

Complaints Policy & Procedure

1. Policy Control

Description	Date
Reviewed	April 2026

2. Introduction

Communities First Wessex, known as Community First, takes complaints seriously. Complaints give us the opportunity to put things right, and the lessons learned can often influence our practices. We know we are not perfect but seek to demonstrate continuous improvement. That is why we have a Complaints Procedure. Sometimes we can put things right; sometimes we can only explain ourselves and apologise. But we do want to learn from our mistakes. What you tell us helps us to improve our service.

It is hoped that customer and third-party dissatisfaction can, for the most part, be remedied on an informal basis. Some people, however, prefer to pursue their complaint on an official footing. Community First, therefore, has a structure to ensure that all complaints are handled within the same framework. Further review and independence is also built into the system.

The complaints process is for all complaints or expressions of dissatisfaction from customers and third parties, including partners, funders and individual customers and beneficiaries who have interacted with our services or had dealings with our staff and volunteers.

The complaints procedure is not designed to handle internal staff complaints which are dealt with under Community First's internal disciplinary and grievance procedures. Nor is it designed to handle and respond to staff or volunteer concerns about practices which give rise to concerns about the quality or safety of services or a situation which has the potential to bring the organisation into disrepute. Staff who raise such concerns have the right to make a protected disclosure (sometimes known as "whistleblowing") and should refer to Community First's Whistleblowing Policy for more detail.

3. Complaints procedure

The Complaints Procedure is available to download from our website at <https://www.cfirst.org.uk/about/complaints/>. A printed copy can be made available, on request. Any written complaints received by letter, email, text, social media or via the helpdesk, will be passed on to the relevant Senior Leadership Team (SLT) member. Complaints raised verbally by phone or in person will similarly be referred directly to a member of SLT. The person hearing the initial complaint will provide a brief written summary of the nature of the complaint and contact details for the complainant. They should also ensure the complainant is referred to the complaints procedure and are told that their complaint will be passed onto a member of SLT. The SLT member receiving the complaint will contact the complainant without delay to confirm that they have received the complaint, to check facts are correct and to explain the process and timescale for investigating.

If a complaint is made about an SLT member other than the CEO, this will be referred to the CEO. If a complaint is made about the CEO, this will be referred to the Chair of the Board of Directors.

There are two stages in investigating and handling complaints.

- Stage One: A review, investigation, recommendation, and response by SLT member or, in the case of a complaint about the CEO, by the Chair of the Board.
- Stage Two: An appeal against the stage 1 findings will comprise a review by the CEO or, in the case of a complaint about a member of SLT, including the CEO, a review by Chair of the Board or another appointed Director.

4. Stage One: review by SLT Member

Once a complaint has been received, a letter of acknowledgement must be sent to the complainant within 5 working days. The complainant will be told who is dealing with the complaint, what action is being taken, and when she/he/they can expect to receive a full reply. The target time for investigating and responding in full to a complaint is 20 working days. If there are exceptional circumstances which may delay this, this will be explained and made clear to the complainant. The CEO will also be notified of and authorise any extension to this timeframe.

The SLT member should instigate and undertake an investigation or oversee an investigation where it can more reasonably be carried out by another member of staff. If the complaint concerns a member of SLT other than the CEO, the CEO will investigate. If the complaint concerns the CEO, the Chair of the Board or a designated Director will investigate. The investigation will include interviews with the complainant and member(s) of staff or volunteer(s) involved.

Once the investigation is complete, a letter detailing its findings should be sent to the person making the complaint. If the matter is complex and will take longer than originally indicated, the person making the complaint will be informed, explaining the reasons, including an indication of when a response can be expected. The CEO will

authorise any extensions to the timeframe.

The full response must contain sufficient information to reassure the complainant that their complaint has been taken seriously. If the complaint is upheld, the person making the complaint must be given a full apology for their experience and given details, as far as possible, of what is being done to prevent a recurrence of the situation. If the complaint is rejected, information should be provided to the complainant explaining the reasons why.

The letter must also inform the complainant of their right to appeal the outcome and ask for a review of the investigation if they are not satisfied with the outcome of Stage One and how to appeal including contact details of the person to whom the appeal should be addressed.

5. Stage Two: Appeal to be heard by CEO or Chair/Director

If a complainant is unhappy or dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigation, they may appeal. They should do so in writing to the CEO, Chair of the Board, or an appointed Trustee Director, setting out the grounds for their appeal, within 10 working days of receiving the response.

The CEO, Chair of the Board, or appointed Director will acknowledge receipt of the appeal within 5 working days and conduct a review of the initial complaint and the investigation. This should take no longer than 20 working days and must be comprehensive and ensure all relevant facts have been taken into account, including any new information which may have only come to light during the appeal process.

Once again, the response to the complainant will be in writing and make clear whether the appeal has been upheld or rejected, giving reasons for this decision. It must contain an explanation, an apology if required, information about remedial actions, and satisfactory assurances that the complaint has been investigated fully. The decision of the CEO, Chair of the Board or appointed Director is final.

In the event that the complaint is about the CEO, the Chair of the Board or a designated Director not previously involved in dealing with the complaint at Stage 1 and appointed by the Chair, will conduct the stage 2 appeal.