



Charity no: 1100976

EXTERNAL COMPLAINTS POLICY

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1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline how Lancashire Women handles complaints across the organisation through various means of expression. The procedure outlined in this document is outlined to enable all staff to follow a consistent approach to handling complaints for fairness and transparency.

2. Scope

This policy and procedures document applies to all complaints received from external parties towards Lancashire Women and its staff, operational centres and services. An external party is any person or organisation that is not directly employed or paid by the organisation, meaning it includes partner organisations and trustees.

3. Definitions

Complaint	A statement, written or verbal, that something is deemed as unsatisfactory or unacceptable by the source of the complaint
Complainant	The party making the complaint
SLT	Senior Leadership Team

4. Complaints policy

Lancashire Women 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 Lancashire Women 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

5. Where complaints come from

Complaints may come from any person or organisation who has a legitimate interest in Lancashire Women i.e. clients, members of the community, other agencies, etc. A complaint can be received verbally, by phone, by email or in writing.

This policy does not cover complaints from staff, they should use Lancashire Women's Disciplinary and Grievance policies.

6. Confidentiality

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

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7. Responsibility

Overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation lies with the Senior Leadership Team.

Responsibility for handling complaints falls to whichever member of staff receives the complaint until the responsibility is formally handed to another member of staff in writing and receipt is confirmed.

8. Publicised contact details for complaints

Written complaints may be sent to Lancashire Women at 21-23 Blackburn Road, Accrington or by e-mail at TalkToUs@lancashirewomen.org

Verbal complaints may be made by phone to 0300 330 1354 or in person to any of Lancashire Women staff, volunteers or trustees. Staff may also receive verbal complaints by phone to their work mobile phones.

9. 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 call or in person complaint should:

- Write down the facts of the complaint
- Take the complainant's name, address, email and telephone number
- Note down the relationship of the complainant to Lancashire Women (for example: service user, partner agency)
- Tell the complainant that we have a complaints procedure
- Tell the complainant what will happen next and how long it will take (outlined in this policy and procedure document)
- Where appropriate, ask the complainant to send a written account by email so that the complaint is recorded in the complainant's own words.

10. Resolving Complaints

10.1 Stage One

In many cases, a complaint is resolved informally when resolved swiftly, if possible and appropriate.

The complaint information should be passed to the relevant Line Manager within two working days if it relates to a specific member of staff. If the complaint relates to more than one member of staff, all Line Managers should be informed within two working days.

If the complaint is in relation to a service, the complaint information should be passed to the relevant Programme Manager within two working days.

When the complaint has been shared with relevant senior staff (Line Managers / Programme Managers) as outlined above, the responsibility moves to that staff member when they confirm receipt.

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On receiving the complaint, it must be recorded in the complaints folder. If it has not already been resolved, investigate it and take appropriate action.

1. If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a fair opportunity to respond.
2. **Complaints should be acknowledged by the person handling the complaint within a week.** The acknowledgement should say who is dealing with the complaint and when the person complaining can expect a reply.
3. **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.

10.2 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 SLT Level.

1. The acknowledgement should say who will deal with the case and when the complainant can expect a reply.
2. The person who receives Stage Two complaints 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.

3. **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.

10.3 External stage

The complainant can complain to the Charity Commission at any stage. Information about the kind of complaints the Commission can involve itself in can be found on their website at: [[Complaints about charities \(CC47\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-charities) / <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-charities>]

11. 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.

12. Monitoring and learning from complaints

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

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