



The
United
Reformed
Church

The United Reformed Church (Northern Province) Trust Limited

Registered Charity N° 1132154 (England) : Company N° 134549 (England) : Limited by guarantee

Complaints Policy

The United Reformed Church (Northern Province) Trust Limited views 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 United Reformed Church as a denomination also has a complaints procedure, which is reproduced below in Appendix 1. That procedure also applies to the *United Reformed Church Northern Synod* and *local churches*, but does not apply to the *Trust* because it is legally a separate company, and not a council of the Church.

The Trust's Policy

Our 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 our complaints procedure so that people know how to contact us to make a complaint
- to make sure everyone at the Trust knows what to do if a complaint is received
- to make sure all 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 us to improve what we do.

Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect of the Trust.

Where Complaints Come From

Complaints may come from:

- directors
- Synod officers or members
- denominational or local church officers or members
- members of the public

A complaint can be received verbally, by phone, by email or in writing.

This policy does not cover complaints *from staff*, who should use the Trust's Grievance policy, as set out in the Employee Handbook.

This policy also does not cover complaints *about ministers*, which should be made to the Synod Moderator or the General Secretary of the United Reformed Church under the Ministerial Disciplinary Process:

<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Section-O-July-23.pdf>

Appendices:

<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Section-O-appendices-July-2023.pdf>

This policy also does not cover complaints *about the United Reformed Church Northern Synod*, except to the extent that they relate to actions of Directors or employees of the Trust. Otherwise, complaints about the Synod should be dealt with under the denominational procedure, above.

Although the Trust does not generally deal with children, young people or vulnerable adults, it has adopted the United Reformed Church Northern Synod's safeguarding policy:

<https://www.urc-northernsynod.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Synod-Safeguarding-Policy-190316.pdf>.

Appeals against decisions of subgroups of the Trust may be made in writing or by email, giving clear grounds for an appeal, based on a procedural irregularity, a perverse decision, or where new information had come to light. The procedure is explained in the guidelines for property and manse grants: <https://www.urc-northernsynod.org/resources/grants/>.

Confidentiality

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

Responsibility

Overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation lies with the board of directors.

Review

This policy is reviewed regularly and updated as required.

Adopted on: 14 April, 2016

Last reviewed: 29 August, 2023

This policy and the procedure which follows are based on a model produced by the then Good Governance Hub www.governancecode.org.



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Complaints Procedure

Publicised Contact Details for Complaints

Written complaints may be sent to the United Reformed Church (Northern Province) Trust Limited at **4 College Lane, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 8JJ** or by email at office@urc-northersynod.org.

Verbal complaints may be made by phone to **0191-232 1168** or in person to any of the Trust's staff, volunteers or trustees at the address above or at any of our events or activities.

Receiving Complaints

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 Trust (for example: director, church member, member of the public)
- tell the complainant that we have a complaints procedure
- tell the complainant what will happen next and how long it will take
- where appropriate, 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.

For further guidelines about handling verbal complaints, see **Appendix 2**.

Resolving Complaints

Stage One

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 (in the form specified in Appendix 3) should be passed to the Trust Secretary within one week. **The complaint information will also be sent to the person making the complaint, along with details of this policy and procedure.**

On receiving the complaint, Trust Secretary records it in the complaints log. If it has not already been resolved, they 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 fair opportunity to respond.

Complaints should be acknowledged by the person handling the complaint within one week. 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 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 *where appropriate* any action taken as a result of the complaint.

Stage Two

If the complainant feels that the problem has not been satisfactorily resolved at Stage One, they can request that the complaint is reviewed at Board level. At this stage, the complaint will be passed to the Trust Chair.

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

The Trust Chair may investigate the facts of the case themselves or delegate a suitably senior person to do so. This may involve reviewing the paperwork of the case and speaking with the person who dealt with the complaint at Stage One.

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

The person who dealt with the original complaint at Stage One should be kept informed of what is happening.

Ideally 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 upheld or not, the reply to the complainant should describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and *where appropriate* any action taken as a result of the complaint.

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

External Stage

The complainant can complain to the Charity Commission at any stage.

Information about the kind of complaints the Commission can involve itself in can be found on their website at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-charities>.

Variation of the Complaints Procedure

The Board 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 as the person leading a Stage Two review.

Monitoring and Learning from Complaints

Records of all complaints will be held at Synod Office, to enable learning to take place.

Complaints are reviewed annually to identify any trends which may indicate a need to take further action.

Appendix 1 – Denominational Complaints Procedure

This can be found at:

https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Q_Complaints_Procedure_2022.pdf.