

Complaints Policy

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31 March 2027

Policy owner
Board of Trustees

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1. Our approach to complaints

If something has gone wrong, we want to hear about it and put it right where we can. Anyone can raise a concern about Roots for Change UK CIO, registered charity 1209308: people using our services, children, families, volunteers, staff, donors, partners or members of the public. This procedure covers our services, decisions, communications, fundraising and the conduct of people acting for us. It is free to use, and we will not penalise anyone for raising an honestly held concern.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction that needs a response. You do not have to call it a complaint, complete a form or try an informal discussion first. If it involves several issues, we will coordinate the relevant procedures and contacts so you do not have to start again each time.

2. How to contact us

Email info@rootsforchangeuk.com, call +44 7960 287537, or write to Roots for Change UK CIO, Bargain Outlet, 111-113 King Street, South Shields, Tyne and Wear, NE33 1DP. You can also speak to a member of staff, an activity lead or a trustee.

Tell us what happened, when it happened, how we can contact you and what you would like us to do. A subject line such as Complaint, Fundraising complaint or Data protection complaint helps us direct it, but is optional. We can help record a verbal complaint and check the account with you where possible. For safeguarding records, identity documents or other sensitive information, ask for a confidential conversation or secure way to send it.

If your concern involves the usual handler, ask for a trustee with no conflict of interest. You can mark a letter Confidential - for an unconflicted trustee. Nobody involved in the complaint may control its routing, investigation or review. If no suitable internal reviewer is available, the Board must arrange an independent one. You can still approach an appropriate authority directly. These contact routes are not an emergency service.

3. Help to make a complaint

Tell us if you need an accessible format, interpreter, support person or another way to communicate. The handler must consider and provide reasonable adjustments where needed. Children should receive an explanation they can understand and be heard in their own right. A child does not have to complain through a parent where that would be unsafe or inappropriate.

Someone else may raise a concern for you. Before sharing your private information with them, we must make proportionate checks of their authority. We also consider anonymous complaints on the evidence available, especially where safety or misconduct is involved. Anonymity may limit what we can investigate or tell you about the outcome, but it is not a reason to ignore a risk.

4. Urgent concerns and other reporting routes

The first person receiving a complaint must record when it arrived, act on urgent safety concerns and pass it promptly to an appropriate handler with no conflict of interest. The acknowledgement deadline is not a waiting period for action on risk.

Concern	Required routing
Immediate danger or urgent medical need	Call 999 in the UK. Follow the relevant local emergency route overseas. Protect people first and make the internal report as soon as it is safe.
Child or adult safeguarding	Contact the Designated Safeguarding Lead on +44 7960 287537 and follow Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy or Safeguarding Adults Policy immediately. If the lead is unavailable or implicated, use the policy's alternative reporting route. Refer directly to the relevant statutory service where necessary; the ordinary complaints timetable must not delay protection.
Suspected crime, serious wrongdoing or fraud	Use Code of Conduct and the appropriate police or regulatory route. Preserve evidence, limit access and avoid enquiries that could prejudice an official investigation.
Request to access, correct, erase or otherwise exercise rights over personal data	Forward promptly to the Data Protection Lead or an unconflicted trustee under Privacy Notice and Data Protection Policy. The charity responds to the request; it is not routinely sent to the ICO to answer.
Complaint about use of personal data	Apply the data protection complaints section below, with the Data Protection Lead and an impartial handler. A concurrent rights request keeps its separate statutory clock.
Employment grievance or disciplinary issue	Refer to an unconflicted manager or trustee and follow the fair process in Code of Conduct, applicable employment terms and law. Do not remove safeguarding or public-interest concerns from the appropriate reporting route.
Volunteer concern	Use this procedure alongside Volunteer Policy and Code of Conduct. Clarify supervision or role problems while retaining an impartial route for misconduct or safeguarding allegations.
Fundraising complaint	Use the contact routes in this policy and follow Fundraising Policy. The external review route is explained under Taking a concern outside the charity.

5. What happens when we receive your complaint

We aim to acknowledge your complaint within five working days. We will confirm the issues we understand, your contact point, any urgent action, when to expect a response and any further information we need. Working days are Monday to Friday, excluding bank holidays in England and Wales. Passing a complaint between our teams does not change its original receipt date.

The handler must have no material conflict of interest and enough authority to obtain records and recommend action. They should agree the scope with you where possible, examine the evidence, hear your account and give anyone complained about a fair opportunity to respond. Findings must distinguish facts, disputed accounts and conclusions. Information is shared only where needed; we cannot promise absolute secrecy or a particular outcome.

If an external investigation is taking place, the handler must check which internal enquiries can safely continue. Any pause needs a recorded reason and an explanation to you as far as the law allows. Protective action and your welfare must remain under review.

6. Our response and putting things right

We aim to give a substantive response within 20 working days of receiving your complaint. If we need longer, we will explain why before that date where practicable, give a realistic new date and keep you updated.

Our response must address each material issue, explain the findings and reasons, acknowledge any mistakes and set out a remedy or improvement where appropriate. This may mean an apology, correcting information, reconsidering a decision, providing additional support or changing a procedure. Any refund or payment needs lawful authority and must follow Fundraising Policy, Annex C - General financial authorisation and payment controls, and applicable donation-return rules. A handler must not promise a payment they have no power to authorise.

We will explain how and when you can request a review. We may need to keep another person's employment, health or safeguarding information confidential, but will explain as much of the outcome as we lawfully can.

7. If you want a review

If you are dissatisfied, contact us through any route above and explain what you believe was missed or handled unfairly. Please do this normally within 20 working days of our response. We will consider reasonable extensions for illness, disability, language, late receipt or another good reason. This internal timetable does not limit statutory rights or a regulator's discretion.

A trustee who has no conflict of interest and was not previously involved must review the disputed findings, evidence, fairness and remedy. If that is not possible internally, the Board must arrange a suitable independent reviewer. The reviewer may seek more evidence and must give the case fresh consideration.

We aim to send the final review response within 20 working days of your request. If there is an unavoidable delay, we will explain it and give the next update date. The response must state the outcome, reasons, who is responsible for any action, completion dates and any appropriate external route.

8. Complaints about personal information

You can use any contact route above to complain about how we handle your personal information. We aim to acknowledge within five working days and must do so within 30 calendar days. We must make appropriate enquiries, keep you informed and explain the outcome without undue delay. Our usual 20-working-day response target supports that duty.

The Data Protection Lead or an unconflicted trustee must handle any separate request to exercise a data right under Privacy Notice and Data Protection Policy and its statutory time limits. For example, asking for a copy of your information remains a rights request even if you also complain about a service.

Our response must explain the outcome, corrective action and your right to complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). Call 0303 123 1113 for information about its complaints process. You do not need our permission to contact it.

9. Taking a concern outside the charity

For an unresolved fundraising complaint, contact the Fundraising Regulator on 0300 999 3407. You should first complain to the charity and normally allow four weeks for a response. You can then contact the Regulator if you are dissatisfied or have received no response; you do not have to finish every stage of our internal review first.

The Regulator normally considers complaints made within one year of becoming aware of the issue, usually counted from when you complained to the organisation. It does not consider complaints brought more than six years after the event. Its eligibility rules and discretion apply, so contact it promptly and check its current guidance.

The Charity Commission for England and Wales considers serious concerns within its remit, including misconduct, mismanagement or risk to charity property. It does not decide every service dispute or ordinary employment grievance. Use its official reporting service and guidance for raising a concern about a charity. Suspected crime and safeguarding concerns must be reported to the appropriate authorities when required, without waiting for our review.

10. Keeping records and learning from complaints

The handler must maintain a restricted complaints log using Annex A. Store detailed evidence separately and give access only to those who need it. Record conflicts and how independence was achieved. Board reports should normally describe anonymous themes. Apply Privacy Notice and Data Protection Policy, Annex A - Retention and secure disposal schedule, and preserve records needed for an investigation, claim or legal hold.

When complaints are active, the Board must review trends and overdue actions at least quarterly. It must consider overall learning at least annually. Give each improvement an owner, due date and completion check. Assess material safeguarding, fraud, privacy or governance concerns for external reporting immediately.

11. Fair treatment and difficult behaviour

You may disagree with a decision or need more explanation. That is not unreasonable behaviour. We must not withdraw legitimate support, disadvantage a volunteer or retaliate against anyone for raising an honestly held concern, even if it is not substantiated.

For threatening, abusive or persistently disruptive contact, a handler may propose proportionate limits. An unconflicted trustee must approve the least restrictive arrangement, record the reason and review date, and keep an accessible route open for new information. Explain the arrangement to the person where safe. It must not prevent emergency reports, safeguarding disclosures, protected disclosures or legal rights. Deliberate fabrication requires evidence and a fair process; a mistaken or unproven complaint is not enough.

12. Responsibility and review

The Board is responsible for this policy. It assigns a Complaints Lead or an unconflicted trustee to maintain the log and monitor deadlines. Everyone answering a charity contact channel must know how to recognise urgent issues and pass complaints on promptly. The public procedure must be available to people using our services and to fundraisers, volunteers and activity leads. Review the policy at least annually, or sooner after a serious incident, a material legal change or evidence that the process is not accessible or effective.