

Compliments, Concerns and Complaints Policy and Procedure

Full policy

The Trustees and volunteers at Leeds Buddhist Centre aim to act ethically and with integrity. We seek to put into practice Buddhist ethical principles of kindness, generosity, contentment, truthfulness and awareness.

We recognise that it is vital to the wellbeing of the Buddhist centre's community and to all who come to the Buddhist Centre that we recognise and respond to concerns and complaints. We also appreciate compliments and value you getting in touch when you like what is happening. We define these below:

Compliments

We hope that the Buddhist Centre creates a positive context for living a Dharma life in Leeds. Where you have had a positive experience of the Buddhist Centre, please do contact us to let us know the impact our work has had. Please contact the Centre Manager on enquiries@leedsbuddhistcentre.org to send us a compliment.

Concerns and complaints

There is a difference between a concern and a complaint: from time-to-time people may have a concern which may not be a complaint. Therefore, it is helpful to explain the difference between a concern and a complaint:

- A concern may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.
- A complaint may be defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about something said, about actions taken or about a lack of action'.

This policy is designed to address concerns and complaints.

Conflicts

Conflicts between people are probably inevitable. They can take the form of a disagreement or a misunderstanding. They are generally interpersonal arising from a difference in style, opinion or approach. They can contribute to an ongoing difficult relationship or relate to an isolated dispute.

Conflicts can be creative and fruitful. They can also be disruptive and undermining, causing ongoing distress to an individual, a group of people and even the Buddhist Centre as a whole. Though you are welcome to approach a member of the team for help with a conflict, the concerns/complaints procedure may not be applicable. In this case, there may be other methods to resolve difficulties such as mediation.

Overview

Every effort will be taken to treat all those involved fairly and respectfully irrespective of whether they are the Complainant or a person against whom a complaint is being made. The purpose of the policy is to:

1. Restore harmony in the sangha
2. Find a satisfactory resolution of the concern/complaint
3. Uphold the ethical principles of Leeds Buddhist Centre
4. Create an opportunity to learn for all those involved
5. Establish the veracity of the concern/complaint.
6. Prevent gossip
7. Protect the reputation Leeds Buddhist Centre.

The process will be conducted by the Buddhist Centre in a timely way, moving forward with reasonable speed. Complainants will also be required to take part in the process in a timely way, for example, by responding promptly to requests for further communication.

The procedure arising from this policy is exploratory and investigative in nature. The implementation of this policy and procedure does not imply fault or wrongdoing by those against whom a complaint has been made.

Confidentiality

Experience has shown that it is extremely important to share information only with those who need to know. Much disquiet and harm may result if information circulates before the complaint is explored / investigated and the facts are independently established. We therefore will request that everybody involved in the process maintains confidentiality in this regard.

Responsibilities of the Buddhist Centre

The Buddhist Centre Trustees have considered the scope of their responsibilities as they cannot be accountable for all issues that happen at the Buddhist Centre or within the sangha. The extent of the responsibility of the Buddhist Centre will need to be taken on a case-by-case basis and this is reflected in the process steps below.

Raising a concern

Most concerns at the Buddhist Centre can be resolved directly in discussion with the person leading the activity or event. The first step is for an individual to attempt to resolve the problem in dialogue. In some cases, it won't be clear who to speak to. In this case, you can contact the Chair or the Safeguarding Trustee and they will suggest the person to address the issue you have raised.

You can contact the Centre on enquiries@leedsbuddhistcentre.org for the attention of the Chair or safeguarding Trustee. You can simply ask the Chair or safeguarding Trustee to contact you without going into the details.

Informal complaints procedure

If you would like to enter the informal complaints procedure, contact the Chair (or, if the complaint relates to the Chair, the safeguarding Trustee). The first step will be to assess whether the Centre can take responsibility for the complaint. It may be possible for the Buddhist Centre to help but without feeling accountable, nonetheless. In some cases, there might be a more appropriate person or group where the complaint should be taken and if that is the case, the Complainant will be re-directed to them. Once that assessment has been done and the Centre feels it can respond, the Chair/Safeguarding Trustee will find a member of the team who is most acquainted with the area of work that the matter relates to. They become the Complaint Coordinator. All efforts will be made to assist a Complainant in resolving the complaint informally, prior to initiation of the formal complaints procedure.

A complaint may be made verbally or in writing. If, after discussing it with the complaint co-ordinator, the Complainant feels satisfied, the complaint need go no further, although a record of the complaint will be made for future reference in a secure filing system.

Formal Complaints Policy and Procedure

If the complaint has not been satisfactorily addressed at the informal level, or it is deemed too serious to be dealt with at that level; the formal complaints procedure can be used.

If the issue cannot be resolved directly or informally, then it should be brought to the attention of the Chair or, if the complaint relates to the Chair, the safeguarding Trustee.

The complaint should be put in writing and this will be acknowledged, in writing, upon receipt. It's helpful if the Complainant gives as much detail as possible, including the dates, who was involved and all the circumstances leading up to their complaint being made. Please also attach copies of any previous correspondence sent and/or responses received that is relevant to the complaint being made.

The Complaint Co-ordinator (appointed during the initial ("informal") stage of this procedure will interview the Complainant, the person about whom the complaint has been made, and any other relevant witnesses, face-to-face or by phone, and will record all interviews in writing.

The records should be signed by the interviewee wherever this is possible. An advocate or supporter may accompany the Complainant to any meeting about the issue. This individual must not be a Trustee of the Buddhist Centre.

The person(s) against whom the complaint has been made will be given the opportunity to identify a member of the sangha to support them and act as an advocate on their behalf throughout the exploration / investigation of the complaint. This individual must not be a Trustee of the Buddhist Centre.

The Complaint Co-ordinator will provide a written report containing a brief summary together with their conclusions. The report should include a summary of the complaint and findings, and recommendations for any further action, changes in policy, recommendations for improvements, etc.

The Chair, plus two other Trustees, will discuss the written report. Notes of the interviews the complaint co-ordinator has conducted can be made available to these three Trustees on request.

The Chair will write to the Complainant explaining the findings and this communication will include details of the appeals procedure. The person who has been complained about will also receive feedback in writing. The rest of the Trustees will be informed of the issue at this point if it hasn't been necessary to inform them earlier in the process.

Where the complaint is found to be valid, efforts will be made to resolve it to the satisfaction of the Complainant and the Trustees.

Efforts will also be made to ensure that the complaint leads to individual and collective learning that minimises the possibility of similar mistakes or harmful behaviours being repeated in the future. In some circumstances, this might require a decision by the Trustees of the Leeds Buddhist Centre.

Where individuals in the local sangha are in conflict as a result of a complaint they will, in most instances, be expected to engage in constructive dialogue with each other in order to restore harmony and prevent divisions within the sangha.

Where required the Leeds Buddhist Centre will offer support to source and arrange independent mediation.

Where a complaint is found to be valid, the person(s) against whom the complaint was made will be expected and encouraged to address their ethical behaviour with other people:

If an Order member, address their ethical behaviour within their chapter, with their preceptors and/or with the regional Order Convenor;

If they are a Mitra seeking ordination, with those who have direct responsibility for their ordination process; or with the appropriate Mitra Convenor if they are a friend or Mitra not seeking ordination.

In some instances, the Trustees may decide to form an ethics panel which could impose sanctions, such as a suspension or expulsion from the Leeds Buddhist Centre. This will only be considered in exceptional circumstances and will require a decision by the Trustees of Leeds Buddhist Centre.

Note that if the Chair or any other Trustee is implicated in the complaint they will be barred from the process / discussion.

Appeal process

If the above measures do not satisfactorily resolve the complaint from the Complainant's point of view, the Complainant can write to the Chair requesting an appeal. The Chair will initiate a meeting of three Trustees not so far actively involved in the process to form an appeal panel.

They will review the documentation of the case so far. The Complainant will then be invited to make written or spoken statements to the appeal panel. The Complainant should be fully informed about the members of the appeal panel and aware of their right to be accompanied by another person if/when meeting with the panel.

The decision of the appeal panel is final.

Reasonable adjustments

In line with the Charity Commission guidance, we are committed to equal opportunities and our aim is to make our complaints policy fair and accessible to everyone we deal with. We will take reasonable steps to accommodate any reasonable adjustments you may need, to enable you to access this policy or receive responses to complaints in other formats and provide such assistance as you may reasonably require.

Recording complaints

Complaint details, outcomes and actions taken are recorded by us and used for our learning. We will handle your information so that it is only processed and retained appropriately and legally, in line with the Data Protection Act 2018 and United Kingdom General Data Protection Regulation and subsequent revisions, amendments and replacement.

Multiple complaints

Individuals who make repeated serious complaints or allegations that are subsequently found to be unsubstantiated, spurious and/or malicious will be expected and encouraged to explore and address this issue. They could do this with their chapter, preceptors or regional Order convenor (if they are an Order member), with those who have direct responsibility for their ordination process (if they are a Mitra seeking ordination), or with one of the Mitra Convenors (if they are a friend or Mitra not seeking ordination). In some instances, the Trustees may decide to form an ethics panel which could impose sanctions such as a suspension or expulsion from the Leeds Buddhist Centre. This will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.

Confidentiality

Experience has shown that it is extremely important to share information only with those who need to know. Much disquiet and harm may result if information circulates before the complaint is explored / investigated and the facts are independently established. We therefore will request that everybody involved in the process maintains confidentiality in this regard.

Providing care for all involved

We need to make sure we're providing care for all involved. Harm and abuse, and allegations of harm and abuse, have deep and wide-reaching implications. Wherever possible ensure that friends or sangha members are providing "pastoral" support for victims, the alleged perpetrator and those involved in the investigation. (The term "pastoral" support has been used in this context to distinguish it from the way "support needs" is meant under the Care Act 2014.)

Good practice recommends that different people are allocated for pastoral, investigation and decision-making roles, and even the pastoral roles supporting the victim and alleged perpetrators are held by separate individuals. This helps us make fairer decisions.

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed every 5 years, or sooner if necessary. The next scheduled review date will be March 2030.

We will ensure that all Trustees, volunteers and any staff are aware of the complaints procedure, its significance and their responsibility for fulfilling its commitments.

Agreed by Leeds Buddhist Centre Trustees