

LC06 POLICY AND PROCEDURE – Managing complaints

1. Introduction

This policy and procedure is intended to ensure we manage complaints fairly, efficiently and effectively, and provides an overview of our complaints management system.

2. Terms and definitions

We have adopted the established definitions below¹:

A **complaint** is an expression of dissatisfaction made to or about us, our services, staff/ministry workers or the handling of a complaint where a response or resolution is expected or legally required².

A **dispute** is an unresolved complaint escalated either within or outside of our organisation.

A **grievance** is a formal written statement by an individual staff member about another staff member or a work-related problem.

Feedback includes opinions, comments and expressions of interest or concern to or about us, about our services or complaint handling system where a response is not expected or legally required.

3. Scope

With reference to the definitions above, the audience for this document is anyone wanting to know how we manage complaints, or wanting to make a complaint. The attached form can also be used to provide feedback.

We have internal procedures for staff, ministry leaders and workers, and members to provide:

- detailed information about addressing concerns in church
- guidance for those involved in managing complaints
- procedures relating to grievances.

¹ Complaints-handling: model policy and procedure, developed by Not-for-profit Law at Justice Connect and promoted by the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profit Commission <https://www.acnc.gov.au/tools/templates/complaints-handling-model-policy-and-procedure>

² AS/NZ 10002:2014

4. Roles and responsibilities

To enable fair, effective and efficient complaint handling, relevant roles and responsibilities are outlined below.

4.1 Senior pastor / Chairperson of the Board

- Promote a culture that values complaints and effective resolution
- Support and resource staff and volunteers in their complaint handling roles and responsibilities
- Review complaint trends and issues and support recommendations for improvements
- Report to any governing body on our complaint handling.

4.2 Administration Committee

- Our Administration Committee (Board) are responsible for some areas of church governance such as work health and safety including child protection, and financial management. Complaints relating to these areas may be referred directly to the Committee members responsible.

4.3 Staff and leaders

- Ensure people making complaints are listened to, treated with respect, and assisted to make a complaint in line with our policy and procedures
- Provide information on complaints, and ways to improve our complaints management system
- Implement changes arising from individual complaints and from analysis of complaint data.

4.4 All ministry workers

- Be aware we value complaints and that we have complaint handling policies and procedures
- Direct those wishing to make a complaint to the relevant ministry leader or resources on our website
- Assist and support those handling complaints to resolve matters promptly.

5. Guiding principles

We are committed to seeking and receiving feedback and complaints, and dealing with any concerns raised within a reasonable timeframe. To this end we have a documented complaint management system based on the principles below.

Objective and fair

People making a complaint will be listened to and treated with respect.

We will address each complaint with integrity and in an equitable, objective and unbiased manner. If a complaint is about a person, the complaint will be managed by a different person. Conflicts of interest (actual or perceived) will be managed responsibly.

Where a complaint is about a person (staff or volunteer), we will notify the person that a complaint has been made against them, and ensure reasonable opportunity is given to provide information relevant to the complaint. The exception to this may be where external reporting obligations apply.

In making a decision about a complaint, we will consider all relevant information and ensure the decision is supported by evidence. We will provide reasons for our decision/s and any options for redress or review.

We aim to ensure any person is not adversely affected as a result of making a complaint.

Responsive

Where possible, complaints will be resolved at first contact with us. Where this is not possible, we will promptly acknowledge receipt of the complaints and inform the person who made the complaint of the complaints process including expected timeframes, their likely involvement in the process, and possible outcomes of their complaint.

We will promptly assess and prioritise complaints according to the urgency of the issues raised. We will advise the person making the complaint of our progress, if we are unable to meet our timeframes and the reason for delay, or if we are unable to deal with any part of their complaint and provide advice about where such issues and/or complaints may be directed.

Accessible and flexible

We value receiving complaints as an opportunity to promptly address concerns or issues. To this end, we aim to make our complaint management process known and accessible. We will include information about how to make a complaint on our website, and in key documents such as our Code of Conduct.

We will aim to adopt a flexible complaints handling approach to enhance accessibility for people making complaints and their representatives. Where possible we will aim to accommodate the needs and preferences of the person who made the complaint and, where appropriate, involve them in the resolution process, for example, determining appropriate actions or improvements.

If a complaint involves external agencies, subject to privacy and confidentiality considerations, we will work with other agencies or organisations to ensure communication is clear and coordinated to facilitate an efficient and timely response.

Confidential

We will keep the details of complaints and the fact that they have been made confidential so far as is practical and appropriate. Personal information that identifies individuals will only be disclosed or used by us as permitted under relevant privacy laws, secrecy provisions and confidentiality obligations.

During the investigation, discussion will be limited to those who need to be involved to facilitate complaint resolution and pastoral care of those involved.

6. Unreasonable expectations or conduct

We are committed to being accessible and responsive to all people who approach us with feedback or complaints. However, when people do not respond or participate reasonably in the process, we will clearly communicate what is acceptable and will then manage the situation to ensure the safety and wellbeing of those involved. We will inform people who make complaints to or about us of internal or external review options available to them.

7. Accountability and learning

We will ensure that complaints are recorded so that information can be retrieved for reporting and analysis. We will regularly review complaints to identify trends and inform improvements. An analysis of complaints will be provided to our governing body for review at least annually. We monitor our complaint management system to ensure effectiveness and identify opportunities for improvement.

8. Our complaint management approach

8.1 Levels of complaint handling

We aim to resolve complaints at this level where appropriate. Relevant leaders are given appropriate authority, training and supervision. Where this is not possible, we may decide to escalate the complaint within our organisation for assessment, possible investigation and/or to facilitate a resolution.

Where a person making a complaint is dissatisfied with the outcome of our review of their complaint, they may seek an external review of our decision. We will provide information about external review options which may involve the Lighthouse Church Board of Reference (internal dispute) or the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission (external dispute) or other authority.

8.2 Complaint handling steps

Our complaint management system includes all policies, procedures, practices, staff, and resources used in the management of complaints. Key stages of our complaint management approach are outlined below.

A. Receive the complaint

Unless the complaint is readily addressed and resolved at the point it is raised, we will record the complaint including key details such as contact information of the person making the complaint, the date received, issues raised, outcome expected, and any additional support the person making a complaint may require.

B. Acknowledge the complaint

We will acknowledge receipt of a complaint promptly, usually within five working days. When appropriate we may offer an explanation or apology. This may be by email, by letter or verbally depending on how the complaint was received, the nature of the complaint, our relationship with the person who made the complaint (eg church member, or member of the public), and the needs or preferences of the person making the complaint.

C. Assess and investigate

We will first assess whether the issue raised in the complaint is within our control, and if it is we will decide how it should be managed depending on how significant and/or complicated it is, the effect on the person making the complaint, the risk the issue may pose to others, and whether involvement of other organisations is required. Where appropriate, we will keep the person making the complaint informed of our progress.

D. Determine and communicate outcome

We will make a decision based on all available information and document the reasons for our decision. We will contact the person making the complaint and advise them of the following the outcome of our decisions and the reasons, the resolution we propose or have implemented, and options if they are dissatisfied with the outcome.

4.5 Close the complaint

We will keep records about how we managed the complaint, the outcome, any outstanding actions, the person responsible and the due date.

9. Additional information

Complete the form below to submit a complaint to or about Lighthouse Church.

For further information about how to make a complaint to or about us, or about how we manage complaints, email: admin@lighthouse.net.au

COMPLAINT AND FEEDBACK FORM

Use this form to submit a complaint or feedback to us or about any aspect of our events or activities.

Person making the complaint or providing feedback	
Name _____	Phone _____
Email _____	
I am a: <input type="checkbox"/> visitor or attendee <input type="checkbox"/> member of the public <input type="checkbox"/> Lighthouse member <input type="checkbox"/> Staff member <input type="checkbox"/> other _____	
I would like to: <input type="checkbox"/> Provide feedback <input type="checkbox"/> Make a complaint	
I am submitting this on behalf of: <input type="checkbox"/> myself <input type="checkbox"/> another person _____	
Complaint details	
Date of complaint _____ Date of issue/concern (if relevant) _____	
Outline your complaint providing as much information as possible to help us consider necessary action	
Immediate action	
<input type="checkbox"/> I just wanted to let you know, I don't need or want any action or follow up <input type="checkbox"/> I expect action would be taken, but I don't need to know the outcome <input type="checkbox"/> I would like someone to contact me about my feedback or complaint My preferred method of contact is: <input type="checkbox"/> phone <input type="checkbox"/> email <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	

Please submit your completed form to: admin@lighthouse.net.au

We will respond to your complaint as soon as possible and within five working days from receipt.