

Author: Paul Bilton	Receiver: All
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Complaints Policy and Procedure

Policy Purpose

Worth Abbey 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.

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 Worth Abbey knows what to do if a complaint is received
- To make sure that 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 Worth Abbey. This could include administration, a staff member, process or service – resulting from our failure to meet the individual's expectations.

An individual may make a complaint if they feel Worth Abbey has:

- Failed to provide a service or an unacceptable standard of service, made a mistake in the way the service was provided or provided an unfair service
- Failed to act in a proper way.

This policy does not cover complaints from staff, who should refer to the Grievance Policy. It also does not cover complaints about Worth School. Complaints concerning Worth School should follow their policy available on the school website – <https://worthschool.org.uk/>

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Concern or Complaint

It is important to establish the difference between a concern and a complaint. Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage will reduce the likelihood of their developing into formal complaints.

If you have any concerns about our work, please tell a monk, staff member or their manager as soon as possible, so they can quickly understand your concerns and try to put things right.

You can also contact us directly about concerns, positive or negative, by phone (01342 710310) or email themonastery@worthabbey.net.

If you are not happy with the response to your concern and/or you want to make a formal complaint, please follow the procedure below.

This policy only covers complaints about the administration, staff, systems, processes or service Worth Abbey. If your complaint is about another organisation that works with us your complaint will have to be directed to them and we can help you do this.

This policy does not cover safeguarding concerns. Any safeguarding concerns raised will be covered by our Safeguarding Policy. To raise a safeguarding concern, you can either use the details above or contact our Religious Safeguarding Lead, Paul Bilton, directly on 01342 710368, pbilton@worth.org.uk. This policy does however cover the event of you thinking your safeguarding concern was not handled in a satisfactory way.

Confidentiality

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

Complaints Procedure

We want to make it easy for you to make a complaint. These are the ways you can get in touch with us:

1. You can call us on 01342 710310 and your complaint will be documented.
2. You can email us on themonastery@worthabbey.net
3. You can write to us at Worth Abbey, Paddockhurst Road, Turners Hill. RH10 4SB

In all instances where a complaint is made using the above means, we will contact you within 2 working days of receiving the complaint. If you provide us with a telephone number and/or email address we will contact you by either of those means to discuss the matter further and to officially

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record all necessary details. Hopefully, we can resolve the matter immediately. However, if the issue is more complex and an investigation is required, we will do the following:

- The person who receives the complaint will:
 - Record full details of your complaint, including the relationship of the complainant to Worth Abbey
 - Record the complaint in our Complaints Register. This includes a situation where the complaint is resolved immediately e.g. on the phone.
 - Take all necessary steps to investigate the matter
 - Contact you again within 15 working days of receiving the complaint to advise you of our findings or to give you an update on progress
 - Continue to keep you informed until the matter is resolved to your satisfaction or until all appropriate steps (in Worth Abbey's reasonable opinion) to resolve the matter have been taken
- Any complaint that cannot be resolved at first point of contact will be handled by the Monastery Bursar. If necessary, he will escalate complaints to the Trustee Board, depending on the complexity or seriousness of the issue.

Resolving Complaints

Our commitment to you is to address each complaint in a sensitive, fair, transparent, equitable, professional and unbiased manner, through our complaints-handling process.

We will operate at all times from the premise that any person is entitled to express their views on our services and that those views will be taken seriously and investigated when needed.

There are two stages to our complaint's procedure:

- Stage One – the complaint/investigation
- Stage Two – appeal

Stage 1

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 will be passed to the Monastery Bursar within five working days.

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On receiving the complaint, if not already resolved, the Monastery Bursar will investigate it and take appropriate action. If the complaint relates to a specific person, they will be informed and given a further opportunity to respond. If the complaint is about the Monastery Bursar then it will be referred to and investigated by the Abbot of Worth.

Complaints will be acknowledged by the person handling the complaint within five working days. The acknowledgement will say who is dealing with the complaint and when the person complaining can expect a reply. A copy of this complaints procedure will be attached.

Ideally complainants will receive a definitive reply within 15 working days. If this is not possible because for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report will be sent to the complainant with an indication of when a full reply will be given.

Whether the complaint is justified or not, the reply to the complainant will describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

Stage 2

If the complainant feels that the problem has not been satisfactorily resolved at Stage 1, they can request that the complaint is reviewed at Trustee Board level. The complainant should do this within 15 working days of receiving the response to the Stage 1 investigation.

At this stage, the complaint will be passed to the Trustee Board. The request for Board level review will be acknowledged within five working days of receiving it. The acknowledgement will say who will deal with the case and when the complainant can expect a reply.

The Board may investigate the facts of the case themselves, establish a sub-committee to carry out the investigation or appoint an external party to carry out the investigation. This may involve reviewing the paperwork of the case and speaking with the person who dealt with the complaint at Stage 1. The person who dealt with the original complaint at Stage 1 will be kept informed of what is happening.

If the complaint relates to a specific person, they will be informed and given a further opportunity to respond. Ideally complainants will receive a definitive reply within a month. If this is not possible because for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report will 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 will describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint. The decision taken at this stage is final.

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External Assistance

When a complaint is received, Worth Abbey may decide to seek external assistance. This could replace either stage 1 or stage 2 of the normal process. However, Worth Abbey will only take this step if it decides that it is appropriate to do so, for example the complaint is of a serious nature or there is a valid conflict of interest.

Conflicts of interest

The Board may vary the procedure to deal with a conflict of interest. For example, a complaint against the Chair will not have the Chair and/or Trustee involved as a person leading a Stage 2 review. Similarly, if the Abbot has investigated a Stage 1 complaint, he will not be involved at Stage 2.

Withdrawal of the Complaint

At any time during the process, a complainant may withdraw a complaint, by notice in writing to the Monastery Bursar. Upon such withdrawal, consideration of the complaint will normally be discontinued, unless the consequences of not following the procedure may result in harm to the individual or the organisation.

Confidentiality

To enable a full investigation to take place, it will be necessary for complainants to provide their name and contact details. However, in some instances, a complainant may wish to remain anonymous.

We always aim to keep a complainant's identity confidential when asked to do so, although this cannot be guaranteed. There may be situations where we have a duty to disclose identity for example to:

- The police, fraud prevention agencies, or other law enforcement agencies (to investigate or prevent crime, including fraud)
- The courts (court proceedings)
- Relevant authorities where there are safeguarding concerns
- Other third parties, e.g., Regulators

Data Protection

To process a complaint, Worth will hold personal data about the complainant, which the individual provides and which other people give in response to the complaint. We will hold this data securely

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in line with our current retention policy and only use it to address the complaint. The identity of the person making the complaint will only be known to those who need to consider the complaint and will not be revealed to other people or made public.

However, it may not be possible to preserve confidentiality in some circumstances, for example, where relevant legislation is applied, or allegations are made which involve the conduct of third parties.

Review of this Policy and Complaints Received

This policy will be reviewed by the Trustee Board every 3 years and all complaints received (and compliments) will be brought before the Board for review at our regular Board meetings. Through this process of regular review we aim to improve our services to you and to ensure that any lessons learned are implemented.

