



# The Crowded House Sharrowvale

## Complaints Policy

March 2024

# Complaints Policy

## Aims of this policy

*The Crowded House Sharrowvale (TCH) recognises the importance of listening to all members of our church community, including those who find it hard to make their voices heard and those who hold contrary views to the church leadership. The trustees will proactively seek the views of all who engage with the church in a variety of ways; however, we also recognise the importance of responding well when concerns, criticisms or complaints are raised with us.*

*It is our hope that the majority of concerns that do not meet the statutory thresholds for referral to external agencies can be resolved informally through constructive discussion and in line with Matthew 18: 15-35, however, we recognise that for a variety of reasons, resolution via such dialogue will not always be possible or appropriate. This procedure seeks to establish a robust process for dealing with complaints or concerns that have not or cannot be resolved through informal discussion.*

*Use of informal discussion (as described above) is **not** a prerequisite for initiating the formal complaint process. Not all complaints will involve a safeguarding element. The same process will be followed for all complaints.*

## Complaints log

- 1.1. TCH will maintain a log of all complaints

## Anonymous complaints and media campaigns (including social media)

- 1.2. Complaints that are made anonymously cannot be handled in the usual way and will generally be filed without full investigation.
- 1.3. Complaints that request a level of confidentiality that would compromise the integrity of an investigation, or its outcome will not be investigated, but may be considered in general terms. They will generally be filed without full investigation
- 1.4. The Crowded House will not respond to complaints made in public space such as social media or other online or in-print publications. All complaints should be addressed to TCH directly using this complaints process
- 1.5. Although anonymous complaints cannot, by definition, be handled in the usual way, TCH will:
  - 1.5.1. Log the complaints
  - 1.5.2. Seek to establish whether any pattern or consistency can be identified
  - 1.5.3. Consider whether any form of investigation or action can and should be taken

## External investigations

- 1.6. Concerns, complaints, and allegations will generally be investigated internally

- 1.7. In exceptional circumstances such as where TCH have concerns about the independence or competence of staff, or their capacity to conduct a timely investigation, TCH will consider whether it is appropriate to involve an independent external individual or organisation to assist with the investigation.
- 1.8. Unless directed by a statutory or regulatory body to involve an independent, external body, TCH will make such decisions. Advice can be sought from Christian Safeguarding Services (CSS) or other sources, but this decision rests solely in the hands of the trustees and senior leaders.

### **Making a complaint**

- 1.9. Complaints should be addressed to one of the Elders (see Elders and trustee email addresses at the bottom of the policy)
  - 1.9.1. If the complaint is about all of the Elders, the complaint should be addressed to the Trustees
- 1.10. The details will be entered into the complaints log and progress to conclusion will be tracked
- 1.11. The Elders will inform the Trustees of the complaint and an initial plan of action will be developed
- 1.12. Consideration will be given to whether a Serious Incident Report to the appropriate charity regulator is required.
- 1.13. An Investigating Officer(s) will be identified.

### **Preliminary actions**

- 1.14. The Trustees or the Investigating Officer may consult with CSS, who will provide independent support and advice to ensure transparency
- 1.15. The Investigating Officer will acknowledge receipt of the complaint and will notify the complainants of the initial plan of action which will include:
  - 1.15.1. Discussing the complaint with the complainants to confirm and clarify the details of the complaint
  - 1.15.2. Details of the complaint process and of key contacts will be provided to the complainants
  - 1.15.3. The investigating Officer will establish whether the complainants wish to start the process at stage 1 (informal resolution) or stage 2 (formal investigation)
  - 1.15.4. A detailed investigation plan will be developed by the investigating officer and signed off by the Trustees

### **Stage 1 – Informal resolution**

- 1.16. Where possible, TCH prefers to commence at this stage; believing this to be best aligned to the biblical principles, however, this will be a decision for the complainants, and if they request commencement at stage 2, that decision will be fully respected by the church
- 1.17. The investigating officer, supported by a note-taker if required will arrange to discuss the matter with the complainants
- 1.18. The aim at this stage is to establish whether agreement can be reached about action that is required

- 1.19. TCH will make a written record of the discussion that includes:
  - 1.19.1. The key points discussed, and views expressed
  - 1.19.2. Areas of agreement
  - 1.19.3. Areas of disagreement
  - 1.19.4. Conclusions and actions agreed
- 1.20. A copy of the written record of the meeting will be provided to the complainants who will have opportunity to request amendments or clarification
- 1.21. Once agreed, the complainants will be asked to confirm the accuracy of the notes of the discussion

#### If resolution has been agreed

- 1.22. Once TCH have completed the agreed actions, they will notify the complainants of the action taken
- 1.23. The complainants will be asked to confirm that they are happy that the matter has been addressed
- 1.24. The complaints log will be updated, and the notes will be stored securely

#### If resolution has not been agreed

- 1.25. A record of the closing position of the informal stage will be agreed between the complainants and the Investigating Officer. This will include any progress made and actions agreed / completed and the issues that could not be resolved
- 1.26. The closing report will be signed off by the Trustees, who will escalate the matter to the formal stage

#### Stage 2 – formal investigation

- 1.27. Complaints at the formal stage will be reviewed by the Trustees to establish whether there are sufficient grounds for a full investigation
- 1.28. If a full investigation is required / justified, this will be agreed and authorised
- 1.29. The “Investigation officer” for this stage will be agreed
- 1.30. An investigation plan will be developed and communicated to the complainants
- 1.31. The matter will be thoroughly investigated, and a final (Stage 2) report will be delivered to the Trustees for sign off
- 1.32. Once signed off, the outcome will be communicated to the complainants,
  - 1.32.1. The complainants will be notified of their right of appeal and of the process and timescales for doing so.
- 1.33. All records will be stored confidentially

#### Stage 3 - Appeal

- 1.34. If the complainants believe that the process or findings of the formal investigation is incorrect, they can raise their concerns using the appeal process
- 1.35. The complainant must clearly outline the basis of the appeal and the justification for appealing the process and / or outcome.

- 1.36. The trustees will consider the grounds of appeal and decide whether the appeal is justified
- 1.37. The appeal will be conducted by a suitably skilled individual(s) who were not part of the stage 2 investigation (excluding the sign off process) and who are not involved in the complaint
- 1.38. An appeal report will be produced and submitted to the trustees (or the subgroup thereof) for final signoff
- 1.39. The complainants will be notified of the outcome of the appeal and their options of further action (e.g., referral to the Charity regulator, the police, or the Local Authority etc will be provided.
- 1.40. *The process will be reviewed to identify lessons that can be learned*

## Points of contact

### Elders

**Danny Elliott:** [Danny.elliott@thecrowdedhouse.org](mailto:Danny.elliott@thecrowdedhouse.org)

**Rob Spink:** [rob.spink@thecrowdedhouse.org](mailto:rob.spink@thecrowdedhouse.org)

### Chair of Trustees

**Laura Johnston:** [Laura.Johnston@thecrowdedhouse.org](mailto:Laura.Johnston@thecrowdedhouse.org)

*A complaints form can be found as Appendix A to this policy which should be used where possible when making a complaint to the appropriate person(s)*

## **The Crowded House Sharrowvale**

### **Complaints and concerns form**

Complainant details	
Name:	Home address:
Phone:	E-mail:
Details of the concern or complaint	
<p>Details of the complaint:</p>          	
<p>Have you raised this matter with anyone from the church before completing this form? If yes, please provide details of who.</p>          	
Handling of this complaint	
<p><i>Please delete statement that does not apply</i></p> <p>I would like this complaint to commence at stage 1 of the complaints process (informal resolution)</p> <p>I would like this complaint to be considered at stage 2 of the complaints process (formal investigation)</p>	
Date completed	
Office use	
Complaints log reference:	