



TOBAR MHUIRE

RETREAT CENTRE & MONASTERY

EXTERNAL COMPLAINTS POLICY

For visitors, retreatants, members of the public and external stakeholders

Policy Owner	Tobar Mhuire
Approved by	_____
Date Approved	_____
Review Date	_____

1. Purpose

Tobar Mhuire is committed to providing a welcoming, respectful, safe and professional environment for everyone who visits, uses its facilities, attends retreats or events, or otherwise engages with its services and activities.

This policy provides a fair, accessible and proportionate process for raising, considering and resolving external complaints. It is intended to support early resolution where possible, fair investigation where necessary, organisational learning and appropriate accountability.

The making of a complaint does not, in itself, establish that wrongdoing has occurred.

2. Scope

This policy applies to complaints made by:

- members of the public and visitors;
- retreatants and participants in activities or events;
- groups or organisations using Tobar Mhuire's buildings, grounds or facilities;
- parents, schools and community organisations;
- contractors, service providers and other external stakeholders;
- any other external person directly affected by Tobar Mhuire's services or activities.

A complaint may concern a service, facility, activity, decision or omission of Tobar Mhuire, or the conduct of an employee, volunteer, contractor or other person acting on behalf of Tobar Mhuire.

3. Matters Outside this Policy

This procedure will not normally be used for:

- an employee's complaint or grievance about their own employment, which should be dealt with under the relevant employee procedure;
- employee disciplinary matters;
- safeguarding concerns requiring immediate action under safeguarding procedures;
- whistleblowing or protected disclosures which fall within a separate whistleblowing procedure;

- matters subject to active police investigation or court proceedings where continuing the complaints process could prejudice those proceedings;
- matters which Tobar Mhuire is required to refer to another authority, regulator, insurer or professional adviser.

Tobar Mhuire may pause or adapt its complaints process where another procedure or external investigation takes priority.

4. Who or What Is the Complaint Against?

A complainant should clearly identify who or what the complaint concerns. Where the complaint is about an individual, the person's name should be provided where known, together with their role or sufficient information to identify them.

The complaint should, where possible, state:

- what happened and the specific action, conduct, decision or omission complained about;
- the date, approximate time and location;
- who was present or may have witnessed the matter;
- which parts were personally witnessed or experienced and which were learned from another person or source;
- why the complainant considers the matter unsatisfactory or inappropriate;
- whether the issue has already been raised and, if so, with whom;
- the evidence relied upon; and
- the outcome or remedy being sought.

Tobar Mhuire may ask for clarification or further information before deciding whether and how the matter can be investigated.

5. How to Make a Complaint

All external complaints must be submitted through the Tobar Mhuire External Complaints Policy framework and must provide the information required by this policy. A concern, allegation or criticism communicated outside this framework — including through social media, online reviews, informal messages or third-party commentary — will not ordinarily be accepted or processed as a formal complaint under this policy.

Where a person wishes Tobar Mhuire to investigate a matter formally, the complaint must be submitted using the Complaint Form at Appendix 1 or in a written format containing the same required information. Tobar Mhuire may ask a complainant to resubmit or complete the prescribed information before the formal complaints process begins. This requirement does not prevent Tobar Mhuire from acting immediately on information that raises a safeguarding concern, an alleged criminal offence, a serious risk to safety, or another matter which requires referral or action outside the complaints procedure.

HOW TO SUBMIT A FORMAL COMPLAINT

By hand:

Submit the complaint to Reception at Tobar Mhuire,
for the attention of Máire Thompson (Management Team).

By email:

A formal complaint to Tobar Mhuire should be addressed for the attention of Máire Thompson
(Complaints Officer / Management Team) and emailed to:
secretary@tobarmhuire.com

Only complaints submitted within this policy framework will ordinarily be accepted and processed as formal complaints.

Reasonable assistance will be offered where a person has difficulty making a complaint in writing because of disability, accessibility needs or other appropriate circumstances.

Anonymous complaints may be considered where sufficient credible information is available, but anonymity may substantially limit Tobar Mhuire's ability to investigate or establish the facts.

6. Complaints About an Employee, Volunteer or Other Individual

Where a complaint concerns an employee, volunteer, contractor or other person associated with Tobar Mhuire, the matter will be handled fairly and impartially. There will be no presumption of wrongdoing merely because a complaint has been made.

Subject to safeguarding, legal, confidentiality or other compelling considerations, the person complained about will normally be informed of the substance of the allegation, given sufficient information to understand it, and afforded a reasonable opportunity to respond and identify relevant evidence or witnesses.

Where an external complaint raises a potential employment or disciplinary issue, Tobar Mhuire may conclude or separate the external complaints process and address the employment matter under the appropriate internal procedure. The complainant will not normally be entitled to confidential details of any employment or disciplinary action.

7. Online, Social Media and Digital Material

Tobar Mhuire recognises that complaints or supporting information may involve Facebook, Instagram, X, online forums, review sites, websites, email, WhatsApp or other messaging services, photographs, video, audio recordings, screenshots or other digital material.

Digital or online material may be submitted as evidence. Where possible, the complainant should identify the platform or source, account or page, date of publication or receipt, and provide a screenshot, copy or other reliable record.

The publication of an allegation, criticism, review or comment online does not automatically constitute the submission of a formal complaint to Tobar Mhuire. A person seeking a formal investigation should normally submit the matter directly under this policy with sufficient particulars to allow it to be assessed.

The existence or repetition of an allegation online does not establish that it is true. Tobar Mhuire will assess relevant digital material alongside other available evidence and will not ordinarily investigate rumour, speculation or unsupported online allegations solely because they have been published or circulated.

Tobar Mhuire may preserve relevant digital material for legitimate complaint-handling, safeguarding, legal, insurance or regulatory purposes, subject to applicable data-protection requirements. Nothing in this policy prevents appropriate action where online activity raises concerns about threats, harassment, safeguarding, confidentiality, data protection, criminal conduct or safety.

8. Confidentiality, Privacy and Information Sharing

Complaints will be handled sensitively and information will normally be shared only with persons who reasonably need it to assess, investigate, determine or advise upon the complaint, or where disclosure is otherwise required or permitted by law.

Absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Fair investigation may require relevant allegations or information to be put to the person complained about or to witnesses. Records will be handled and retained in accordance with applicable data-protection requirements and Tobar Mhuire's record-management arrangements.

9. Stage One - Early Resolution

Where appropriate, Tobar Mhuire will seek to resolve a concern promptly and informally. This may include clarification, an explanation, correction of a misunderstanding, acknowledgement of an error, an apology where appropriate, or reasonable corrective action.

A serious, complex or sensitive matter may proceed directly to formal investigation.

10. Stage Two - Formal Investigation

All formal external complaints will, at the initial investigation stage, be referred to and investigated by the Complaints Officer, Maire Thompson. The Complaints Officer will assess the issues raised, seek any clarification required, gather and consider relevant evidence, obtain a response from the person complained about where appropriate, speak with relevant witnesses and review applicable records, policies or procedures.

Where the Complaints Officer has a material conflict of interest, is the subject of the complaint, or where another compelling reason makes it inappropriate for her to investigate, Tobar Mhuire will appoint another suitably impartial person to undertake the investigation.

Timeframes. Tobar Mhuire will acknowledge receipt of a formal complaint in writing within 10 working days. Tobar Mhuire will aim to complete the formal investigation and issue its written outcome within 25 working days of receipt of the complaint. These are maximum target timescales, and complaints will be progressed sooner wherever reasonably practicable. Where a complaint is particularly complex, requires information from third parties, involves the absence of a relevant person, or cannot reasonably be concluded within 25 working days, the complainant will be informed of the reason for the delay and given a revised anticipated completion date.

11. Outcome

After considering the available evidence, each substantive aspect of a complaint may be recorded as:

- Upheld - the available evidence supports the complaint;
- Partially upheld - some, but not all, aspects are supported;
- Not upheld - the available evidence does not substantiate the complaint;
- Unable to determine - there is insufficient reliable evidence to reach a fair conclusion.

The complainant will normally receive a written outcome with an appropriate explanation. The response will not disclose confidential personal, employment, disciplinary, safeguarding or other protected information concerning another person.

12. Request for Review

A complainant who remains dissatisfied with the written outcome may request a review using Appendix 3. A review is not automatically a complete reinvestigation of the original complaint.

The review will be undertaken by a Review Sub-Group comprising two members of the Tobar Mhuire Management Committee. The members selected should, so far as reasonably practicable, have had no material prior involvement in the complaint and have no conflict of interest.

The Review Sub-Group will consider the original complaint, the investigation record, the evidence considered, the written outcome, the grounds for review and any significant new evidence that could not reasonably have been provided earlier. It may seek further clarification or information where this is necessary to reach a fair decision.

The Review Sub-Group may confirm the original outcome, vary it, remit a specific matter for further investigation, or make any other reasonable recommendation within Tobar Mhuire's authority.

The written decision of the two-member Review Sub-Group will constitute the final stage and full exhaustion of Tobar Mhuire's internal complaints procedure. No further internal review or appeal will ordinarily be available. This does not remove any statutory right or entitlement a complainant may have to approach an appropriate external authority or regulator.

Review Timeframes. Tobar Mhuire will acknowledge receipt of a request for review within 10 working days. The two-member Review Sub-Group of the Management Committee will aim to complete the review and issue its written final decision within 25 working days of receipt of the review request. Where this is not reasonably possible because of complexity, the need to obtain further information, the availability of relevant persons or other exceptional circumstances, the complainant will be informed of the reason for the delay and provided with a revised anticipated completion date.

13. False, Malicious, Vexatious or Repetitious Complaints

A complaint will not be treated as malicious or vexatious merely because it is critical, persistent, strongly expressed or ultimately not upheld.

However, Tobar Mhuire may proportionately restrict or conclude correspondence where substantially the same matter has already been fully considered and no material new information is provided; allegations are knowingly false; the process is being used primarily to harass, intimidate or cause unreasonable disruption; communications are abusive, threatening or discriminatory; or the frequency or nature of contact has become unreasonable.

Any restriction should not prevent a genuinely new and substantive concern from being considered.

14. Serious, Criminal or Safeguarding Matters

Where a complaint indicates a potential safeguarding concern, criminal offence, serious risk, fraud or another matter requiring external referral, Tobar Mhuire may refer the information to the police, safeguarding authorities, insurers, professional advisers, regulators or another appropriate body. Immediate protective action may be taken where necessary.

15. Conflicts of Interest and Complaints About Senior Personnel

No person should determine a complaint concerning their own conduct. Where the complaint concerns the person who would ordinarily manage the process, another suitably appropriate and impartial person will be appointed. Tobar Mhuire may obtain independent or professional assistance for serious or complex matters.

16. Fairness and Natural Justice

Tobar Mhuire will seek to listen fairly to all relevant parties, avoid prejudgment, provide an appropriate opportunity to respond, consider relevant evidence, manage conflicts of interest and reach a proportionate decision on the information reasonably available.

No person should be subjected to detrimental treatment by Tobar Mhuire solely because they have made a genuine complaint in good faith, assisted an investigation or provided relevant evidence.

17. Behaviour During the Process

Tobar Mhuire expects respectful communication. Distress, frustration and strongly expressed disagreement will be treated with appropriate sensitivity; however, threatening, abusive, discriminatory or

intimidating behaviour will not be accepted. Reasonable limits may be placed on the method or frequency of contact while preserving an appropriate route for legitimate communication.

18. Recording, Learning and Review

Tobar Mhuire will maintain appropriate records of formal complaints and outcomes. Where a complaint identifies an opportunity to improve services, procedures or practices, reasonable corrective or preventative action will be considered. Patterns of complaint may be reviewed for organisational learning.

This policy will be reviewed periodically and amended where necessary to reflect organisational requirements, applicable law, regulatory guidance and good practice.

19. External Rights and Responsibilities

Nothing in this policy removes any legal right or responsibility to contact an appropriate statutory authority, regulator, law-enforcement body or professional adviser. Tobar Mhuire may also make external notifications where required or appropriate.



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APPENDIX 1 - EXTERNAL COMPLAINT FORM

CONFIDENTIAL. Please provide as much factual information as possible. Attach additional pages if required. Once completed, this form should be handed to Reception at Tobar Mhuire for the attention of Máire Thompson (Complaints Officer / Management Team), or submitted by email to secretary@tobarmhuire.com, clearly marked for the attention of Máire Thompson.

A. Your Details

Full name:

Address:

Telephone:

Email:

Preferred method of contact:

B. Who or What Is Your Complaint About?

Name of person complained about (if applicable):

Role/position, if known:

If the complaint is not about an individual, identify the service, activity, decision or matter:

C. Details of Your Complaint

Date(s) of incident/event:

Approximate time(s), if known:

Location:

Describe what happened and why you are complaining:

Please distinguish, where possible, between matters you personally witnessed or experienced and information you received from another person or source.

D. Other People Present

Names and, if known, contact details of witnesses or other persons with relevant information:

E. Evidence Supporting Your Complaint

Tick or identify any material supplied: emails/letters; photographs; video/audio; text or WhatsApp messages; social-media posts; screenshots; online reviews/comments; documents/records; witness information; other.

List the evidence attached or state where it may be found:

For online material, please provide the platform/source, account or page, date and a screenshot or copy where possible. Online publication or repetition of an allegation does not, by itself, establish that it is accurate.

F. Have You Previously Raised This Matter?

Yes / No. If yes, with whom and when:

What response or action was taken?

G. Outcome Sought

What reasonable outcome or resolution are you seeking?

The outcome requested will be considered but does not determine the result of the complaint.

H. Declaration

I confirm that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, the information I have provided is accurate. I understand that Tobar Mhuire may seek further information; relevant information may need to be shared to investigate fairly; confidentiality cannot be guaranteed absolutely; making a complaint does not establish wrongdoing; and serious safeguarding, criminal or other concerns may be referred to an appropriate external authority.

Signature:

Print name:

Date:

For Tobar Mhuire Use Only
Complaint reference:

Date received / received by:

Acknowledgement sent:

Stage: Early Resolution / Formal Investigation

Person responsible:

Target/update date:



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APPENDIX 2 - INTERNAL COMPLAINT INVESTIGATION RECORD

CONFIDENTIAL - INTERNAL USE ONLY

Complaint reference:

Complainant:

Person/service complained about:

Date received:

Complaints Officer / Investigator: Maire Thompson

Issues Requiring Investigation

List the substantive issues/allegations:

Evidence Considered

Documents, digital evidence, records and other material:

Persons Consulted

Witnesses/persons interviewed or consulted:

Response of Person Complained About

Summary of response and evidence:

Findings

For each substantive allegation record: Upheld / Partially Upheld / Not Upheld / Unable to Determine.

Finding(s) and reasons:

Action / Learning

Corrective action, organisational learning or recommendations:

Does this raise another procedure or referral (safeguarding / employment / whistleblowing / H&S / police / data protection / insurer / other)?

Investigation completed:

Outcome issued:

Signed / position:



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APPENDIX 3 - REQUEST FOR REVIEW

CONFIDENTIAL. A review is not normally a complete reinvestigation. Please identify the specific grounds relied upon.

Your name:

Complaint reference:

Date of original outcome:

Grounds for Review

Please identify one or more grounds: relevant evidence was not considered; significant new evidence is available; the procedure was materially unfair or not properly followed; there was a material conflict of interest; the conclusion was not reasonably supported by the evidence; other substantive grounds.

Explain your grounds:

New Evidence

Describe any new evidence and why it was not previously available/provided:

Outcome Sought

What outcome are you seeking from the review?

Signature:

Date:

For Tobar Mhuire Use Only

Date review request received:

Review accepted: Yes / No

Review Sub-Group (two Management Committee members):

Reason if review not accepted:

Review decision/outcome:

Date outcome issued:

Signed:



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APPENDIX 4 - COMPLAINTS PROCESS AT A GLANCE

1. Raise the Concern

Where appropriate, raise a minor concern informally so that early resolution can be attempted.

2. Submit a Formal Complaint

Complete Appendix 1 or provide the same information in writing, clearly identifying who or what the complaint concerns and the evidence relied upon.

3. Initial Assessment

Tobar Mhuire will determine whether the matter falls under this policy, requires clarification, or should be handled or referred under another procedure.

4. Formal Investigation

An appropriate person will gather and consider relevant information, including a response from the person complained about where fairness requires it.

5. Written Outcome

The complainant will normally receive a written outcome. Confidential employment, disciplinary, safeguarding or personal information about another person will not normally be disclosed.

6. Review

A substantive request for review may be made using Appendix 3.

7. Closure and Learning

The matter is closed following the final internal decision, with appropriate records and organisational learning retained.

Formal Adoption

Approved on behalf of Tobar Mhuire by:

Position:

Signature:

Date:

Next review date:
