

North London Buddhist Centre: Complaints Policy

The North London Buddhist Centre (NLBC) aims to act ethically and with integrity, practicing the Buddhist principles of kindness, generosity, contentment, truthfulness and awareness. We recognise that responding effectively to conflict, concerns and complaints is important.

We distinguish between four types of issues/situations:

Issue	Definition	Primary Resolution
Conflict	Interpersonal disagreements or misunderstandings (often arising from a difference in style, opinion or approach).	Invitation for direct personal dialogue.
Concern	An expression of worry or doubt over an issue where reassurances are sought.	Discussion with activity leader or contact Centre Manager. <i>(Order members may take concerns to the NLBC President).</i>
Informal Complaint	Dissatisfaction. Likely with actions, lack of action, poor communication or harsh speech.	Informal discussion with Centre manager or Chair.
Formal Complaint	Alleged harm, serious ethical breach, issues with wider implications for safety and governance. <i>(Or in instances where an informal resolution has been attempted but failed, or is clearly inappropriate).</i>	Formal investigation by appointed complaints coordinator followed by Trustee panel review and decision.

Conflicts & Concerns

Whenever possible, you should attempt to resolve problems directly with those concerned. If you are unsure who to speak to you can contact: manager@northlondonbuddhistcentre.com.

Initial Complaint & Informal Process

Step 1: Complaint Made

If the issue can't be resolved directly, a complaint may be made verbally or in writing to the centre manager and/or Chair. (their contact information is in the Appendix below).

Note: You can write to the Centre Secretary instead if the complaint is about the Chair.

Step 2: Initial Assessment

The receiver of the complaint will then look at the issue to decide:

- If the issue raised is a conflict, a concern or a complaint?
- Does the NLBC/Nalanda Trust have responsibility for the matter?
- What is the most appropriate route for addressing the issue?

This initial review decides if the issue is suitable for our complaints procedure (below), not whether the complaint itself is valid.

Step 3: Informal Complaint Discussion

If the outcome is to proceed, an opportunity for an informal discussion will follow. All efforts will be made by the NLBC to assist in resolving complaints and concerns informally.

Step 4: End of Informal Process

If, after discussing it informally, the complainant is satisfied, **it needs go no further.**

Formal Complaints Procedure

If the complaint has not been satisfactorily addressed informally, or it is deemed (by the NLBC) to be too serious to be dealt with that way, we will use our formal complaints procedure. Every effort will be taken to treat all those involved (both the complainant or a person against whom a complaint is being made) fairly and respectfully.

The purpose of our formal complaints procedure is to:

- Establish the facts
- Uphold ethics
- Prevent gossip
- Restore harmony
- Protect reputations
- Ensure accountability
- Enable learning

Step 1: Written formal complaint provided

The complaint will now need to be put in writing to the Chair (or to Council Secretary if the complaint is about Chair). It's helpful if the complainant gives as much detail as possible (ie. the dates, who is involved and all the circumstances leading up to their complaint).

Step 2: Complaint co-ordinator appointed

The Chair (or Council Secretary if the complaint is about the Chair) will appoint a complaint co-ordinator. The complaint co-ordinator (whether they are a member of the centre team, a Trustee or a local order member) are appointed to deal with the specific complaint only.

Step 3: Investigation by complaint co-ordinator

The Complaint Co-ordinator will gather facts by:

- Interviewing the complainant and relevant witnesses.
- Interviewing the 'Respondent'. If the complaint is against a person, that individual is

interviewed or if it concerns a facility or policy (e.g. building access), the staff member or trustee responsible for that area is interviewed.

- Summarising all interviews in writing; which are then reviewed and agreed to be accurate by the interviewees.

Both the complainant and respondent may be accompanied by a single supporter/advocate (who can not be an NLBC Trustee) to any meetings/interviews.

Step 4: Report, Review & Communication

- **The Report:** The Co-ordinator provides a written report summarising the complaint, the investigation, their findings and their recommendations (ie. further action, changes in policy, recommendations for improvements/learnings).
- **The Panel:** The Chair and two other Trustees review the report. If the complaint is about the chair, this is done by the Secretary or President plus two Trustees
- **Notification:** The Chair (or the Secretary/President plus two Trustees if the Chair is involved) writes to the complainant and person complained about (if relevant) with the findings and appeal details.

Step 5: Outcomes & Accountability

Where the complaint is found to be valid, efforts will be made to resolve it to the satisfaction of the complainant and the trustees panel. The Trustees will determine the appropriate response, which may include:

- **Remediation:** Actions may include apologies, acknowledging wrongdoing, making amends or seeking independent mediation to restore harmony.
- **Ethical Practice:** 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 behavior within their relevant spiritual context
 - Order Members: Within their chapter, with their preceptors and/or Kalyana mitras, or with the regional Order convenor.
 - GFR Mitras: With those responsible for their ordination process.
 - Mitras: With the appropriate Mitra convenor.
- **Organisational Learning:** The Centre will implement any recommended changes to policies or practices to prevent recurrence.
- **Sanctions:** In exceptional circumstances, the Council of Trustees may decide to form an ethics panel to impose sanctions (such as suspension or expulsion from the NLBC).

Step 5a: Appeal

If the complainant remains unsatisfied, they may request an appeal in writing to the Chair. 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 and the complainant will be invited to make written or oral submission to the appeal panel. **Their decision is then final.**

Appendix

Key Contacts:

Centre Manager: manager@northlondonbuddhistcentre.com

Centre Chair: chair@northlondonbuddhistcentre.com

Council Secretary: council@northlondonbuddhistcentre.com

Note: Council secretary is only to be contacted when a complaint is made about the Chair.

Important Considerations:

- **Process Length:** The NLBC will conduct the process promptly and with reasonable speed. Complainants are also required to respond promptly to communication.
- **Safeguarding:** Any matters relating to potential safeguarding issues will immediately trigger the NLBC's Safeguarding Policies.
- **Criminality:** If an investigation reveals a potential criminal matter, it will be referred to the police. Any internal procedures or investigations may be paused pending police advice.
- **Confidentiality:** To prevent harm and gossip, we request that all parties maintain confidentiality. However, we are committed to ensuring no one feels isolated:
 - Both the complainant and respondent are encouraged to identify a member of the Sangha to act as a supporter/advocate for them (they cannot be an NLBC Trustee).
- **Multiple or Malicious Complaints:** If repeated allegations are found to be unsubstantiated or malicious, the individual will be encouraged to address this behaviour. In exceptional cases, Trustees may consider sanctions for the individual, including suspension or expulsion from attending events at the NLBC.
- **Reasonable Adjustments:** In line with Charity Commission guidance, we will take steps to make this policy accessible to all, providing assistance or alternative formats as required.
- **Data Protection:** Records are handled and retained in line with the Data Protection Act 2018.

Policy Review Date: Review every 4 years.