

Complaints

Policy, Procedure and Guidance

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Related Documents

Reference	Document Name
	Safeguarding children, young people, and adults at risk of abuse
	Non-Recent (Historical) Abuse Policy & Procedure
	Managing allegations
	Whistleblowing Policy
	Grievance Policy and Procedure
	Dignity at work

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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. [Appendix A](#) provides updated guidance in relation to any complaints relating to our young people's services which are part of the Youth Impact domain.

1.2 You can make a complaint through the following:

- By email to our complaints email address Complaints@childrenssociety.org.uk
- Via telephone to our Supporter Care line on 0300 303 7000 or by writing to us at the address below:

Supporter Care Team,
The Children's Society,
Whitecross Studios,
50 Banner Street,
London
EC1Y8ST

- By speaking with the relevant manager, team or service employees

Comments, compliments and suggestions that are not complaints may be submitted to supportercare@childrenssociety.org or on 0300 303 7000.

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, speak with any The Children's Society employee or volunteer. 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 barriers, disability or neurodiversity, The Children's Society will arrange for reasonable adjustments to be provided. We will help you to find the right support needed for you to make your complaint.

1.6 If you are a child or young person receiving support from The Children's Society and have concerns about your own safety or protection (safeguarding concerns), please tell a member of staff or manager in your service immediately.

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- 1.7 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.
- 1.8 This policy also includes guidance for situations where The Children's Society considers raising a concern or complaint about an external organisation and/or professional person.

2. Who Can Complain Using this Policy

- 2.1 This policy is intended for:
- members of the public;
 - people who support our charity through donations and/or fundraising;
 - children and young people who use our services;
 - parents or carers of the children and young people who use our services; and
 - our partners and supporters, including visitors to our shops.
- 2.2 This policy cannot be used by The Children's Society employees or volunteers where other processes would apply.
- 2.3 Adults who were in the care of The Children's Society as children and want to make a complaint about non-recent abuse, should follow this link to [our website](#), where the specialist help we provide and further information specific to such matters can be found.
- 2.4 The Children's Society employees or volunteers who have a complaint or concern should follow 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](#)
 - [Dignity at work](#)
 - [Managing allegations](#)

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- 2.5 We will tell you about this policy when we begin working with you. Employees and volunteers will be informed of the policy as part of their induction process and where possible the policy will be included within our contracts with partners. This policy is also available on our website for anyone to access, together with our Safeguarding and Whistleblowing policies, at: <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/organisationalhttps://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/organisational-policies>
- 2.6 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 to be confirmed in writing from you).
- 2.7 Then, we can talk with them about the complaint and agree the best way to communicate with you throughout the process.
- 2.8 Current or former volunteers who wish to raise a complaint should follow the steps outlined in the [volunteer handbook](#) (page 47 Raising and Resolving Issues and Complaints). For further guidance a volunteer can speak to their manager, or access support from the People Partnering Team who can be contacted via volunteering@childrenssociety.org.uk
- 2.9 Volunteers with any safeguarding concerns should inform their Volunteer Manager immediately (or that person's manager, if need be), as per the [Safeguarding Policy](#).

3. What Can You Complain About?

- 3.1 For the purpose of this policy a complaint is a **formal expression of dissatisfaction with any aspect of the work of The Children's Society.**

There may be times you might contact us about something we don't consider a complaint or something that doesn't need further investigation. This could include, for example:

- 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 employees and volunteers 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, direct messages or letters;

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- Complaints that are made later than 6 months after the relevant incident complained about (see [Section 2.1](#) for details of historic matters);
- Complaints where we have not received any material response from the complainant within 6 months of our last communication.

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.

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 at the same time.

4. Other principles of this Policy

- 4.1 Our supporter engagement activity is conducted in accordance with our supporter promise which you can find [here](#).
- 4.2 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, we will let you know as soon as we can and tell you when you will hear from us next.
- 4.3. We will respect confidentiality throughout the process.
- 4.4 If you decide you want to withdraw your complaint, you can do so at any time – just let us know.
- 4.5. Complaints must be made to us within 6 months of the date the incident being complained about happened or the date the person raising the complaint found out about it, whichever is the later date. If a complaint is made to us after that 6-month deadline, we will consider if we believe there were good reasons for not making the complaint before the deadline and it is still possible to properly consider the complaint.
- 4.6 If you are a young person and want to make a complaint about the service you're getting, we will make sure your voice is heard. Your experience will be at the heart of how we look into the issues you've raised, and we will support you so you can take part in the complaints process.

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

[Appendix A](#) provides guidance for how the organisation will respond to complaints regarding our young people's services and includes guidance around local resolution.

5.1 Stage 1: Formal

- Wherever possible, complaints will be resolved informally by a relevant manager. If the manager is involved in the complaint, we will ask an independent manager to manage the complaint.
 - Where a safeguarding concern is raised via a complaint process, The Children's Society's Safeguarding Policy will be followed.
 - It is our aim that all **Stage 1** complaints will be **resolved in 15 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 endeavor to resolve all complaints at Stage 1, however the matter may progress to Stage 2 should you not be satisfied with the outcome of the complaint. The organisation also reserves the right to decide to proceed with a complaint to Stage 2 after Stage 1 and will communicate this decision to any complainant.

5.2 Stage 2: Appeal

- If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the Stage 1 complaint, please inform us in writing (which can include by email) to tell us why you are dissatisfied, providing full details of your reasons, **within 14 days** of receiving written notification of the Stage 1 outcome. Once the appeal information has been received, a Senior Manager (appointed by the Director in charge of the work area) who has not previously been involved in Stage 1, or the underlying matter will be assigned to:
- consider whether there are sufficient grounds for upholding an appeal and/or conducting a new investigation in relation to the original complaint; and to review how The Children's Society complaints policy and procedure was applied.
- Any investigations carried out at Stage 2 will be conducted in line with The Children's Society's [Investigations policy](#). Complaints requiring investigation **at Stage 2** must be completed within **25 working days**. 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.
- We will give you our decision in relation to the appeal, including any findings and conclusions which led to the decision, in writing.

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5.3 Stage 3: Final Appeal

- If you remain dissatisfied following the outcome at Stage 2, please inform us in writing (e.g. via email) 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 at Stages 1 or 2 or the underlying matter to consider your appeal.
- An indicative timeframe for resolution will be agreed with you at the start of the Stage 3 process. This could be subject to change. You will be updated regularly.
- 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 person making the complaint.
- Stage 3 Final Appeal decisions are final and may not be further appealed.

5.4 Extending time limits

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

5.5 Appointment of a third party

- 5.5.1 We may at our sole discretion 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.

6. Options After Stage 3 Final Appeal

- 6.1 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>.

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- 6.2 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 donations or how fundraisers have behaved.
- 6.3 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>.

7. Confidentiality, GDPR and Data Protection

- 7.1 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.
- 7.2 We will only tell those people involved in resolving your complaint and may share information with our Advisors, Committee Members and Trustees.
- 7.3 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.
- 7.4 After the complaint is resolved, we will keep a summary on record, using relevant data protection protocols. If you use our "work" and have a file, the complaint record will be placed on your file.
- 7.5 We use anonymised information from complaints to make sure we learn and improve our services.

8. Malicious, repetitive or vexatious claims or complaints

- 8.1 Please refer [Section 3.1](#) of this policy and to Appendix A, [Section 4.6](#).

9. Employees of The Children's Society who wish to make a complaint about an external professional, organisation or partner.

- 9.1 On occasion, The Children's Society employees in a professional capacity may wish to raise concerns about an external professional, organisation or partner we have worked with or alongside.

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They should in the first instance raise this with their line manager.

9.2 In all instances, where a Children's Society employee wishes to formally progress concerns (including the consideration of making a complaint), The Children's Society employee should discuss this with their line manager prior to making a complaint to discuss what evidence is available to corroborate a complaint and/or whether alternative informal remedial/reparative action can be taken. The line manager should also assess whether any action needs to be taken in relation to our [Managing Allegations Policy](#) and/or Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) procedures. The line manager should always ensure their Senior Manager and where appropriate Director are made aware before any decision to proceed is made.

10. Process for the consideration of complaints about an external professional, organisation and/or partner

10.1 Employees are encouraged to seek remedial / reparative action prior to making a formal complaint.

10.2 Remedial or reparative action may involve

- What additional support may The Children's Society employee need in relation to managing their concerns?
- Is there evidence (e.g. email trails) to suggest that inappropriate/discriminatory/unprofessional behaviour has been exhibited?
- Is there a more appropriate route to address the concerns e.g. escalation processes, a HR process (e.g. LADO¹) or a legal process (if it is a partner/organisation who is contracted by us).
- Is the professional/organisation/partnership of strategic importance and therefore needs careful management?
- Are there any reputational risks (for The Children's Society or the external party) to consider?
- Can the concerns be resolved informally, e.g. by the line manager or a senior manager offering a meeting with the external party to try and resolve the concerns?
- Can the concerns be resolved through appropriate challenge?

10.3 In some instances, senior managers may not agree that a complaint to an external organisation or partner is warranted. In this case, employees will not be permitted to make a complaint within their position as a The Children's Society member of staff. If this is the case, the Senior Manager will meet with the employee and their line manager to explain why.

¹ The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) is responsible for overseeing concerns, allegations, or incidents involving individuals working with children and young people. This might be for example a teacher, a childminder, a nursery worker or a police officer.

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11. 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.

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Appendix A

Guidance for Youth Impact Domain staff (young people's services and programmes only)

1. Overview and Introduction

- 1.1 This guidance is designed for use by colleagues in the Youth Impact domain who work in services and programmes only – referred to as 'youth practice' in this document. This takes into consideration the work our services and programmes deliver for and with children, young people and their families.

2. Scope and Definition

- 2.1 The guidance gives due consideration to receiving and responding to complaints or concerns at an informal level (called local resolution) that we receive in our services and programme, noting that it is important that we record these complaints and concerns.
- 2.2 This guidance forms part of and should be read in conjunction with this [Complaints Policy and Procedure](#).

3. Key Principles

- 3.1 We aim to work in a trauma informed way when dealing with complaints and will try and see the situation from the perspective of young people. We also have a duty of care to our employees and volunteers, so this will be carefully considered too.
- 3.2 We will always consider who is best to be the lead contact for the complainant, especially where this is a child, young person or family member. This will usually be the Service Manager or another Manager working within the service e.g. Safe Practice Manager.
- 3.3 For services that are supporting younger children e.g. under 11s, we may receive a complaint from a parent/carer or legal guardian on their behalf. In consultation with Safeguarding and Quality Practice team, consideration should be given to whether evidence of Parental Responsibility (PR)² is required.
- 3.4 We aim to operate in a transparent environment for our employees and volunteers and ensure that they are given the opportunity to rectify situations

² [Parental responsibility](#) refers to the legal rights, responsibilities, and authority that a parent has regarding their child. This includes making decisions about the child's welfare, education, medical treatment, and cultural upbringing. According to the Children's Act 1989, it encompasses all the rights, duties, powers, and authority that a parent has concerning their child and their possessions. Essentially, it defines who has the legal authority to make significant decisions about a child's life.

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where appropriate. If a complaint has been made in relation to an employee, the line manager will inform them of this and the details of the complaint, unless there are concerns in relation to an allegation which then would need to be dealt with in accordance with our [Managing Allegation Policy](#).

3.6 Ways in which we can receive complaints via children and young people, parents/carers and professionals:

- Text
- Email
- Other messaging platforms e.g. WhatsApp
- Letter
- Verbal – either a phone call or in person

4. Process

- 4.0.1 The process below outlines how we will respond to the vast majority of complaints received. There may however be exceptional cases that require a different approach due to the seriousness of the complaint and/or who the complaint is against or involves. In these situations, the approach will be decided by the relevant Head of and/or the Director of Young People's Services.
- 4.0.2 The recording of complaints at all levels should be in accordance with the [Complaints Policy and Procedure](#). This includes ensuring the relevant details of the complaint and outcome are saved on Mosaic or on the recording system used by the service or programme.

4.1 Local resolution (informal)

- 4.1.1 In the first instance we will try to resolve complaints within the local team – this could involve the Service Manager in consultation with their Area/Operations/National Programme Manager contacting you, hearing their concerns and agreeing any potential solutions or remedial action.
- 4.1.2 This provides the local team with an opportunity to resolve concerns or complaints in agreement with you without instigating a formal process. The benefits of local resolution are that concerns/complaints can be dealt with more quickly. This stage involves minimal investigation and/or involvement from senior management/leadership unless the complaint involves reputational risk or has implications in relation to safeguarding.
- 4.1.3 Examples of situations that can be dealt with via local resolution would include:
- a parent/carer being unhappy about the service they have or haven't received:

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- a child/young person or family member being unhappy about the worker they have been allocated: or
- a complaint being received in relation to a particular process or system issue.

4.1.4 Service Managers will be required to complete an [Informal Complaint Form](#) which details information about the concerns and how it was resolved. This information will be held by the Safeguarding and Quality Practice Team and shared with named organisational lead for complaints – Head of Supporter Experience and will contribute towards the organisation’s data in relation to complaints and will help to capture learning for the organisation.

4.2 Stage 1: Formal

4.2.1 See Complaints Policy [Section 5](#) for details.

If a resolution cannot be agreed informally as above, then the complaint will proceed to the formal stage (Stage 1). See Complaints Policy [Section 5.1](#) for details.

A ‘Record and Manage Complaints’ workflow should be started on Mosaic for all complaints that are responded to at Stage 1 (Formal stage). For guidance on how to use the workflow and what steps to take please go to [Using Workflows](#).

This stage involves Service Manager in discussion with the regional Area/Operations/National Programme Manager agreeing who (either the Service Manager or Area/Operations/National Programme Manager) will investigate the concerns/complaint in line with our [Investigations policy](#). Complaints requiring investigation at **Stage 1** by an appropriate manager must be investigated **within 15 working days**. For more information about the investigation process, see our [Complaints Policy and Procedure](#).

4.3 Stage 2: Appeal

4.3.1 See Complaints Policy [Section 5.2](#) for details.

If it is a child/young person or family member wishing to appeal, and it is deemed they may require support to write an appeal, they should be offered such support via a local team. Once the appeal information has been received, a senior manager who has not previously been involved in Stage 1 or the underlying matter will be assigned to consider whether there are sufficient grounds for upholding an appeal and/or conducting a new investigation in relation to the original complaint and to review how The Children’s Society complaints policy and procedure was applied.

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4.3.2 Complaints requiring investigation at **Stage 2** must be completed within **25 working days**. The outcome of the appeal will be provided in writing to the person making the complaint. Any investigations carried out at Stage 2 will be conducted in line with our [Investigations policy](#).

4.4 Stage 3: Final appeal

4.4.1 This stage will be undertaken in line with our Complaints Policy and Procedure – see [Section 5.3](#)

4.4.2 If a complaint progresses to Stage 2 and or 3, a learning review will take place once the complaint has been resolved/concluded to look at the thematic learning. This will be led by the Head of Safeguarding Managing Allegations and Post Adoption Service (the nominated lead Senior Manager for complaints).

4.5 Responding to complaints that are not from, or on behalf of, a child, young person or family member:

4.5.1 The Service Manager, in agreement with the Area/Operations/National Programme Manager, people partnering, SQP and the Data Protection Officer (DPO) should decide whether there is an alternative appropriate process that should be used to manage the complaint, such as the whistleblowing policy, a HR process or data management process.

4.5.2 If there is no appropriate process the complaint must be investigated as outlined in the process above. The level of investigation will depend on the seriousness and complexity of the complaint.

4.5.3 Advice for such complaints can be sought from the Head of Safeguarding – Managing Allegations and Post Adoption Service who will liaise with people partnering and Data Protection Officer where appropriate.

4.5.4 The relevant Head of Young People's Services should be kept informed.

4.6 Malicious, repetitive or vexatious claims or complaints

4.6.1 Malicious, repetitive or vexatious claims such as harassment of employees or repeated submissions of a complaint to which a response under our complaint's procedure has been provided are unlikely to be taken forward. In these instances, advice and guidance as to the best course of action should be sought from the heads of relevant services and the Safeguarding and Quality Practice Team in the first instance.

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5. Roles and Responsibilities

5.0.1 Volunteers:

Volunteers who wish to raise a complaint should follow the steps outlined in the [volunteer handbook](#) (page 47 Raising and Resolving Issues and Complaints).

For further guidance a volunteer can speak to their manager, or access support from the People Partnering Team who can be contacted via volunteering@childrenssociety.org.uk

5.0.2 Practitioners:

- Provide children and families with information about their rights to complain, providing the link to TCS Complaints Policy.
 - To help resolve informal complaints swiftly where appropriate and where agreed with a manager that this is the right approach.
 - To inform line managers as soon as possible of potential concerns or complaints.

5.0.3 Line Manager:

- To respond to and resolve informal complaints at the local resolution stage.
- To provide support to the employee's member that the complaint has been made in relation to where appropriate.
- Where appropriate (and in line with contract requirements) to inform commissioners about complaints where formal action has been taken.
- To ensure adequate records in relation to informal and/or formal complaints are taken.

5.0.4 Head of Young People's Services (Senior Manager)

- To maintain an overview of complaints received in their area.
- On occasion, and where it is not deemed appropriate for an Area/Operations or National Programme Manager to investigate, to investigate complaints that progress to Stage 1 of the formal process.

5.0.5 Independent Investigating Manager:

- To investigate appeals of Stage 1 complaints where relevant, to conduct an investigation into how the complaint was dealt with at Stage 1 and/or at the local resolution stage.
- Where relevant, to interview all witnesses involved in the complaint.

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5.06 **Head of Safeguarding – Managing Allegations and Post Adoption Service**

- The Head of Safeguarding – Managing Allegations and Post Adoption Service will be the lead for complaints received in relation to services and programmes in the Youth Impact domain and should be made aware of all concerns and complaints and consulted with for all Stage 1, 2 and 3 complaints.
- In conjunction with the Director of Young People’s Services and/or the Executive Director of Youth Impact, they will help to identify appropriate investigating managers for Stage 1, Stage 2 and Stage 3 complaints.
- Along with the Director of Young People’s Services, they will be responsible for ensuring actions resulting from complaints are completed and sent to Supporter care for reporting to the organisation.
- They will provide a summary of complaints in the Youth Impact domain to the CEO and Executive Director of Youth Impact in the monthly Safeguarding report.

5.0.7 **Head of Supporter Experience**

- The Head of Supporter Experience should be informed as appropriate and when required about complaints and their outcomes. Staff members may seek support from the Head of Supporter Experience in handling or responding to complaints, where required. Confidentiality shall be respected with respect to Information shared and this should exclude personal and/or sensitive details (e.g. when the complaint involves a child, young person or family member). The Head of Supporter Experience will not manage grievances or allegations about staff members, as these are addressed under separate safeguarding and HR policies referred to in this policy.
- The Head of Supporter Experience shall be responsible for creating the charity’s annual complaints report.

5.0.8 **Director of Young People’s Services**

- To support Heads of Young People’s Services where complaints escalate to Stage 1, Stage 2 or Stage 3. This will include identifying appropriate investigating managers and signing off on terms of reference for Stage 1, Stage 2 and Stage 3 complaints.

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