

# Complaints Handling Policy

Last reviewed October 2019

Next review October 2021

## Purpose of the Complaints Policy

To maintain and build relationships with the people on whom the charity depends to:

- Demonstrate our commitment to all our stakeholders
- Demonstrate our commitment to providing the best possible service
- Help us find out about things that have gone wrong so that they can be fixed
- Help us prevent things going wrong again in future

Read for Good views complaints as an 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. Our policy is:

- To provide a fair complaints procedure which is clear and easy to use for anyone wishing to make a complaint
- To publicise the existence of our complaints procedure so that people know how to contact us to make a complaint
- To make sure everyone at Read for Good knows what to do if a complaint is received
- To make sure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way
- To make sure that complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are repaired
- To gather information which helps us to improve what we do

## Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect of Read for Good.

## Where Complaints Come From

Complaints may come from any person or organisation who has a legitimate interest in Read for Good. A complaint can be received verbally, by phone, by email or in writing. This policy does not cover complaints from staff, who should use Read for Good's Discipline and Grievance policies found in the Staff Handbook. Any complaint related specifically to Safeguarding should follow Read for Good's Safeguarding policy.

## Confidentiality

All complaint information will be handled sensitively, telling only those who need to know and following any relevant legal and data protection requirements.

## Responsibility

Overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation lies with the CEO and Board of Trustees. This policy is reviewed regularly and updated as required.

## Complaints Procedure

### Publicised Contact Details for Complaints

Written complaints may be sent to Read for Good, 26 Nailsworth Mills, Avening Road, Nailsworth, Gloucestershire or email [reading@readforgood.org](mailto:reading@readforgood.org). Verbal complaints may be made by phone on 01453 839005 or in person to any of Read for Good's staff or trustees at our offices or at any of our events or activities.

### Receiving Complaints

Complaints may arrive through channels publicised for that purpose or through any other contact details or opportunities the complainant may have. Complaints received by telephone or in person need to be recorded. The person who receives a phone or in-person complaint should:

- Write down the facts of the complaint
- Take the complainant's name, address and telephone number
- Note down the relationship of the complainant to Read for Good (for example: donor, school)
- Tell the complainant that we have a complaints procedure and where it can be found on our website
- Tell the complainant what will happen next and how long it will take
- Where appropriate, ask the complainant to send a written account by post or by email so that the complaint is recorded in the complainant's own words

### Resolving Complaints

#### Stage One

- In many cases, a complaint is best resolved by the person responsible for the issue being complained about. If the complaint has been received by that person, they may be able to resolve it swiftly and should do so if possible and appropriate. (See advice for handling verbal complaints below.)
- Whether or not the complaint has been resolved, the complaint information should be passed to the CEO (and/or the Board) within a maximum of 2 working days.
- If it has not already been resolved, they delegate an appropriate person to investigate it and to take appropriate action.
- If the complaint relates to a specific person, that individual should be informed and given a fair opportunity to respond.
- Complaints should be acknowledged by the person handling the complaint within a maximum of 2 working days. The acknowledgement should say who is dealing with the complaint and when the person complaining can expect a reply. A copy of this complaints procedure should be attached. Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within four weeks. If this is not possible because for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given.
- Whether the complaint is justified or not, the reply to the complainant should describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

## **Stage Two**

- If the complainant feels that the problem has not been satisfactorily resolved at Stage One, they can request that the complaint is reviewed at Board level. At this stage, the complaint will be passed to the Chair of Trustees. The request for Board level review should be acknowledged within a week of receiving it. The acknowledgement should say who will deal with the case and when the complainant can expect a reply.
- The Chair of Trustees may investigate the facts of the case themselves or delegate a suitably senior person to do so. This may involve reviewing the paperwork of the case and speaking with the person who dealt with the complaint at Stage One.
- If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a further opportunity to respond. The person who dealt with the original complaint at Stage One should be kept informed of what is happening. Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within four weeks. If this is not possible because for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given. Whether the complaint is upheld or not, the reply to the complainant should describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint. The decision taken at this stage is final, unless the Board decides it is appropriate to seek external assistance with resolution.

## **External Stage**

- The complainant can complain to the Charity Commission at any stage.

## **Variation of the Complaints Procedure**

The Board may vary the procedure for good reason. This may be necessary to avoid a conflict of interest, for example, a complaint about the Chair should not also have the Chair as the person leading a Stage Two review.

## **Monitoring and Learning from Complaints**

Complaints are reviewed annually to identify any trends which may indicate a need to take further action.

## **Practical Guidance for Handling Verbal Complaints**

- Remain calm and respectful throughout the conversation
- Listen - allow the person to talk about the complaint in their own words. Sometimes a person just wants to "let off steam"
- Make written notes wherever possible
- Don't debate the facts in the first instance, especially if the person is angry or upset
- Show an interest in what is being said
- Obtain details about the complaint before any personal details
- Ask for clarification wherever necessary
- Show that you have understood the complaint by reflecting back what you have noted down
- Acknowledge the person's feelings (even if you feel that they are being unreasonable) - you can do this without making a comment on the complaint itself or making any admission of fault on behalf of the organisation e.g "I understand that this situation is frustrating for you"
- If you feel that an apology is deserved for something that was the responsibility of your organisation, then apologise
- Ask the person what they would like done to resolve the issue
- Be clear about what you can do, how long it will take and what it will involve
- Don't promise things you can't deliver
- Give clear and valid reasons why requests cannot be met
- Make sure that the person understands what they have been told
- Wherever appropriate, inform the person about the available avenues of review or appeal