Dorset County Association of Church Bell Ringers

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Dorset County Association of Church Bell Ringers
Bell Restoration Fund is a registered charity. Charity number 294239

Conduct and Compliance Policy

Version History

Version	Approved by	Date Approved	Minute Ref	Latest Review By	Review Date	Minute Ref
1.0	DCA Committee	26/07/26	Item 7	DCA Committee	26/07/26	Item 7

Next Review Due by July 2029.

1. Introduction and Scope

1.1 Purpose

The Dorset County Association of Church Bell Ringers ("the Association") is committed to fostering an environment in which every individual is treated with **empathy, courtesy and respect**. These three principles underpin this Policy and are expected to guide the conduct of all members in every aspect of the Association's activities.

This Policy establishes the standards of conduct expected of those participating in the Association's activities and sets out the procedures for managing concerns, complaints, disciplinary matters and appeals. It is intended to promote good governance, encourage the early resolution of concerns wherever appropriate.

This Policy forms part of the Association's governance framework and should be read alongside the Association's Rules, Standing Orders and other policies adopted by the Committee. Where any inconsistency arises, the Rules shall take precedence, followed by the Standing Orders.

1.2 Purpose of Each Section

This Policy is arranged into the following sections:

- **Section 2 – Equality, Inclusion and Fair Treatment** establishes the Association's commitment to equal treatment, inclusion and fair participation for all members.
- **Section 3 – Standards of Conduct** sets out the standards of behaviour expected of all members, founded upon the principles of empathy, courtesy and respect.
- **Section 4 – Conflicts of Interest, Meeting Protocol and Governance Roles** establishes the governance standards that support fair, transparent and accountable decision-making.
- **Section 5 – Complaints Procedure** explains how concerns and complaints may be raised, considered and investigated.
- **Section 6 – Compliance, Enforcement and Disciplinary Procedure** sets out the action that may be taken where complaints are upheld and the principles governing disciplinary decisions.
- **Section 7 – Appeals** provides a fair and transparent process for appealing decisions made under this Policy.
- **Section 8 – Review** explains how this Policy will be maintained and kept up to date.

1.3 Adoption of National Standards

As an affiliated society of the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers (CCCBR), the Association supports nationally recognised standards of conduct for bell ringing.

1.4 Scope

This Policy applies to all members of the Association, including Life Members, officers, committee members and volunteers acting on behalf of the Association.

Members are expected to comply with this Policy whenever they participate in, organise or represent the Association's activities, or where their conduct could reasonably be regarded as affecting the Association's reputation, governance or proper operation.

Nothing in this Policy overrides the Association's Rules or any applicable legal or regulatory requirement.

1.5 Guiding Principles

In administering this Policy, the Association shall seek to:

- act fairly, consistently and impartially;
- uphold the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness;
- promote empathy, courtesy and respect in all Association activities;
- encourage the informal resolution of concerns wherever appropriate;
- protect the reputation and integrity of the Association;
- make decisions that are proportionate, evidence-based and properly recorded; and
- maintain the confidence of members through transparent and accountable governance.

1.6 Definitions

For the purposes of this Policy:

- **Association** means the Dorset County Association of Church Bell Ringers.
- **Committee** means the management committee of the Association constituted in accordance with the Rules.
- **Officer** means any person elected or appointed to an office established by the Rules or Standing Orders.
- **Member** means any person holding membership of the Association.
- **Complainant** means the member submitting a formal complaint under Section 5.
- **Respondent** means the person against whom a complaint has been made.
- **Natural justice** means the principles that a person shall be informed of the case against them, given a reasonable opportunity to respond, and have the matter determined fairly by an impartial decision-maker.

2. Equality, Inclusion and Fair Treatment

2.1 Equal Treatment

The Association is committed to fostering an environment in which every individual is treated with **empathy, courtesy and respect** and is able to participate fully and fairly in the life of the Association.

The Association will not unlawfully discriminate against any person on the grounds of any protected characteristic recognised in law, including:

- age;
- disability;
- gender reassignment;
- marriage or civil partnership;
- pregnancy or maternity;
- race, including colour, nationality and ethnic or national origin;
- religion or belief;
- sex; or
- sexual orientation.

2.2 Application

The principles set out in this section apply to all aspects of the Association's activities, including:

- membership;
- elections and appointments;
- participation in meetings, events and ringing activities;
- volunteering;
- training and development; and
- decision-making by the Committee.

All decisions shall be based on relevant considerations and shall not be influenced by prejudice, favouritism or unlawful discrimination.

2.3 Member Conduct

Members are expected to demonstrate **empathy, courtesy and respect** in all their interactions and to contribute to an environment that is welcoming, inclusive and supportive.

Bullying, harassment, victimisation, intimidation and discriminatory behaviour are incompatible with the Association's values and will not be tolerated.

Differences of opinion are inevitable within any organisation and should be expressed constructively, recognising that disagreement never justifies discourtesy or disrespect.

2.4 Reasonable Adjustments

Where reasonably practicable, the Association will seek to remove unnecessary barriers to participation and will consider reasonable adjustments that enable individuals to take part in its activities.

Members are encouraged to discuss any adjustments they may require with an appropriate officer so that suitable arrangements can be considered.

2.5 Whistleblowing and External Reporting

Nothing in this policy prevents members from raising genuine concerns with appropriate external organisations or authorities. Members should ensure that any representations made are honest, accurate, evidence-based and made in good faith, and should clearly distinguish personal opinion from statements made on behalf of the Association.

3. Standards of Conduct

3.1 Adoption of the CCCBR Code for Ringing

As an affiliated society of the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers (CCCBR), the Association adopts the CCCBR Code for Ringing as the primary standard of conduct for all Association activities.

The version of the Code published on the CCCBR website on the date this Policy is adopted is incorporated into this Policy by reference. Unless the Committee determines otherwise, any subsequent revisions published by the CCCBR shall automatically become the standard of conduct expected within the Association.

The current version of the CCCBR Code for Ringing is available at:
https://cccbr.org.uk/bellringing/code-for-ringing/

3.2 Expected Standards of Behaviour

Members are expected to:

- uphold the principles of **empathy, courtesy and respect**;
- support a welcoming, inclusive and safe environment;
- act honestly and with integrity;
- comply with this Policy and the Association's other governing documents;
- respect decisions properly made under the Association's governing documents;
- raise concerns constructively and through the appropriate procedures;
- avoid behaviour likely to bring the Association into disrepute; and
- support the safe enjoyment and development of bell ringing.

3.3 Unacceptable Behaviour

Behaviour inconsistent with the Association's values includes, but is not limited to:

- bullying, harassment or intimidation;
- discrimination or victimisation;
- abusive, threatening or offensive behaviour;
- deliberate disruption of Association activities or meetings;
- misuse of confidential information;
- knowingly making false or malicious allegations;
- knowingly making false or misleading representations about the Association, its governance, its officers or its decisions, or purporting to act or speak on behalf of the Association without proper authority; or
- conduct that could reasonably damage the reputation, governance or effective operation of the Association.

4. Conflicts of Interest, Meeting Protocol and Governance Roles

4.1 Definition of a Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest arises where a person's personal, financial or other interests could reasonably be perceived as influencing their judgement or actions on behalf of the Association.

Examples include:

- a personal or financial interest in a matter under consideration;
- a close personal or family relationship that is relevant to the matter being decided;
- involvement with another organisation whose interests overlap with those of the Association; or
- any other circumstance in which an individual could reasonably be perceived to gain a personal benefit from an Association decision.

Membership of the same tower, marriage, civil partnership or another close personal relationship does not, of itself, constitute a conflict of interest. Such relationships need only be declared where they are relevant to the matter under consideration.

4.2 Declaration of Interests

Where a matter under consideration gives rise to an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest, the individual concerned shall declare that conflict as soon as it becomes apparent.

Declarations shall normally be made at the relevant meeting, or in advance where an ongoing interest is known, and shall be recorded in the minutes. The Committee may maintain a register of interests where appropriate.

4.3 Management of Conflicts

Following a declaration of interest, the Committee shall determine the appropriate action.

This may include requiring the individual to:

- take no part in discussion;
- abstain from voting;
- withdraw from the meeting for the relevant item; or
- comply with any other proportionate arrangement considered appropriate.

In reaching its decision, the Committee shall have regard to the nature of the conflict and the need to ensure that decisions are, and are seen to be, fair, impartial and in the best interests of the Association.

4.4 Meeting Protocol

Committee meetings shall be conducted in a manner that promotes fairness, transparency and effective decision-making.

In particular:

- declarations of interest shall form part of the agenda;
- declarations and any action taken shall be recorded in the minutes;
- members shall respect the authority of the Chair in conducting meetings; and
- discussions shall be conducted with empathy, courtesy and respect.

4.5 Financial Governance

The Association shall maintain appropriate financial controls to support good governance, transparency and accountability.

Where reasonably practicable:

- payments shall require dual authorisation;
- authorised bank signatories should not be members of the same household;
- an authorised signatory should not approve a payment made directly to themselves where another authorised signatory is available; and
- financial oversight shall not rest solely with one individual.

Detailed financial procedures shall be set out in the Association's Standing Orders or Financial Management Policy.

4.6 Governance Roles and Separation of Duties

The Association recognises that, as a volunteer organisation, individuals may from time to time hold more than one office or role. Where this occurs, the Committee shall ensure that appropriate safeguards, oversight and separation of duties are maintained. Particular regard shall be had to the financial controls set out in Section 4.5.

5. Complaints Procedure

5.1 Informal Resolution

Members are encouraged, where appropriate, to raise concerns directly with the person concerned.

Many issues can be resolved through discussion, clarification or apology.

Where informal resolution is successful, no further action shall normally be taken.

Nothing in this section prevents a formal complaint being made where informal resolution is inappropriate or unsuccessful.

5.2 Formal Complaints

Formal complaints shall be submitted in writing to the Secretary.

Where the complaint concerns the Secretary, it shall be submitted to the Chair.

Complaints shall normally be submitted within **three months** of the events giving rise to the complaint. The Committee may consider complaints outside this period where it considers there are exceptional circumstances.

Receipt of a formal complaint shall be acknowledged within ten days, and the Committee shall be notified of the complaint within the same period.

Only members of the Association may submit a formal complaint under this procedure[1].

5.3 Consideration and Right to Reply

The Committee shall determine how a complaint is to be handled, which may include informal resolution or investigation.

Where an investigation is required, the respondent shall be informed of the substance of the complaint and given a reasonable opportunity to respond before any decision is made.

The respondent shall also be entitled to:

- receive a written summary of the allegations;
- submit evidence and identify relevant witnesses;
- respond in writing, in person, or both;
- be accompanied at any meeting by another member or other person agreed by the Committee or Investigating Officers; and
- have the matter determined fairly on the basis of all available evidence.

Where appropriate, the Committee may appoint two impartial Investigating Officers.

5.4 Investigation

Investigations shall be conducted fairly and impartially in accordance with the principles of natural justice and with **empathy, courtesy and respect**.

No person with an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest shall take part in the investigation.

Following an investigation, the Investigating Officers shall produce a written report setting out the facts established, the evidence considered, their findings and any recommendations. The Committee shall not determine a complaint until it has considered the findings of any investigation it has commissioned.

5.5 Committee Determination

The Committee shall consider the investigation report and determine whether the complaint is:

- upheld;
- partially upheld; or
- not upheld.

Both parties shall be notified of the decision and the reasons for it.

Where a complaint is upheld or partially upheld, any resulting action shall be taken under Section 6.

[1] Nothing in this section prevents the Committee from initiating a complaint where information comes to its attention that reasonably indicates a serious breach of this Policy.

6. Compliance and Action

6.1 Principles

This section does not apply to administrative suspensions or safeguarding actions taken under the Association's Rules, Standing Orders or Safeguarding Policy.

Where a complaint is upheld or partially upheld, any action taken shall be:

- proportionate to the findings;
- based on evidence considered in the investigation;
- applied consistently and fairly;
- consistent with the Association's Rules and governing documents; and
- consistent with **empathy, courtesy and respect**.

No action shall be taken unless the individual concerned has been given a fair opportunity to respond to the complaint and any findings arising from the investigation.

The reasons for any action shall be recorded.

6.2 Action in Respect of Members

The Committee may take any of the following actions:

- no further sanction;
- advice, guidance or informal resolution;
- verbal or written warning;
- request for apology or remedial action; or
- recommendations for procedural or governance improvements.

Where necessary, matters may be referred to a General Meeting in accordance with the Rules.

6.3 Action in Respect of Officers

Where a complaint concerning an officer is upheld, the Committee may apply any of the actions available under Section 6.2.

Where appropriate, the Committee may recommend removal from office to a General Meeting in accordance with the Rules.

6.4 External Referral

Nothing in this Policy prevents referral of matters to appropriate external statutory or safeguarding authorities where there is a legal, safeguarding, or regulatory requirement to do so, or where the Committee considers such referral necessary in the interests of safeguarding, compliance with the law, or the proper discharge of its legal or regulatory responsibilities.

6.5 Records and Confidentiality

All complaint outcomes and actions shall be recorded and treated as confidential, shared only where necessary for the operation of this Policy or where otherwise authorised by law.

7. Appeals

7.1 Right of Appeal

A member who is the subject of a complaint may appeal against the outcome of the investigation or any action taken under Section 6.

The purpose of an appeal is to determine whether the process was fair, whether relevant evidence was considered, and whether the outcome was reasonable.

7.2 Grounds for Appeal

An appeal may only be made on one or more of the following grounds:

- a significant procedural irregularity;
- failure to consider relevant evidence;
- new evidence that could not reasonably have been presented earlier;
- the outcome was disproportionate; or
- the decision was unreasonable on the evidence available.

7.3 Submission of Appeal

Appeals shall be submitted in writing to the Secretary within **28 days** of notification of the decision.

Where the appeal concerns the Secretary, it shall be submitted to the Chair.

Receipt of an appeal shall be acknowledged within ten days, and the Committee shall be notified within the same period.

7.4 Appeal Process

The Committee shall first determine whether valid grounds exist.

If not, the appeal may be dismissed with reasons.

If valid, an Appeal Panel of at least three members with no prior involvement shall be appointed.

The Panel may:

- review the evidence considered during the original investigation;
- consider new evidence relevant to the appeal;
- seek clarification; and
- hold hearings if necessary.

The appellant shall be given a reasonable opportunity to present their case.

The Panel may:

- uphold the decision;
- vary the outcome;
- overturn the decision; or
- refer the matter for further investigation.

A written decision with reasons shall be issued.

7.5 Finality

The Appeal Panel’s decision is final within the Association’s internal procedures.

This Policy does not affect any external legal rights.

8. Review

8.1 Review of this Policy

This Policy shall be reviewed by the Committee at least once every three years to ensure that it remains effective, proportionate and consistent with the Association's Rules, Standing Orders and governance arrangements.

The Committee may undertake an earlier review where it considers this necessary, including where there are significant changes to:

- the Association's Rules or Standing Orders;
- legislation or regulatory requirements;
- the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers' Code for Ringing or other guidance adopted by the Association;
- recognised good governance practice; or
- the practical operation of this Policy, where experience indicates that amendments would improve its effectiveness.

Any amendments approved by the Committee shall take effect immediately unless the Rules or another governing document requires approval by a General Meeting.