



Complaints Policy

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Document Control

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Introduction

Reach (Reach) is committed to providing quality services for adults with learning disabilities and/or their carers that are equitable, accessible and effective. We are always keen to hear what is working well and we value all feedback.

Reach recognises that at times, clients/carers may be unhappy with services provided and that such concerns and complaints are a valuable tool for improving the quality of these services. Early resolution of any complaint is vital to ensuring safe, high-quality care and identifying areas of risk.

Reach aims to provide a complaints process which is easy to access and is supportive and open and which results in a speedy and fair resolution. This to ensure that complaints are investigated promptly and proportionately and that apologies are given and services are improved where necessary. The policy aims to promote a culture of openness and transparency for the benefit of all clients/carers, in which all forms of feedback are valued, listened to and acted upon.

Related Policies

This policy is supported by the following other policies and procedures (in the Employee Handbook):

- Whistleblowing Policy

And the following standalone policies, procedures or handbooks:

- Fundraising Complaints Policy
- 'Have Your Say' booklet (available at all centres)

Relevant Legislation

- Human Rights Act 1998
- The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Data Use and Access Act 2025
- UK General Data Protection Regulation
- Equality Act 2010

Training

Relevant staff will complete online 'Awareness of Handling Complaints' training.

Definitions

General Complaint	A complaint is defined as any expression of dissatisfaction, whether written, verbal or electronic, about a function, decision or service delivered or commissioned by Reach. Examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dissatisfaction with service quality• Unacceptable delays or failures to deliver a service• Perceived failure to follow procedures or good practice• Behaviour of a staff member or another client.
Data Protection Complaint	Data protection complaints relate specifically to the handling of personal data. Examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A data breach that has affected the complainant• Dissatisfaction with a response to a subject access request• Concerns about the accuracy of information held• Concerns about retention periods• Concerns about security of personal data• Concerns about profiling or automated processing.
Complainant	The person who raises or makes a complaint under this policy.
Subject	The subject of the complaint and/or the person the complaint is about.

Complaints Policy

Access

Reach aims to provide a complaints process that is clear, accessible and supportive. Complaints may be made:

- In person
- By telephone
- By email or other electronic means
- In writing
- Through online messaging services eg Facebook Messenger
- Through an advocate or representative

- In alternative accessible formats (Easy Read, large print, assisted communication), upon request.

Information about how to complain will be:

- Published on our website
- Available in service locations
- Provided in our privacy notice where data protection concerns may arise.

Assistance to make a complaint will be offered where required.

Data protection complaints may be raised using any method above. Where possible, complaints should be directed to Laura Carr, Executive Assistant by email to laura.carr@reachuk.org or in writing to Laura Carr, Reach, Prebend Passage, Westgate, Southwell, Nottinghamshire NG25 0JH.

Purpose and Scope

Purpose: The purpose of this policy is to:

- Protect the interests of the individuals we support, and their families
- Achieve fairness, transparency, learning and service improvement
- Align with Reach's commitment to high-quality services for adults with learning disabilities and their families
- Ensure that no individual is treated unfavourably for raising a concern, and provide a clear statement of non-retaliation confirming that making a complaint will not affect access to services
- Create equality of access to redress regardless of race, age, gender, sex, sexual orientation, marriage/civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity, religion or belief, or disability
- Provide responses that are clear and easy to understand and offer staff support to enable understanding where required
- Enable clients and families to challenge what may feel to be unclear/confusing decisions
- Ensure staff and volunteers are not unfairly affected by complaints being handled inconsistently or without clear rules
- Provide an additional means of monitoring the Charity's performance
- Handle complaints in line with Reach values.

Scope: This policy applies to all clients, carers, families, advocates, members of the public, staff, volunteers and third-party partners who work with or receive services from Reach.

This policy covers:

- Complaints about services delivered or commissioned by Reach or Reach Care CIC
- Complaints relating to decisions, actions or failures to act
- Complaints concerning staff behaviour, conduct or communication
- Data protection complaints about the use or handling of personal data.

Some issues may fall outside this policy, such as matters already under legal proceedings or those requiring safeguarding, HR processes or fundraising related complaints.

General Principles

- Complaints are best dealt with as soon as they arise
- Complaints must be investigated in an open, honest, fair and efficient way within the shortest possible timescale
- Confidentiality must be maintained at all times. All staff and volunteers should be aware of their legal and ethical duty to protect personal information about clients of services provided by Reach.
- The approach to resolving complaints should be flexible and conciliatory and should encourage communication and negotiation to reach a fair resolution.
- Lessons learnt should be identified and incorporated into practice as quickly as possible
- Staff will be treated with respect and offered support throughout the investigation. The approach will be open, positive and non-punitive.
- Where an apology is required it will be offered openly and positively and given at the earliest opportunity
- Clients/carers should be reassured that making a complaint will not affect their eligibility for, or the nature of, current or future treatment by Reach
- Complaints should be made within six months of the event to ensure that proper investigations can be carried out
- Whoever has made the complaint may receive a response at the conclusion of the process, unless this is prevented by confidentiality, data protection or legal requirements.

Roles and Responsibilities

- **All staff** must support early resolution and report complaints promptly
- **Managers** must ensure fair and timely investigations
- **Chief Executive** or nominated member of the Senior Leadership Team oversees serious complaints and reviews
- **Chair of Trustees** conducts final reviews where needed
- **Data Protection Lead** manages data protection complaints and advises on compliance
- **Trustees** review organisational trends and ensure effective governance

Early Resolution

Where possible, concerns should be raised at the earliest opportunity with a staff member. Staff will attempt to resolve issues immediately and informally. Where an issue is resolved informally, a brief note will be placed on the client's file.

Early resolution may not be suitable where:

- The concern is serious
- The complainant does not feel comfortable raising it informally
- The issue involves safeguarding or staff conduct

Outcomes, Remedies and Redress

Where a complaint is upheld:

- Redress will be in proportion to the complaint
- A sincere apology will be offered
- Corrective action may be taken
- Service improvements or staff training may be implemented
- Compensation may be considered where financial loss has occurred.

Where a complaint cannot be resolved after all available stages, the Chair of Trustees may issue a final decision.

Recording, Monitoring and Reporting

- A full record will be made using the standard [complaints form](#)
- All correspondence will be stored securely and retained for seven years
- Serious complaints will be escalated to the Chief Executive without delay
- Complaints will be reported to the Chief Executive and the Board through quarterly departmental reports
- An annual anonymised report will identify trends and learning, where sufficient numbers of complaints have been reported to ensure anonymity
- Data protection complaints will be monitored separately to ensure compliance.

Learning from Complaints

Where an investigation identifies significant or systemic issues, a lessons learnt investigation will be carried out and a report submitted to the and Board of Trustees. The Senior Leadership Team will consider whether a lessons learnt investigation is required on a case by case basis.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

All complaints will be handled in strict confidence.

Personal data used during complaint handling will be:

- Processed lawfully and fairly
- Used solely for the purpose of managing the complaint
- Stored securely with limited access
- Retained in accordance with organisational data retention schedules
- Shared only where legally required.

Further details are available in our Privacy Notices at reachuk.org/about/privacy/.

Review of this Policy

This policy will be reviewed annually, or earlier if:

- Legislative or regulatory changes occur
- Significant organisational changes take place
- Trends or incidents indicate a need for policy revision.

Complaints Procedure

Formal Complaints Procedure (non data protection complaints)

Acknowledgement

Formal complaints will be acknowledged within three working days, explaining what will happen next and the expected timescales.

Initial Assessment and Allocation

Within 5–10 working days of receipt, we will aim to:

- Decide whether the issue is a complaint, safeguarding concern, whistleblowing issue, or something else
- Assess seriousness and risk
- Decide who will investigate
- Identify whether immediate action is required.

The complainant will be kept in touch with the process, particularly where it is taking longer than expected and given an explanation of any delay.

High-risk issues, especially safeguarding, will be prioritised and escalated immediately rather than waiting for standard timelines.

If the relevant manager is personally involved in the matter, the Chief Executive will appoint an impartial manager to oversee the investigation.

Investigation

The purpose of the investigation is to establish the facts, to learn, to detect poor practice where this is the case and to make recommendations.

Investigations will be:

- Fair, transparent and non-adversarial
- Appropriate and proportionate to the seriousness of the complaint
- Carried out by speedily and efficiently by appropriately trained staff.

The complainant and any individuals named in the complaint will be informed of:

- What will be investigated and what will not
- Who is involved
- The roles each person will play
- Expected timelines.

Complainants may bring a friend or advocate to meetings.

Response

A full response will normally be provided within 28 days. If delays occur, these will be explained and revised timescales will be provided.

Responses will include:

- A clear explanation of how the complaint was considered
- Findings for each element of the complaint
- Any remedial actions taken or proposed, and steps taken to prevent reoccurrence
- An apology where appropriate
- Information on next steps if dissatisfied with the outcome, and who to contact for more information.

Review

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may request a review by the Chief Executive.

If the Chief Executive handled the complaint, the review will be undertaken by the Chair of Trustees.

Data Protection Complaints Procedure

Data protection complaints will be acknowledged and investigated in line with Reach's general complaints procedure, and as a minimum will:

- Be acknowledged within **30 calendar days**, in line with legal requirements
- Be investigated without undue delay
- Keep the complainant informed throughout the investigation
- Provide a clear written outcome and explanation.

Escalation to the ICO

If dissatisfied with our handling of a data protection complaint, individuals may escalate the matter to the **Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)**. Details are available at: www.ico.org.uk.

Ends