



Version 1.0

Effective: 01-03-2026

Complaints Policy and Procedure for Dorset Women CIC



Complaints Policy and Procedure

1. Purpose of this Policy

Dorset Women CIC is committed to providing high-quality, respectful and transparent services. We welcome feedback, including complaints, as they help us learn, improve, and ensure we are meeting the needs of the women and communities we support.

This policy explains:

- What complaints Dorset Women CIC can consider
- How to make a complaint
- How complaints will be handled
- What complainants can expect from us

This policy is designed to be simple, clear, and accessible, in line with **Section 2.4: Complaints and concerns about fundraising** of the [Fundraising Code of Practice](#).

If a complaint raises a safeguarding concern, risk of harm, or allegation of abuse, it will be managed in accordance with the Dorset Women CIC Safeguarding Policy rather than solely under this Complaints Procedure. Safeguarding concerns will take priority and may require referral to statutory authorities.

Where a complaint reveals a matter that may constitute a serious incident (e.g., safeguarding failure, financial irregularity, significant reputational risk), it will be escalated immediately to the Board and handled in accordance with the Serious Incident Reporting Framework.

2. Scope of Complaints

We can consider complaints relating to:

- Our services, activities, or events
- The behaviour or actions of our staff, volunteers, or anyone acting on our behalf
- Our fundraising activities and communications
- How we have applied our policies or procedures

We cannot usually consider:

- Complaints about matters outside our control
- Anonymous complaints where there is insufficient information to investigate
- Issues that are the subject of ongoing legal proceedings

3. How to Make a Complaint

Complaints can be made by anyone who has been affected by our work or fundraising activities.

You can submit a complaint by:

- Email
- Letter
- Telephone
- In person

Complaints should be passed internally to the Complaints Lead (normally a Director or senior staff member). All staff and volunteers are expected to know how to do this if they receive a complaint.

We encourage complaints to be made as soon as possible so we can address concerns quickly.

4. Acknowledging and Responding to Complaints

We aim to deal with complaints quickly, fairly, and efficiently.

- We will acknowledge receipt of a complaint within 5 working days
- Our acknowledgement will explain:
 - The complaints process
 - Who is handling the complaint
 - When the complainant can expect a response

If we are unable to meet our stated timescales, we will:

- Keep the complainant informed
- Explain the reasons for the delay

We aim to provide a full written response within 20 working days. If the complaint is complex and requires more time, we will provide an update within 20 working days explaining the reason and the revised timescale.

5. Investigating Complaints

Complaints will be investigated fairly and thoroughly.

Where possible:

- The complaint will be investigated by someone independent of the events complained about
- If this is not possible, we may ask a third party to carry out the investigation

As part of the investigation, we will:

- Listen carefully to the complainant to understand the issue and the outcome they are seeking
- Review all relevant evidence
- Speak to any staff, volunteers, or third parties involved
- Inform staff if a complaint has been made about them and give them the opportunity to respond

We have a duty of care to both complainants and staff involved.

6. Reaching a Decision

Once the investigation is complete, we will:

- Provide a clear, evidence-based response
- Address all substantive points raised
- Explain whether the complaint is upheld, partially upheld, or not upheld

Our response will be:

- Respectful and open
- Proportionate and fair
- Acknowledging the complainant's experience, regardless of the outcome

Where appropriate, we will:

- Take responsibility for mistakes
- Apologise
- Take action to put things right
- Explain what we have learned and any changes made to improve our services, policies, or procedures

Possible outcomes may include:

- An explanation
 - An apology
 - A change in practice or procedure
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7. Escalation and External Review

If a complainant is not satisfied with our response, we will clearly explain how they can escalate their complaint.

For fundraising-related complaints that we are unable to resolve, complainants will be signposted to:

- The Fundraising Regulator (England, Wales and Northern Ireland), or
- The Scottish Fundraising Adjudication Panel (where applicable)

If the complaint concerns a Director, the matter will be handled by the Chair (or an independent Director if the Chair is involved). Where appropriate, the Board may appoint an independent external reviewer.

8. Learning and Improvement

Dorset Women CIC uses complaints as a learning opportunity. We regularly review complaints to:

- Identify themes or recurring issues
 - Improve services and fundraising practices
 - Strengthen policies, guidance, and staff training
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9. Accessibility and Awareness

This Complaints Policy and Procedure:

- Is published prominently on our website
 - Is shared internally with staff and volunteers
 - Is available in alternative formats upon request
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All complaints will be handled confidentially and in accordance with our Data Protection Policy. Information will be shared only on a need-to-know basis.

Dorset Women CIC reserves the right to manage unreasonable, vexatious or persistent complaints proportionately, while ensuring fairness and transparency.

Approved by: Dorset Women CIC
Review date: 28-02-2029