

Complaints Policy and Procedure

Purpose & Scope

This policy informs Communities 1st staff, volunteers and Trustees about what constitutes a complaint towards the charity and how to manage them to learn and strengthen service delivery quality and manage organisational reputation risk. This policy covers complaints from an individual member or partner organisation that we work with or a community, business or member of the public.

This policy does not cover complaints by staff which are governed by Communities 1st's procedures for dealing with problems in the workplace such as the Harassment and Sexual Harassment policies. Complaints relating to serious incidents such as fraud and corruption or safeguarding concerns will be dealt with through the relevant policy and procedures.

These complaint procedures do not apply to complaints that are subject to current investigation by any regulatory body or other legal or official authorities. Such issues will be dealt with by the relevant regulatory body's procedures.

Policy statement

Communities 1st aims to provide its individual members and partner organisations with the best possible service. We positively welcome suggestions to improve our service.

However, we recognise that there may be occasions when users of our services feel that the quality or level of service provided is below reasonable expectations. We want to be informed about these occasions so that we can learn, rectify the problem and plan to avoid its repetition.

Definitions

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about the standards of service, actions or lack of action, by Communities 1st or its staff and associated personnel¹. It is a criticism that expects a reply and would like things to be changed. Complaints may include the following, non-exhaustive list:

- Concern from someone we work with about the quality of programme delivery

¹ Contractors, suppliers, volunteers etc.

- Concern from a member of the public or supporter about a particular fundraising approach or campaign action
- Concern about the behaviour of staff or associated personnel

A complaint must be about action for which Communities 1st is responsible or is within our sphere of influence.

A complaint is **not**:

- A general inquiry about Communities 1st's work
- A request for information
- A contractual dispute
- A request to amend records e.g. to correct an address, cancel a donation
- A request to unsubscribe from a Communities 1st service e.g. a campaign newsletter or email

Procedures for making a complaint

Communities 1st's complaints procedure will be publicised to organisations and individuals who use its services.

It is hoped that most complaints or concerns about Communities 1st's work or behaviour can and will be dealt with informally by staff or volunteers at a local level. However, it is recognised that not all issues can be resolved in this way and that a formal complaint mechanism is required for those occasions when an individual or organisation wishes to make their complaint a matter of record and to receive a formal response.

How to make a complaint

1. Complaints should be made by the individual or organisation making the complaint or via someone acting on their behalf.
2. Complaints should be made to the member of staff or volunteer concerned who will try to resolve the issue informally.
3. If the issue is serious, or the complainant is not satisfied with the concerned staff / volunteer's response following an informal complaint, they should make a formal complaint. This is when the 'Complaints Checklist' is used.
 - a. The formal complaint should be made in writing by letter or email, marked "Private & Confidential", and sent to relevant Head of Service who will acknowledge it in writing (letter or email), normally within 7 days of receipt. A copy of the complaint should be kept.
 - b. The Head of Service will investigate the complaint and use the Complaints Checklist Appendix to investigate.
 - c. The Head of Service shall communicate the results of the investigation to the complainant within a reasonable timeframe, normally 21 days.

4. if dissatisfied with the response from the Head of Service, the complainant has the right to resubmit their case in writing to the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive shall - in consultation with the Chair of the Trustees - investigate the complaint and will communicate the results of the investigation to the complainant within a reasonable time, normally 14 days.
5. In the event of the complaint being about the Chief Executive, the complaint should be made in writing addressed to the Chair of the Trustees c/o Communities 1st who will acknowledge it in writing (normally within 7 days of receipt). A copy of the letter must be kept.
 - a. The Chair of Trustees will appoint a trustee to investigate the complaint.
 - b. The trustee shall communicate the results of the investigation to the complainant within a reasonable time - normally 21 days.
 - c. If dissatisfied with the response from the trustees, the complainant has the right to appeal to the Chair of Trustees who will convene a panel of members from Communities 1st's Trustee Board.
 - d. The decision of the panel will be final.

Where appropriate, Communities 1st will make a written apology to the complainant and agree any further action necessary to make good the cause of the complaint.

All formal complaints and the response made to them will be recorded and filed in a secure place.

For ease of review, a log of complaints will be kept, summarising the complaint, process carried out and the outcome. Using the Complaints log, the Trustee Board shall be informed by the Chief Executive at the first available meeting of the number and nature of any formal complaints and their outcome, and consideration will be given to the implications these have for the planning and management of future services annually, as part of Communities 1st's self-evaluation.

This policy is to be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- Complaints Checklist
- Equality and Diversity Policy

Approved: March 2026

Date for Review: February 2031

Complaints checklist

Use this checklist when investigating a formal complaint as part of the organisations complaints policy and procedure.

Staff Name: Date:

Complainants Name:

Have you conveyed the investigation procedure and timescale verbally to the complainant?	YES/NO
Have you conducted an interview to establish background to and detail of the complaint?	YES/NO
Have you written a statement about the complaint which you have dated and signed?	YES/NO
Has the complainant countersigned as correct the statement you have taken?	YES/NO
Have you given a copy of the complaint to those associated with its contents?	YES/NO
Have you asked, in writing, for a statement from those associated with the complaint within an agreed period of time?	YES/NO
Have you received the statements within the agreed time period?	YES/NO
Have you advised those being interviewed that they can have a colleague or friend with them?	YES/NO
Have you interviewed all those associated with the complaint?	YES/NO

Have you written up, signed, and dated your notes from each of these interviews?	YES/NO
Have you reviewed all the evidence placed before you?	YES/NO
Have you assessed whether you feel there are grounds for complaint?	YES/NO
If so, have you considered all the options for action that could/should be taken as a result?	YES/NO
Are you clear in your own mind what will be the content of the discussion with the Chief Executive/Chair of Trustees about this investigation and its findings?	YES/NO
Have you discussed fully with the Chief Executive/Chair of Trustees the findings of your investigation and your recommendations for action?	YES/NO
Have you put the findings of the investigation and your recommendations for action formally in writing to the Chief Executive/Chair of Trustees, together with the statements and notes taken during the investigation?	YES/NO
Final response submitted to complainant	YES/NO

This document is to be used in conjunction with the Complaints policy and the Complaints notice