

DOCUMENT ID	PD22/0012
APPLICABLE TO	Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle workers, including workers of all Agencies.
DOCUMENT OWNER	Head of Governance
APPROVAL DATE	11 October 2022
APPROVED BY	CEO
EFFECTIVE DATE	3 November 2022
LAST REVIEW DATE/S	N/A (New Document)
NEXT REVIEW DATE/S	October 2025
RELATED DOCUMENTS	Complaints Resolution Agency Procedure Complaints Resolution Diocesan Procedure Safeguarding Framework Policy Delegations of Authority Policy Policy Management Policy

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## 1. Purpose

- 1.1 This policy is intended to ensure that the Catholic Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle (Diocese) handles complaints fairly, efficiently, and effectively by the implementation of a complaint management system that is intended to:
- a. enable the Diocese to respond to people providing feedback or making complaints in a manner that is consistent with the Catholic Social Teachings:
    - i. Dignity of the Human Person – Everyone should be treated with respect and dignity. Each person is equal in dignity and has equal rights as a child of God.
    - ii. Common Good (Community) – People realise their dignity and rights in their relationships with others, in community. The rights and duties of individuals and groups must be harmonised under the common good.
    - iii. Solidarity – Humans are one family, no matter the differences. We are social by nature and depend on one another. We seek to stand in unity with each other, particularly those who are powerless or disadvantaged, and recognise each persons’ rights regardless of our differences.
    - iv. Stewardship - The goods of the earth are gifts from God, and they are intended by God for the benefit of everyone. We are responsible for taking care of the world we live in and for sharing all the wonders and resources the earth gives us.
    - v. Option for the Poor and Vulnerable - A healthy community can be achieved only if its members give special attention to those with special needs, to those who are poor and on the margins of society. Preference care should be shown to poor and vulnerable people, whose needs and rights are given special attention in God’s eyes.
    - vi. Subsidiarity Participation - All people have the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Subsidiarity requires that decisions are made by the people closest and most affected by the issues and concerns of the community. Only when higher authority is required for the common good should there be intervention.
  - b. enable the Diocese to respond in a timely and cost-effective manner to issues raised by people providing feedback or making complaints.
  - c. improve and maintain public confidence in the processes adopted by the Diocese in the receipt of, and response to, feedback and complaints.
  - d. provide a pathway to receive information from diocesan workers and people engaged with the life of the Diocese that may be used to continuously improve the services the Diocese provides, the systems each diocesan agency implements or complaint handling.

## 2. Scope

2.1 This policy will apply to:

- a. all diocesan workers who receive or manage the response to a complaint, and
- b. the people engaged with the life of the Diocese who wish to provide feedback or make a complaint about a service the Diocese provides.

2.2 This policy will not apply to the management of the complaints in the following categories:

- a. grievances between staff members – reference should be made to the diocesan Workplace Grievance Policy.
- b. allegations that a diocesan worker has acted in breach of the code of conduct – reference should be made to the diocesan Counselling and Disciplinary Policy.
- c. allegations that require a safeguarding response – reference should be made to the Reporting Concerns for Children Policy.
- d. complaints arising from the provision of service at a parish – these should be referred to the Bishop’s Office.
- e. disclosures made by a whistleblower – reference should be made to the Whistleblower Policy.
- f. a request for review in accordance with accepted internal review procedures – in these circumstances a complainant may seek a second-tier review of the process applied by the agency in its decision making.
- g. complaints that do not relate to a service provided by the Diocese - in these circumstances the person raising the concern or providing feedback will be supported to direct their information to the appropriate external agency.
- h. complaints that are not deemed appropriate for response – a complaint may be deemed not appropriate for response if it is highly abusive, aggressive, or threatening towards one or more diocesan worker or presented as statements not seeking a response. In these circumstances the complainant will be advised (if possible) and the complaint closed.

## 3. Organisational commitment

3.1 The Diocese is committed to the provision of fair, effective, and efficient complaint management that accords with the Catholic Social Teachings.

3.2 The Diocese expects its operational leadership to promote a culture that values complaints and their effective resolution.

3.3 The Diocese expects each agency to establish and maintain a fair, effective, and efficient complaint management process.

3.4 The Diocese expects its workers to:

- a. treat all people with respect, including people who make complaints.
- b. assist people to provide feedback and make a complaint, if needed.
- c. be aware of and comply with the Complaints Resolution Policy.
- d. provide feedback to operational leadership on issues arising from complaints.
- e. provide suggestions to operational leadership on ways to improve the complaints management process.
- f. implement changes arising from individual complaints or from the analysis and evaluation of complaint data.

## 4. Terms, definitions, and acronyms

TERM	DEFINITION
Administrative Inquiry	An administrative inquiry is a structured process undertaken to investigate whether there is sufficient evidence to sustain a complaint. Administrative inquiries apply the civil standard ( <i>on balance of probabilities</i> ) and do not address questions of innocence or guilt; nor can administrative inquiries unilaterally achieve <i>moral certitude</i> in canonical jurisdictions.  See Safeguarding Framework Policy 2022.
Administrative Review Officer	A member of the Complaint Management Service at diocesan Governance who may be allocated to finalise a complaint by Administrative Inquiry.
Complaint	A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction made to or about the Diocese, the services the Diocese offers, a diocesan worker or the handling of a complaint where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.  A complaint is not a request for service, an expression of concern, opinion, or feedback where a response is not explicitly or implicitly expected.  A matter that may not be considered a complaint as defined by the policy may be recorded and referred to the appropriate operational leadership for management.
Complainant	The complainant is the person who makes the complaint. The complainant may be the person who suffered the alleged

TERM	DEFINITION
	inappropriate conduct or poor service or a person acting on another person's behalf for example, the responsible adult for a child.
Complaint management service	<p>The diocesan service provided by Governance that is dedicated to the resolution of complaints and includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Resolution Officers who have an impartial, facilitative, and supportive role in the resolution of complaints at the Agency, and</li> <li>- Administrative Review Officers who may be allocated to finalise a complaint by the completion of an Administrative Inquiry.</li> </ul>
Complaint management system	All policies, procedures and practices used by the Diocese in the management of complaints.
Dispute	An unresolved complaint escalated either within or outside of the Diocese.
Dispute Resolution	Dispute resolution involves the people who are in dispute talking about the issues between them and working towards an agreement on how these issues may be resolved. The conversation between the people who are in dispute may be facilitated by an impartial person, such as a mediator.
Feedback	Opinions, comments, compliments and expressions of interest or concern, made directly or indirectly, explicitly, or implicitly, to or about the Diocese, the services offered by the Diocese or complaint handling where a response is not explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.
Grievance	<p>A statement (written or oral) raised by a diocesan worker regarding a genuine work-related concern, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an interpersonal conflict</li> <li>• a perceived breach of policy</li> <li>• the allocation of work or developmental opportunities, or</li> <li>• a perceived unfairness in the workplace.</li> </ul>
Request for service	<p>A request for service may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• requests for information.</li> <li>• a request for review in accordance with accepted internal review procedures.</li> </ul>

TERM	DEFINITION
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• requests for approval.</li> <li>• requests for actions.</li> <li>• routine inquiries about the services offered by the Diocese.</li> <li>• requests for the provision of diocesan services and assistance.</li> <li>• requests for explanation of diocesan policies, procedures, and decisions.</li> </ul>
Resolution Officer	A member of the Complaint Management Service at diocesan Governance who has an impartial, facilitative and support role in the resolution of complaints at the Agency.

## 5. Guiding Principles of Complaints Management System

### 5.1 Facilitate complaints:

- a. People focus – the Diocese is committed to seeking and receiving feedback and complaints about its services, systems, practices, procedures, and complaint handling. Any concerns raised in feedback or complaints will be dealt with within a reasonable time frame.
- b. People making complaints will be:
  - i. provided with information about the complaint management process.
  - ii. provided with multiple and accessible ways to make complaints.
  - iii. listened to, treated with respect by staff and be actively involved in the complaint management process where possible and appropriate, and
  - iv. provided with feedback that is relevant to them and the management of the complaint, including options for redress or review.
- c. No detriment to people making complaints – the Diocese will take all reasonable steps to ensure that people making complaints are not adversely affected because a complaint has been made by them or on their behalf.
- d. Anonymous complaints – the Diocese will accept anonymous complaints and will address the issues raised where there is enough information provided.
- e. Accessibility – the Diocese will ensure that information about how and where complaints may be made is well publicised. The Diocese will ensure that its systems to manage complaints are easily understood and accessible to everyone, particularly people who may require assistance.

- f. Option of a representative - if a person prefers or needs another person or organisation to assist or represent them in the making and/or resolution of their complaint, the Diocese will communicate with them through their representative. Anyone may represent a person wishing to make a complaint with their consent for example, advocate, family member, legal or community representative.
- g. No charge – complaints made will be managed by the Diocese for free.

## 5.2 Respond to complaints:

- 5.2.1 Early resolution – where possible, complaints will be resolved at first contact with the relevant diocesan agency.
- 5.2.2 Responsiveness – the Diocese will promptly acknowledge receipt of complaints:
  - a. The Diocese will assess and prioritise complaints in accordance with the urgency and/or seriousness of the issues raised. If a matter concerns an immediate risk to safety or security the response will be immediate and will be escalated appropriately.
  - b. The Diocese is committed to managing people’s expectations, and will inform them as soon as possible, of the following:
    - i. the complaints resolution process,
    - ii. the expected timeframes for actions,
    - iii. the progress of the complaint and reasons for any delay,
    - iv. their likely involvement in the process, and
    - v. the possible or likely outcomes of their complaint.
  - c. The Diocese will advise a person as soon as possible if the Diocese is unable to deal with any part of their complaint and provide advice about where such issues and/or complaints may be directed (if known and appropriate).
  - d. The Diocese will advise a person as soon as possible if the Diocese is unable to meet expected time frames for responding to their complaint and where appropriate, the reasons for the delay.
- 5.2.3 Objectivity and fairness – the Diocese will address each complaint with integrity and in an equitable, objective, and unbiased manner.
  - a. The person with management of the complaint will not be a diocesan worker whose service or conduct is being complained about.

- b. Conflicts of interest, whether actual or perceived, will be managed responsibly. In particular, administrative Inquiries about how a complaint was managed will be conducted by a person other than the original decision maker.

5.2.4 Responding flexibly – diocesan workers are empowered to resolve complaints promptly and with as little formality as possible.

- a. Diocesan agencies will adopt flexible approaches to service delivery and problem solving to enhance accessibility for people making complaints and/or their representatives.
- b. Diocesan agencies will assess each complaint on its merits and involve the person making the complaint and/or their representative in the process for resolution as far as possible.
- c. Agency staff and diocesan Resolution Officers will support members of the diocesan community to engage with the complaints management system.
- d. Diocesan Resolution Officers will also support each Agency to engage with the complaints management system.

5.2.5 Confidentiality – the Diocese will protect the identity of people making complaints where this is practical and appropriate.

- a. Personal information that identifies individuals will only be disclosed or used by the Diocese as permitted under the relevant privacy laws, secrecy provisions and any relevant confidentiality obligations.

### 5.3 Manage the parties to a complaint

5.3.1 Complaints involving multiple agencies.

- a. where a complaint involves multiple organisations, the Diocese will work with the other organisation/s where possible, to ensure that communication with the person making a complaint and/or their representative is clear and coordinated.
- b. Subject to privacy and confidentiality considerations, communication and information sharing between the parties will be organised to facilitate a timely response to the complaint.
- c. Where a complaint involves multiple diocesan agencies, responsibility for communicating with the person making the complaint and/or their representative will also be coordinated.
- d. Where the diocesan service the subject of complaint is contracted out the Diocese expects the contracted service providers to have an accessible and comprehensive complaint management system. In such circumstances, the

Diocese will receive complaints about the services and staff of the diocesan agency and that of the contracted service providers.

5.3.2 Empowerment of diocesan workers – all diocesan workers managing complaints are empowered to implement the diocesan complaint management system as relevant to their role and responsibilities.

5.3.3 Diocesan workers are encouraged to provide feedback to operational management about the effectiveness and efficiency of all aspects of the diocesan complaint management system.

#### 5.4 Manage unreasonable conduct by people making complaints

5.4.1 The Diocese is committed to being accessible and responsive to all people who approach it with feedback or complaints. The successful resolution of complaints by the Diocese depends on the:

- a. ability of diocesan workers to do their work and perform their functions in the most effective and efficient way possible,
- b. health, safety, and security of diocesan workers, and
- c. ability to allocate diocesan resources fairly across all complaints received.

5.4.2 When people behave unreasonably in their dealings with the Diocese, their conduct can significantly affect the progress and efficiency of the services provided. As a result, the Diocese will take proactive and decisive action to manage any conduct that negatively and unreasonably affects workers and will support workers to do the same in accordance with this Policy.

5.4.3 An unreasonable complainant is defined by their behaviour which, because of its nature or frequency, raises substantial health, safety, resource, or equity issues for the people involved in the complaint process. A person's conduct may be considered unreasonable if it has unacceptable consequences for one or more of the parties to the interaction.

5.4.4 The following categories of unreasonable conduct will be referenced by the Diocese in its interpretation of when a complainant's conduct may be considered unreasonable:

- a. Unreasonable persistence – people who persist with their issues even though they have been finalised, refusing to accept a final decision, and sending excessive amounts of correspondence.
- b. Unreasonable demands – people insisting on outcomes that are unattainable, moving the goal posts or demanding to have their matters dealt with in particular ways.

- c. Unreasonable lack of cooperation – people providing disorganised, excessive, or irrelevant information, failing to provide relevant information that might not suit their position or argument, being unwilling to consider other valid viewpoints, or refusing to define their issues of concern when they are capable of doing so.
- d. Unreasonable arguments – people seeing cause and effect arguments where there is none, holding conspiracy theories unsupported by evidence, or irrationally interpreting facts or laws and refusing to accept other interpretations.
- e. Unreasonable behaviours – people exhibiting extreme anger, aggression, threats or other threatening or violent conduct.

5.4.5 The assessment of whether a complainant’s conduct is unreasonable will be made case-by-case by a senior member of the Complaint Management Service.

5.5 Referral of a complaint to another diocesan agency or external authority for management

- a. Where, upon further inquiry into the complaint there may be reasonable grounds to suspect that criminal, corrupt, reportable conduct, or gross professional misconduct may have occurred the matter will be referred to the appropriate diocesan agency for example, Human Resources or the Office of Safeguarding and/or the appropriate external authority, for example the NSW Police.

## 6. Document Review

6.1 This Policy will be reviewed when there is a legislative change, organisational change, delegations change or at least every 3 years to ensure it continues to be current and effective.

REVISION NO.	PREPARED/REVISED BY AND DATE	AMENDED SECTION(S)	AMENDMENT DESCRIPTION	APPROVED BY AND DATE
1.	Dispute Management Specialist/ Oct 22	New Document	N/A	CEO – 11/10/22