

Complaints

Policy & Procedure

September 2023

Contents



1	Overview and Introduction.....	3
2	Who can complain using this policy?.....	4
3.	What can you complain about?	5
4.	What is not covered in this policy?	6
5.	Key principles of this policy	7
6.	Making sure our complaints policy is effective.....	7
7.	Options after stage 3.....	10
8.	Confidentiality, GDPR and Data Protection	10
	Safeguarding Statement.....	11
	Appendix: Complaints process flowchart	12

1. Overview and Introduction

- 1.1 We welcome feedback on any aspect of our work, including complaints, comments, compliments, and suggestions. This policy covers complaints only and sets out The Children's Society's process for responding to complaints. The process is intended to be as clear, fair, consistent, and timely as possible.
- 1.2 Complaints can be made through the following:
- You can share thoughts via our [feedback form](#), available from all our services and on our website
 - In person by talking with the relevant manager, team or service staff
 - By email to our complaints email address Complaints@childrenssociety.org.uk
 - Via telephone to our Supporter Care line on 0300 303 7000 or writing to us at the below address:

Supporter Care team
The Children's Society,
Whitecross Studios,
50 Banner Street,
London EC1Y 8ST.
- 1.3 More information and options for contacting us are available on our website <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/about-us/contact-us>.
- 1.4 If you are thinking about making a complaint, but aren't sure if you want to, talk to any Children's Society member of staff. They can tell you more about how complaints are dealt with. Regardless of your method of contact, we will follow the same process.
- 1.5 If there is difficulty in making a complaint for any reason including language difficulties, disability or neurodiversity, The Children's Society will arrange for all reasonable necessary assistance to be provided.
- 1.6 If you are a child or young person receiving support from us today and have concerns about your own safety or protection (safeguarding concerns), please tell a member of staff or manager in your service immediately. You

can also give us your details via this email address:

Safeguarding@childrenssociety.org.uk.

- 1.7 Whilst we always aim to get things right the first time, we know that on occasion we may not. If we make a mistake, we will be open and honest about it as soon as possible. We will tell you about our mistake, explain why we think the mistake was made, and tell you how we will do our best to ensure it doesn't happen again. This applies if you are a child or young person, parent or carer, volunteer, supporter, or partner. We will also give you this information in writing.
- 1.8 The Children's Society is positive about receiving complaints, and views them as an opportunity for us to get things right. We are committed to learning and continuous improvement. We use information about mistakes and complaint information constructively to reflect, learn, monitor, and improve our performance. Complaints are monitored within the organisation and reported anonymously to our Board of Trustees.
- 1.9 We will treat any expression of dissatisfaction about our conduct as a complaint. However, we ask you to follow the steps provided in this policy so that we can consider the matter properly.

2. Who can complain using this policy?

- 2.1 This policy is intended for children and young people who use our services, parents or carers of the children and young people who use our services, our volunteers, partners and supporters, including visitors to our shops. This policy cannot be used by The Children's Society staff or former staff and contract counter parties, where other processes would apply. This policy does not cover historic issues. Adults who were in the care of The Children's Society as children and want to make a complaint about historic (past) matters, should follow this link to [our website](#), where our apology, the specialist help we provide and further information specific to historic matters can be found.
- 2.2 The Children's Society staff or former staff who have a complaint should follow, or have followed one of the policies below:
 - Whistleblowing Policy
 - Grievance Policy and Procedure
 - Safeguarding children, young people, and adults at risk of abuse

- Non-Recent (Historical) Abuse Policy & Procedure

- 2.3 We tell all the children and young people who use our services, their parents and carers, and our volunteers and supporters about this policy when we begin working together. This policy is also available on our website for anyone to access at: <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/organisational-policies>
- 2.4 If you don't want to make a complaint yourself, you can ask someone, such as a parent or friend, to make a complaint on your behalf. First, we will need to be sure you have asked them to raise your concern (we will need this in writing from you).
- 2.5 Then, we can talk with them about the complaint and agree the best way to communicate with you (as the complainant) throughout the process. If you are a volunteer, we will not be able to talk about your volunteering role or give any information to another person on your behalf if we do not have your consent to do so.
- 2.6 Volunteers should, in the first instance, raise any complaint with their Volunteer Manager. If the complaint concerns this person, it can be raised with the person the Volunteer Manager reports to. The People Partnering Team receives information about all complaints made by volunteers and are available to help volunteers wanting to make a complaint. They can be contacted via volunteering@childrenssociety.org.uk. Alternatively, volunteers can register their complaint outside the volunteering team, using the complaints email address: Complaints@childrenssociety.org.uk.
- 2.7 Volunteers with any safeguarding concerns should inform their Volunteer Manager immediately (or that person's manager, if need be), who will follow the organisations safeguarding policy.
- 2.8 If we receive several complaints from the same person, we will group these together and manage them through identifying themes that can be responded to together at the same time.

3. What can you complain about?

- 3.1 A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with any aspect of the work of The Children's Society.
- 3.2 This policy covers complaints about:

- a particular area of the charities work, such as our fundraising practices or our Retail shops
- how you or others have been treated by The Children's Society;
- the behaviour of The Children's Society's staff

3.3 It may be the case that we receive correspondence that in our view does not fall under our definition of a complaint or does not raise any issue that calls for further investigation. This may apply, for instance, to:

- objections to certain steps, recommendations or decisions we have taken in compliance with a legal requirement;
- disapproval of The Children's Society's refusal to take action in a matter where we have no legal power to act;
- anonymous complaints;
- malicious, repetitive or vexatious claims such as harassment of staff or repeated submissions of a complaint to which a response under our complaints procedure has been provided. We will not reply to rude, abusive, unspecific or repetitive emails, calls or letters.
- Complaints that are made later than 6 months after the relevant incident complained about (see section 2.1 for details of historic matters).
- In all other cases we will give brief reasons for our views but having done so once will not normally engage in further correspondence on the merits of the position we have taken.

4. What is not covered in this policy?

4.1 The policy does not cover matters that are subject to separate procedures, which include the following:

- Dissatisfaction or disagreement with opinions or determinations handed down by The Children's Society
- Staff matters;

- Data Subject Access Requests or other data rights applications under the UK General Data Protection Regulation
- Concerns raised by staff which are dealt with under our Whistleblowing policy.

5. Key principles of this policy

- 5.1 We encourage children and young people who use our services, their parents/ carers, our volunteers, partners and supporters to tell us if they aren't happy with our work. We will treat anyone making a complaint with dignity and respect. We will take your concerns seriously.
- 5.2 Our policy and procedures about complaints are clear, open and honest. We take extra care to make the complaints process as simple and straightforward as possible for the children and adults we work with.
- 5.3 Complaints will be resolved as swiftly, and as far as possible, informally, by those who are responsible for the relevant area of work. Whenever there is a delay for whatever reason, we will let you know quickly and tell you when you will hear from us next.
- 5.4 Through the implementation of this policy and procedure, we will ensure there is a fair, clear and consistent process which sets out three stages for considering complaints (please see section 6 for further detail around the stages). This includes, as far as possible, a consistent contact person who will update you throughout the process.
- 5.5 We will respect confidentiality throughout the process. Only those involved in looking into the complaint will know about it.
- 5.6 If you need help to make a complaint, please get in touch with us by any of the ways listed in section 1.2 of this policy and we will help you to find the right support needed for you to make your complaint.
- 5.7 If you decide you want to withdraw your complaint, you can do so at any time.

6. Making sure our complaints policy is effective

- 6.1 We want our complaints policy to be effective. We will monitor and review complaint information to make sure that the correct procedure has been followed.

- 6.2 All complaints will be logged and monitored through a central register, held on a restricted, confidential basis by The Children's Society. The Children's Society Board of Trustees retain oversight of complaints as part of the charity's governance. They will make sure we are learning from complaints and making any necessary changes to the way we work.
- 6.3 This policy may be reviewed at any time at the request of management but will be reviewed every three years or sooner where required in response to new national guidance and/or legislation.
- 6.4 We welcome any comments or suggestions about our complaint's procedure, to make sure it operates as efficiently and effectively as possible.

The Children's Society has a three stage complaints procedure:

Stage 1: Local resolution

- Wherever possible, complaints will be resolved swiftly and informally by the relevant manager. If the manager is involved in the complaint, we will ask another independent manager.
- Where a safeguarding concern is raised via a complaint process, The Children's Society's Safeguarding Policy will be followed. A staff member will talk about this with you if your complaint involves a safeguarding issue.
- It is our aim that all Stage 1 'local resolution' complaints will be resolved 10 working days after we receive the complaint. If we are unable to resolve the complaint in this timeframe, we will tell you as quickly as possible and let you know when you can expect to hear from us.
- TCS will endeavour to resolve complaints in the most informal way possible, however the organisation does reserve the right to decide to proceed a complaint to stage 2 and will communicate this decision to any complainant.

Stage 2: Appeal

- If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the Stage 1 complaint, please write to us to tell us why you are unhappy, providing full details of your reasons, within 14 days of receiving written notification of the Stage 1 outcome.
- A relevant independent staff member (appointed by the Director in charge of the work area) will be assigned to resolve the complaint appeal. This will

initially involve considering reasons for the appeal and to decide if further review is required.

- If further review (known as an 'investigation') is required, an investigating officer will be appointed. We aim to complete the investigation as quickly as possible. We will keep you informed as our investigation progresses and tell you how long we estimate the process will take.
- We will give you our decision in relation to the appeal, including any findings and conclusions which led to the decision, in writing.

Stage 3: Final Appeal

- If you remain dissatisfied following the outcome at Stage 2, please tell us in writing, setting out in full your grounds for appeal, within 14 days of receiving the written Stage 2 decision notification, that you wish to appeal from that outcome.
- We will assign a senior manager who has not previously been involved in Stage 1 or the underlying matter to consider your appeal.
- The final appeal stage will involve both a reconsideration of the original complaint and a review of how The Children's Society complaints policy and procedure was applied.
- The outcome of the final appeal will be provided in writing to the complainant (person making the complaint).
- Stage 3 final appeal decisions are final.

6.5 Extending time limits

We aim to work within the timescales above; however, if a complaint is very complex it may occasionally be necessary to extend the time limit. If this is the case, we will keep the complainant informed of progress with the investigation, the reasons for the delay, and the new deadline.

6.6 Appointment of a third party

If a complaint is complex, or we have a potential conflict of interest, we may nominate an external independent third party to carry out the investigation on The Children's Society's behalf. We will carefully consider any such decision to balance the needs for fairness against a cost-effective and efficient investigation. Depending on the nature of the complaint, it may be necessary to notify external safeguarding teams and/or local police forces.

7. Options after stage 3: Final Appeal

- 7.1 The Charity Commission regulates registered charities in England and Wales. They make sure that charities are accountable, well-run and meet their legal obligations. The Commission will receive complaints related to suspected serious abuse or illegal activity at a charity. Further information is available on the gov.uk site, using this link: <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-charity>.
- 7.2 Any Children's Society supporter making a complaint about our fundraising activities, who is dissatisfied with the outcome or response times, can (after four weeks from making an initial complaint) refer their complaint to the Fundraising Regulator via telephone on 0300 999 3407 or web form <https://www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/complaints/make-complaint>. You can also complain to the Fundraising Regulator if you have a complaint about the way you have been asked for do-nations or how fundraisers have behaved.
- 7.3 The Information Commissioners Office is The UK's independent authority set up to uphold information rights in the public interest, making people aware about their data protection and information rights. If you have a concern about The Children's Society information rights practices, you can report it directly via telephone on 0303 123 1113 or on their website: <https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint>.

8. Confidentiality, GDPR and data protection

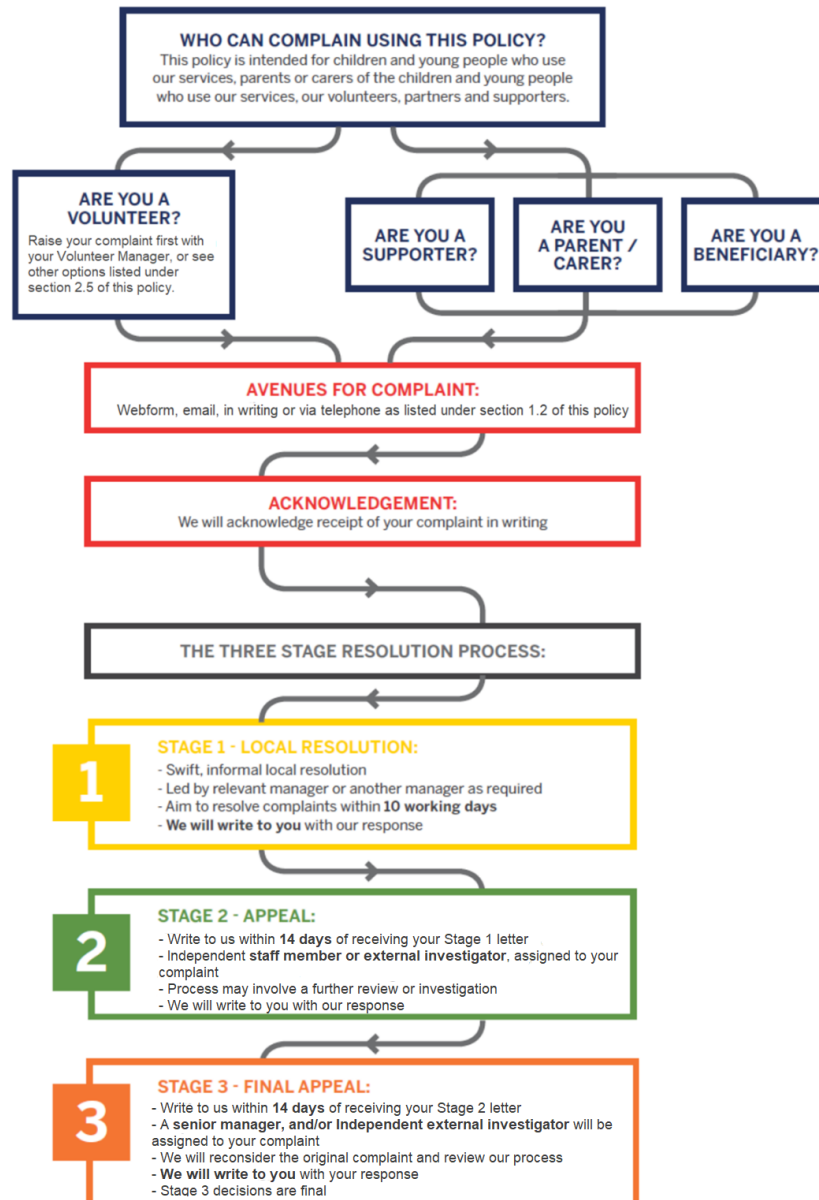
- 8.1 This policy complies with the requirements of The Equality Act (2010) and is in accordance with The Children's Society commitment to diversity and inclusion.
- 8.2 We will only tell those people involved in resolving your complaint about it.
- 8.3 Sometimes we may need to share your complaint or concerns with other individuals to understand the situation fully. If you are a child or young person making a complaint, we will talk with you about any concerns we have for your wellbeing that might make it necessary to tell any other adults.
- 8.4 After the complaint is resolved, we will keep a summary on record, using relevant data protection protocols. If you use our services and have a file, the complaint record will be placed on your file.
- 8.5 We use anonymised information from complaints to make sure we learn and improve our services.

Safeguarding statement:

There will be circumstances when this policy is used concurrently with other policies. However, when there are concerns for a child or adult at risk the 'Safeguarding children, young people and adults at risk policy and procedures' will always take precedence; other processes may be suspended or run concurrently whilst safeguarding processes are completed.

For advice in relation to safeguarding policy and procedures contact The Children's Society Safeguarding Team on safeguarding@childrenssociety.org.uk.

Appendix- Complaints Process Flowchart



Status	Approved and Live
Approved by	ELT
Last updated	September 2023
Last briefed to staff	October 2023
Date for review	September 2026
Owner	Company Secretary
Version	V3