

COMPLAINTS POLICY FOR CAQM

Complaints Policy

1. Purpose

All the Meetings for Worship in Cumberland Area Quaker Meeting (CAQM) are committed to providing high-quality services and maintaining positive relationships with our community. We recognise that complaints may arise from time to time, and we value feedback as an opportunity for growth and improvement.

This policy outlines our process for handling complaints in a fair, transparent, and respectful manner.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all Members, Attenders, contractors and volunteers within all meetings of CAQM, along with hirers and those who may attend their events.

3. Definitions

A complaint may be generally defined as an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or a lack of action. Where it is unclear whether a communication is a concern or a complaint, we will err on the side of caution and treat it as a complaint.

- **Complaint:** An expression of dissatisfaction related to our services, conduct, or any other aspect of our organisation.
- **Complainant:** The individual / group making the complaint.
- **Respondent:** The person or team responsible for addressing the complaint, usually the individual Meeting or CAQM.

4. Procedure

4.1. Receiving Complaints

1. **Informal Resolution:** Complainants should be encouraged to resolve issues informally by discussing them directly with the relevant person or team involved.
2. **Formal Complaints:** If the issue remains unresolved, the complainant should submit a formal complaint in writing (email or letter) to the designated contact person (usually the Local Meeting Clerk).

A formal complaint can be made in writing to:

- the Clerk of the local Quaker meeting
- or for Area Meeting matters, the Clerk of the Area Meeting
- or if the Clerk is the person the complaint relates to, complainants should send it to the Clerk of the Trustees.

Throughout this procedure, the relevant Clerk will either handle the complaint themselves with one other Member; or ask another Quaker to take their place in this procedure, such as an Elder, Pastoral Friend or Trustee, depending on the nature of the complaint. Two Members (or more if a serious complaint) should be involved in handling any complaint.

When complaining, the complainant should tell us:

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

The complainant should be informed that they may ask someone to help them write this, and advised that it is not always possible to keep a complaint confidential although it may be possible to remove their name.

4.2. Handling Formal Complaints (Stage 1)

1. **Acknowledgment:** Upon receiving a formal complaint, we will acknowledge it within 15 working days.

In the event that it is not possible to meet the timescales set out, the Clerk will ensure the complainant is kept up to date and explain the reasons for the time taken.

2. **Investigation:** The designated person will investigate the complaint impartially, ensuring confidentiality.

Where possible, Clerk will ensure that complaints are investigated by someone within CAQM who is independent of the events complained about. Where this is not possible, CAQM will consider whether a third party outside of the organisation should be asked to investigate the complaint. We seek to listen to complainants to understand the complaint and the outcome they are seeking.

3. **Response:** We will provide a written response to the complainant within 30 working days, outlining the findings and any proposed actions.

CAQM will provide clear, evidence-based reasons for our decisions and ensure those decisions are proportionate, appropriate and fair. This means responding openly to all of the substantive points raised by a complainant and explaining why CAQM considers those points are justified or not.

When responding to complaints, CAQM will be respectful and acknowledge the experience of the complainant, whether the complaint is justified or not.

CAQM takes responsibility for the actions of those acting on its behalf. When responding to a complaint, CAQM will acknowledge if things have gone wrong

and take proportionate action to put things right, including apologising where appropriate.

This will also include telling the complainant about the lessons learnt and any changes made to services, guidance or policy as a result of the complaint.

4. **Appeals:** If the complainant is dissatisfied with the response, they may appeal to a higher authority within our organisation (usually the Clerk to Area Meeting Trustees).

CAQM regards complaints as a source of learning and improvement.

CAQM will keep a record of the complaints we receive, the outcomes of any investigations and the reasons for our decisions.

CAQM will review regularly the complaints we have received to identify any trends or wider learning. In reviewing the complaints we have received, CAQM will consider what lessons can be learnt and how we can improve our service and the experience of donors.

CAQM will be cognisant of the requirement outlined in the Charities (Protection and Social Investments) Act 2016, which requires registered charities, by law, to have their accounts audited to include extra information about fundraising complaints in their annual report and accounts.

4.3. Escalation (Stage 2)

If the outcome at Stage 1 does not resolve the complaint satisfactorily, complainants can appeal in writing to the Clerk of Trustees, explaining why.

The Clerk of Trustees may handle the matter themselves in conjunction with another Member, or ask another Quaker to take their place in this procedure, such as the Assistant Clerk of Trustees or Area Meeting Clerk, perhaps if the matter relates to a decision by Trustees. If another Quaker or a panel is handling the appeal, they will keep the Clerk of Trustees informed on issues relating to Trustees' responsibilities, for example reputational or legal issues. As with Stage 1, two Members (or more if a serious complaint) should be involved in handling any complaint.

They will review the complaint, in consultation with appropriate Quakers if required. They will check that the fundamental point of the complaint has been addressed and will respond to any outstanding issues.

They may decide to form a panel, usually of three people chosen from Trustees, Elders or Pastoral Friends who have not been involved in the process before, and could include people from another Area Meeting. The panel will establish why **the** complainant still feels dissatisfied, and receive any documentation from Stage 1. The panel will normally meet with the complainant and their supporter, the person the complaint relates to and their supporter, and the Clerk who undertook Stage 1. Other people may be asked to contribute. The panel members will then meet separately to make a decision about the complaint.

The Clerk of Trustees, or the convenor of the panel if one is used, will let the complainant and the person the complaint relates to 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. Notes of the discussions and outcome will be kept, held by the Clerk of Trustees.

The decision of the Clerk of Trustees, or the panel if used, will be final. There is no further stage of appeal.

If the complaint remains unresolved, the complainant may escalate it to external bodies, such as the Charity Commission or relevant regulatory authorities.

5. Amongst Quakers

Elders and those with pastoral care responsibilities have a particularly important role in maintaining the community of every Quaker meeting. This includes giving guidance on appropriate and inappropriate behaviour within meetings for worship, and also towards other people in the Quaker community. (See *Quaker faith & practice*, chapter 12.)

Complaints and concerns from Members and Attenders about relationships with other Friends, arrangements for worship and related matters will be addressed by elders and overseers following procedures in *Quaker faith & practice*. Again, this will mainly be by discussion, problem solving, mediation and negotiation.

Section 10.21 of *Quaker faith & practice* is useful:

‘There are times of conflict in every meeting when we are required to find and show the love we have for one another and to face our difficulties squarely, for it is only when we work through them, using our meeting for church affairs and other appropriate methods, that we can move forward together. Such conflict may involve a clash of personalities, a difference over the quantity or style of vocal ministry, or issues about the place where meetings for worship are held. Problems may become tangled and one sort of issue may masquerade as another. Care will be required to identify the root cause. Skill, time and great love are needed to overcome these problems, but where they have been openly faced and successfully overcome, meetings have sometimes been much richer for the experience.

The primary responsibility for finding a way to resolve these problems lies with elders and overseers. It may be that the use of a meeting for clearness (see 12.22–12.25) would offer a way forward.

Deep-seated problems are sometimes more easily resolved when an experienced facilitator from outside the situation is called on. Quaker Life or area meetings may be able to suggest Friends with an understanding of how groups and individuals interact with one another, and who are able to spend time with a meeting that has got into seemingly insoluble difficulties.’

See also sections in Chapter 10 about Our Community, and Conflict.

There is also useful guidance provided on pages 293-300 of “*With a tender hand*” by Zélie Gross.

If the matter cannot be resolved at the local meeting level, the procedure at *Quaker faith & practice* 4.23 should be followed:

'Area meetings are recommended to appoint a group of experienced and knowledgeable Friends who would be available to give general assistance in the amicable settlement of disputes. If help from outside the area meeting is needed, enquiry should be made of the clerk of Meeting for Sufferings, who may suggest Friends qualified to give it. Techniques of problem-solving, mediation, counselling or meetings for clearness may be appropriate in particular instances where disputants wish to mitigate the consequences of confrontation. It should be borne in mind that Friends were among the pioneers of conflict resolution as a distinct activity and have constantly sought to promote reconciliation in the wider world.'

6. Contact Information

For submitting formal complaints or seeking clarification, please contact:

- **Name:** Clerk to the Trustees
- **Email:** am.trustees@cumberlandquakers.org.uk

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