

The Free Church of England SOCIAL MEDIA COMPLAINTS

Social Media is, most often, a fruitful arena in which Churches and individual Christians can share their lives, views and their faith. There is space for a healthy exchange of views and for debate and disagreement.

Occasionally, there are contributions that may not comply with the Free Church of England Social Media Policy.

This document outlines the process that will be followed when a complaint is received and provides clarity and protection to the subject of the complaint and to the complainant.

The General Secretary receives a complaint and acknowledges it

No further action necessary

The General Secretary is charged with dealing with any 'reputational damage' to the Denomination and is therefore the appropriate person to receive complaints. An initial assessment of the complaint can be made, including some exploration of the identity of the complainant: the response may be that the communication has been received; or may refer the complainant to FCE documents (e.g. if a complaint refers to an exclusively male ministry). In most cases, no further action is necessary.

2 Further investigation by the General Secretary

No further action necessary

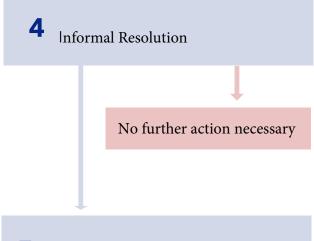
If there are reasonable grounds to believe there is substance to the complaint, the General Secretary will investigate the evidence in greater depth to determine how to proceed. If the material appears to contradict the Social Media Policy it will progress to the next stage. If it has no substance or is evidently a vexatious complaint, no further action will be necessary.

At this stage the subject of the complaint will be made aware that a complaint has been received and (unless there are clear reasons for not divulging the information) the identity of the complainant.

The General Secretary consults with the Diocesan Bishop or the Denominational Safeguarding Officer

No further action necessary

The General Secretary will consult with the appropriate Diocesan Bishop (or the Bishop Primus if a Bishop is the subject of a complaint, or another Bishop if the Bishop Primus is the subject of the complaint) or with the Denominational Safeguarding Officer if the complaint clearly and demonstrably refers to allegations of harm or abuse towards children or vulnerable adults. If it is determined that the complaint has substance the General Secretary will draft a some feedback to the subject of the complaint, outlining any requirements or expectations that have been agreed. The subject of the complaint will be given the opportunity to respond in writing and this will be considered, together with any other relevant information, by the Diocesan Bishop and the General Secretary, to decide whether or not the complaint can be sustained or if no further action is necessary.



If the complaint has not been resolved the Diocesan Bishop (or Bishop Primus) will facilitate an informal meeting to discuss the issues raised in the complaint and attempt to reach a satisfactory conclusion. The Bishop (or Bishop Primus) and the subject of the complaint may be supported by a colleague who will be present as an advisor but not as an advocate.

5 Formal Process Initiated

If there are credible grounds that the complaint constitutes a serious breach of the Social Media Policy and it has not been resolved through the informal meeting, or that the subject of the complaint has brought the Denomination into disrepute there remains the formal process outlined in the Canons. When all other options have been exhausted, the Bishop may instruct the General Secretary to initiate due process after a breach of Canon J.3.2 or 4.

If the complaint is against the General Secretary, the Bishop Primus will receive and progress the complaint.

