved in step 3.1 in the procedure.

3 PROCEDURE

When complaining, please tell us:

- As much as you can about the complaint
- What has gone wrong
- How you want us to resolve the matter.
- How much you want this to be kept confidential.
- Your name, address, telephone number and email address
- That you want this treated as a formal complaint.

3.1 Complaints or grievances against Friends should be addressed by the complainant, in the first instance, to Elders and Pastoral Care Team in the local meeting. It is expected that LM Elders and Pastoral Carers will seek to resolve the matter.

Complaints or grievances against Area Meeting Trustees should be addressed by the complainant to the Area Meeting Clerk, who will seek to resolve the matter.

Complaints or grievances against the Area Meeting should be addressed by the complainant to the clerk of trustees, who will seek to resolve the matter.

Should the complaint be perceived as **relating to a Safeguarding matter**, the Clerk of Trustees will be informed and, in consultation with the AM clerk, will refer the matter to the Safeguarding Trustee, who will ensure that it is considered within the context of Safeguarding legislation, with the support of the Leeds Safeguarding Board if appropriate.

3.2 Should the complainant not be satisfied with the outcome of initial referral, the AM Clerk will refer the complaint to the AM Group appointed to consider complaints, and inform the Area Meeting that this has happened.

3.3 The AM Group appointed to consider complaints will

- Invite the complainant to explain the complaint, accompanied by a friend of her or his choosing if wished;
- Ensure that mediation and conflict transformation have been or will be employed;
- Enlist the assistance of Friends from a cluster group of Quaker Life Network if appropriate;
- Keep the Clerk of Trustees informed of issues which might have a bearing on trustees' responsibilities, for instance for reputational risk or legal implications;
- Decide whether to uphold or reject the complaint;

- let the complainant know the outcome, ideally within three weeks of the formal complaint being made. If there is a delay, they will keep the complainant informed of progress.
- Report the decision to the complainant, to the AM Clerk and Clerk of Trustees.

3.4 In the event that the complainant is not satisfied with the decision of the Group the complainant should write to the AM Clerk to **register an appeal** against the decision.

3.5 The AM Clerk will seek assistance from one or more neighbouring AMs by asking them to form a review group to hear the appeal and to decide whether it should be upheld or rejected.

3.6 The Review Group thus formed will review the process by hearing from the appellant and the AM Group, in order to decide whether the process was carried out sufficiently and properly and whether there is evidence which was not heard which has a bearing on the decision of the AM Group. The Review Group will let you the complainant know the outcome of the appeal, ideally within a month of the appeal being made. If there is a delay, they will keep the complainant informed of progress

3.7 Should the appeal be upheld, the Review Group will report this to the appellant, to the AM Clerk and to the Clerk of Trustees, with recommendations for subsequent action.

3.8 Should the appeal be rejected, the Review Group's decision is final. The Review Group will report its decision to the appellant, to the AM Clerk and to the Clerk of Trustees.

3.9 The AM Group should be invited to make any recommendations it deems to be appropriate. It is hoped that any learning from the complaint, whether or not upheld, would be shared with the AM.

4 PROCEDURE FOR UNREASONABLE OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINANTS

We define unreasonable or vexatious complainants as those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with any aspect of the life of the Area Meeting and its Members, Attenders and Role-Holders, hinder consideration of theirs or other people's complaints leading to a perception of harassment or bullying. In these circumstances, it may be deemed appropriate to suspend the complaints procedure and for the Area Meeting Bullying and Harassment policy to be applied instead.

5 REPORTING

Once the final decision of a complaint has been completed, The AM should minute the following:

- a) The existence of the complaint,
- b) Whether it was accepted or rejected, and
- c) where it has been accepted, and recommendations for changes in structures or processes have been made, what these were and whether they have been implemented.

Safeguarding Complaints

The clerk of trustees should report to The Charity Commission any Safeguarding issue which has been considered a 'serious incident' by trustees.

Approved by LAQM Trustees
28th April 2024

To be reviewed April 2026