

# Complaints Handling Policy

## Document Control

Item	Detail
Policy Title	Complaints Handling Policy
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Effective Date	
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Policy Owner	Board of Trustees

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## 1.0 Purpose and Legal Basis

This section establishes the strategic rationale and the legal foundations for this policy. A transparent, effective, and compliant complaints process is of strategic importance for maintaining the trust of beneficiaries and stakeholders, and for demonstrating the charity's commitment to meeting its regulatory obligations as an accountable charitable entity.

### 1.1 Purpose

The core objectives of this policy are to:

- Provide a fair, consistent, and clear procedure for anyone wishing to make a complaint about the charity's activities, trustees, volunteers, or contractors.
- Ensure all complaints are investigated thoroughly and impartially.
- Guarantee that complaints are resolved promptly and that relationships are restored wherever possible.
- Use feedback from complaints to learn and enhance the charity's services and governance processes.

## 1.2 Legal Basis

This policy is designed to ensure full compliance with the charity's legal and regulatory obligations. This framework includes, but is not limited to:

- **Charity Commission Guidance:** Adherence to the best practice standards for accountability and transparency as set out by the Charity Commission for England and Wales, specifically its guidance on "Complaints about charities".
- **The Equality Act 2010:** A firm commitment to handling all complaints without discrimination and to making reasonable adjustments to ensure the process is accessible to everyone.
- **UK General Data protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018:** Recognition of our legal obligations for handling complaints that involve personal data, including the complainant's right to escalate their concern to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).
- **Future Legislation:** A commitment to align with the principles of emerging data governance legislation, such as the anticipated Data (Use and Access) Act, ensuring our practices remain forward-looking and compliant.

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## 2.0 Scope

A clearly defined scope is essential for the effective implementation of this policy, ensuring that all relevant individuals and activities are covered, and that the policy is applied consistently and fairly.

### 2.1 Individuals Covered

This policy applies to complaints received from any person or organisation with a legitimate interest in the charity. This includes, but is not limited to, beneficiaries of the charity, members of the public, trustees, volunteers, contractors, and other charities or organisations that interact with the charity.

### 2.2 Activities/Data Covered

This policy covers complaints about any aspect of the charity's work, including:

- The standard of service provided by the charity.
- The conduct of the charity's trustees, volunteers, or any contractors acting on its behalf.
- Any fundraising or financial management activities, including the sale of merchandise.
- The implementation of any of the charity's other policies or procedures.

This policy does not cover grievances raised by volunteers or contractors relating to their roles or agreements, which should be handled through their respective agreements or a separate grievance procedure. While the Board of Trustees may choose to investigate issues raised in an anonymous complaint at its discretion, such complaints fall outside this formal procedure.

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### 3.0 Policy Statement

The charity is committed to providing a high-quality service to its beneficiaries and stakeholders. We view complaints as a valuable opportunity to learn and improve for the future, as well as a chance to put things right for the person or organisation that has made the complaint.

Therefore, our policy is:

- To provide a complaints process that is easy to understand, access, and use.
- To treat every complainant with courtesy and respect.
- To handle all complaints promptly, fairly, and with a high degree of confidentiality.
- To ensure there is no disadvantage to any individual who makes a complaint in good faith.

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### 4.0 Definitions

Term	Definition
<b>Complaint</b>	An expression of dissatisfaction, whether verbal or written, about any aspect of the charity's work, including its services, volunteers, trustees, or contractors, which requires a response.
<b>Complainant</b>	Any individual or organisation making a complaint.

<b>Beneficiary</b>	An individual eligible for support under the charity's objects, as defined in Clause 3(1) of the charity's Constitution.
<b>Vexatious Complaint</b>	A complaint that is obsessive, harassing, or repetitive, and which may be designed to cause disruption or annoyance rather than to genuinely resolve a grievance. The decision to classify a complaint as vexatious can only be made by the Board of Trustees.
<b>Third-Party Contractor</b>	Any external organisation or individual engaged by the charity to provide services, including asset management or operational support.

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## 5.0 Procedures

### 5.1 How to Make a Complaint

Complaints should be made in writing to ensure clarity and provide a formal record. They can be submitted to the Chairman, who serves as the initial point of contact for all complaints.

- **Email:** [chairman@THE CHARITY EMAIL]
- **Post:** The Chairman, [CHARITY ADDRESS]

### 5.2 Stage One: Informal Resolution

The charity encourages the informal resolution of complaints wherever possible, as this can often lead to a swift and mutually satisfactory outcome.

- Upon receiving a complaint, the Chairman (or a designated trustee) will contact the complainant within five working days to acknowledge receipt.
- This initial contact will be used to discuss the issue, understand the complainant's desired outcome, and seek a mutually agreeable resolution without the need for a formal investigation.

### 5.3 Stage Two: Formal Investigation

If informal resolution is not successful or is not appropriate for the nature of the complaint, the matter will proceed to a formal investigation.

1. The complainant must submit their complaint in writing to the Chairman if they have not already done so.
2. The charity will provide a formal written acknowledgement of the complaint within five working days of its receipt.
3. The Board of Trustees will appoint an Investigating Trustee, who must have no prior involvement in the subject of the complaint, to conduct a thorough and impartial investigation.
4. The investigation will be completed, and a formal written response will be sent to the complainant within **28 days** of the acknowledgement. This response will detail the investigation's findings, the conclusions reached, and any actions that will be taken as a result.

#### 5.4 Stage Three: Appeal to the Board

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the Stage Two investigation, they have the right to appeal.

- An appeal must be submitted in writing to the full Board of Trustees, via the Chairman, within **14 days** of receiving the Stage Two response.
- The appeal will be considered by the full Board at its next scheduled meeting.
- A final written response from the Board, detailing its decision on the appeal, will be issued within **14 days** of that meeting. This decision is final, and there are no further stages of appeal within the charity.

#### 5.5 Escalation to External Bodies

Once the charity's internal complaints process has been exhausted, if the complainant remains unsatisfied, they have the right to raise their concern with the appropriate external regulatory body.

- **Charity Commission for England and Wales:** For most complaints about a charity's governance or activities.
- **Information Commissioner's Office (ICO):** For complaints relating specifically to the handling of personal data.

### 6.0 Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Assigned Responsibilities

<b>Board of Trustees</b>	Holds ultimate responsibility for this policy, ensuring it is properly implemented, monitored, and reviewed. The Board is responsible for hearing and making final decisions on Stage Three appeals.
<b>The Chairman</b>	Acts as the primary point of contact for receiving all complaints. The Chairman is responsible for initiating the Stage One informal resolution process and for maintaining the central complaints register.
<b>Investigating Trustee</b>	A designated trustee, appointed by the Board, who is responsible for conducting an impartial and thorough Stage Two investigation, gathering all necessary evidence, and drafting the formal response.
<b>Data Protection Officer (DPO)</b>	Acts as the designated lead for any complaint relating to data protection or a potential breach of UK GDPR. The role is performed by an ordinary Trustee appointed by the Board, which is responsible for managing any potential conflicts of interest that may arise.
<b>Volunteers and Contractors</b>	Must be aware of this policy and must direct any complaints they receive to the Chairman immediately, without attempting to investigate or resolve the matter themselves.

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## 7.0 Implementation

1. **Policy Adoption:** This policy will be formally approved and adopted by a resolution of the Board of Trustees, and its effective date will be recorded.
2. **Communication:** The adopted policy will be made publicly available to ensure it is accessible to beneficiaries and the public. All trustees, volunteers, and contractors will be formally notified of the policy and its procedures.
3. **Training:** The Board of Trustees will receive a briefing on the procedures outlined in this policy to ensure every trustee fully understands their roles and responsibilities in its execution.
4. **Resources:** A central complaints register will be established and maintained by the Chairman to log, track, and monitor all complaints received, ensuring a complete record of actions and outcomes.

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## 8.0 Monitoring, Review, and Reporting

This section outlines the critical governance disciplines for ensuring the policy remains effective, compliant, and responsive to feedback from the community.

- **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):** The effectiveness of the policy will be measured by tracking metrics including the number and types of complaints received, resolution times at each stage, and complainant satisfaction where such feedback is available.
- **Reporting:** The complaints register will be a standing item for review at every Board of Trustees meeting to ensure continuous oversight.
- **Review Schedule:** This policy will be formally reviewed by the Board of Trustees at least annually, or more frequently if there are significant changes to legislation, Charity Commission guidance, or the charity's operations.
- **Organisational Learning:** Lessons learned from complaints will be actively used to identify systemic issues and inform tangible improvements to services, processes, and policies across the charity. An anonymised summary of complaints and outcomes will be included in the Trustees' Annual Report.

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## 9.0 Related Policies and Documents

This policy operates as part of a wider suite of governance documents that collectively protect the charity. It should be read in conjunction with the following policies:

- Safeguarding Adults Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Conflict of Interest Policy