

# Southwark Mothers' Union Complaints Procedure 2020

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Author:	Members of the F&A Unit
Approved By:	Finance & Administration Unit Committee
Ratified By:	Board of Trustees
Target Audience:	Southwark Mothers' Union Members
Review Date:	Second year of the Triennium
Responsible for review:	Chair of Finance & Admin Unit

## Dissemination Plan

Audience	Method	Paper or Electronic	Responsible
All members	MU Secretary	Both	Vice President & Branch Leaders
Wider public	Website	Electronic	Website manager

## 1. Introduction

The Southwark Mothers' Union (MU) goal is to see all people enjoying loving, respectful and flourishing relationships. Any concerns or complaints that arise should always be characterised by mutual respect, honesty and a willingness to listen to one another to resolve the situation.

The MU is committed:

- To dealing effectively with any concerns or complaints raised about the way in which it works, what action is taken and/or the services provided.
- To avoid any harassment or victimisation of the complainant

## 2. Purpose and Scope

This complaints procedure seeks to

- Offer guidance for any concern or complaint relating to the Mothers' Union in Southwark, its members, activities and projects.
- Ensure that all complaints are handled fairly, consistently and wherever possible resolved to the complainant's satisfaction.
- Put things right when they have gone wrong, as far as possible, learn from any mistakes and use the information gained to improve future ways of working

### **What counts as a concern / complaint?**

A concern / complaint is a written or verbal expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet about an action, or lack of action, by a person acting on behalf of the MU or about the policies and procedures of the organisation itself. A complaint may include an allegation that a person has behaved in an unacceptable way.

An anonymous concern or complaint will not be investigated under this procedure, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

When the complaint is made by someone who is a paid employee, it is usually referred to as a grievance, and resolution should be sought through the separate Grievance Procedure. A concern or complaint made against someone who is a paid employee should be managed through the Disciplinary Procedure.

If a complaint relates to or includes an allegation that a child or adult who may be vulnerable has been harmed or is at risk of harm, or that an adult or another child may have caused harm to a child or adult who may be vulnerable, it must be responded to through the MU safeguarding procedures for handling allegations of abuse.

If during investigation it appears that the complaint has highlighted a

criminal act then further advice will be sought from the Southwark Diocese and MSH along with referral to the relevant police authorities.

Concerns or complaints should always be brought to the attention of the Mothers' Union as soon as possible. In general, any matter raised more than 3 months after the event will not be considered.

### **3. Informal Problem-solving stage**

The aim always, when responding to concerns / complaints, is to enable them to be resolved informally, speedily and fairly by discussion, problem-solving, mediation and negotiation.

As a first step any concern or complaint should therefore be brought to the attention of the person who is most able to respond. This may be the person who appears to be the cause of the concern or someone responsible for the organisation or project in which the concern arose. If this is difficult to achieve then support is available from the relevant Area Vice President or Unit Leader (if a Diocesan Project)

### **4. Formal procedure for complaints – stage 1**

If the concern / complaint cannot be resolved at a local level then a formal complaint can be submitted in writing (email or letter) to the MU Secretary at [mu@southwark.anglican.org](mailto:mu@southwark.anglican.org). The secretary will bring it to the attention of the Diocesan President who will allocate to a nominated officer to investigate. The complaint will be acknowledged within 2 working days (or as soon after as possible)

The MU Diocesan Chaplain will also be notified of the formal complaint and available to facilitate access to any pastoral care that may be required by all parties.

The person bringing the complaint will have the opportunity to meet with the investigating officer, at a mutually convenient time, where they can state their case. They can also be supported and / or accompanied, at the meeting by a friend or other representative.

After listening to the complainant, the nominated Officer will meet with the person or persons about whom the complaint is made and share with them issues raised in discussion. The person or persons who are the subject of the complaint can also be supported and / or accompanied by a friend or representative. Once both sides have been listened to the investigating officer may then interview any other relevant parties.

The Officer then draws conclusions and informs the complainant and the subject of the complaint of the outcome, ideally within 28 working days of date of the formal complaint (or within an agreed timeframe).

It may be agreed that a joint meeting of the parties concerned would be beneficial. If mediation is required the investigating officer can call on support from other Diocesan officers.

It is important that the complaint is brought to a conclusion at this point whenever possible; however, it is recognised that there may be one or more people who are not content with the final outcome. In situations such as this the individual can seek further pastoral support. If they feel that the process was not in line with Diocesan policy then they have the opportunity to progress to stage 2.

**Note:**

A formal complaint against a Mothers' Union member who is also employed by the MU will be need to be brought directly to the attention of the Diocesan President via the local leader.

Any formal complaint against the Diocesan President should be brought to the attention of the Bishop of Southwark's office.

## **5. Formal procedure for complaints – stage 2**

If after stage 1 the complainant is not satisfied, a further request can be made to review the way the complaint was handled. This should be put in writing to the MU secretary, who will take it to the Diocesan President and Trustee Board.

The Trustee Board will form a panel of three independent members who have not been involved in the process before.

The panel will establish why the complainant continues to feel aggrieved, and receive all the documentation from the previous investigation at stage 1. The panel will then meet with the complainant and his/her supporter, the subject of the complaint and his/her supporter, and the Officer who investigated the complaint at the first stage. Witnesses may be called.

The panel members will then sit alone to consider whether the action taken to resolve the complaint was reasonable, proportionate and in line with the policy. They will form a judgement and make a decision about the complaint. They will inform the complainant, the subject of the complaint and the Officer of the outcome within a month of the complaint being made.

The decision of the panel representing the Trustees will be final.

## 6. Data Protection and confidentiality

Personal data will be required to investigate a complaint, with details provided by the complainant and other people involved in the situation. This will be held securely in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation, and only used to address the complaint. The identity of the person making the complaint will only be made known to those involved in the Complaints Procedure, and will not be revealed to other people or made public unless there are legal requirements to do so. Complaints files will normally be destroyed six years after the complaint has been closed, in a secure manner.

## 7. Unreasonable complaints

Complaints will always be taken seriously. If, however, there are grounds to believe that the complainant is unreasonably vexatious, persistent, harassing or abusive, or not genuinely seeking to have a situation remedied then advice will be taken from Southwark Diocese and MSH.

## 8. Training

Training in mediation, investigation, interviewing and report writing will be provided in different forms - face to face and online. Copies of policy and guidance to be sent to all Branch leaders and Trustees.

## 9. Monitoring Compliance

Element (s) to be monitored	Person (position) responsible for the monitoring	Method	Monitoring frequency	Committee or group monitoring is reported to including responsibility for action plans and changes in practice
Numbers of formal complaints Resolved and unresolved - time frame for complaint. Themes emerging	MU secretary	Annual report	Annual	F&A unit committee

## 10. Associated Documents

Available through branch leaders and trustees

- Safeguarding policy
- Disciplinary and Grievance Policies (for employees)