



## Complaints Procedure

Last reviewed by the Trustees: June 2020

### Receiving Complaints

Complaints may arrive through channels publicised for that purpose or through any other contact details or opportunities the complainant may have.

All complaints should be recorded in the Complaints Log.

The person who receives a verbal or telephone complaint should:

- Write down the details of the complaint.
- Take the complainant's name, address and telephone number.
- Note down the relationship of the complainant to Level Trust (for example: client, project partner, donor).
- Give/send the complainant a copy of the Complaints Policy.
- Where appropriate, ask the complainant to send a written account by post or by email so that the complaint is recorded in the complainant's own words. For further guidelines about handling verbal complaints, see Appendix 1.

### Resolving Complaints

#### (a) Stage One

In many cases, a complaint is best resolved by the Level Trust representative involved. If a complaint has been received by that person, they may be able to resolve it swiftly and should do so if possible and appropriate. The complaint information should be passed to the CEO and a note of all correspondence regarding the complaint kept on record.

If the issue has not been resolved, and the complainant wishes to make a formal complaint, the CEO must be informed and an appropriate person will be asked to investigate the matter. In this case a formal acknowledgement will be sent to the complainant within **7 working days** of the complaint being raised and an entry made in the Complaints Log. The formal acknowledgement should say who is dealing with the complaint and when the complainant may expect a reply. A copy of the complaints policy should be included with the letter.

If a complaint involves a safeguarding allegation, the safeguarding officer must also be informed and safeguarding procedures followed alongside complaints procedures.

Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within **21 working days**. 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.

#### (b) Stage Two

Level Trust is a registered charity number 1178223, [www.leveltrust.org](http://www.leveltrust.org) Unit 2G The Mall, Luton, LU1 2TW

If the complainant feels that the problem has not been satisfactorily resolved at Stage One, they can request that the complaint is reviewed at Board level. At this stage, the complaint will be passed to the Chair of Trustees.

The request for Board level review should be acknowledged within **one week** of receipt and include details of who will deal with the case and when the complainant can expect a reply.

The Chair of Trustees may investigate the facts of the case herself or delegate a suitably senior person to do so. This may involve reviewing the paperwork and speaking with the person who dealt with the complaint at Stage One. In all cases, people involved in the original investigation should be aware of what is happening.

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.

### **(c) External Stage**

The complainant can complain to the Charity Commission at any stage. Information about the kind of complaints the Commission can involve itself with are available on their website at: [www.charitycommission.gov.uk/publications/cc47.aspx](http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/publications/cc47.aspx).

### **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 have the Chair as the person leading a Stage Two review.

### **Monitoring and Learning from Complaints**

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

## Appendix 1 - Practical Guidance for Handling Verbal Complaints

- Remain calm and respectful throughout the conversation.
- Listen - allow the person to talk about the complaint in their own words. Sometimes a person just wants to "let off steam".
- Don't debate the facts in the first instance, especially if the person is angry.
- Show an interest in what is being said.
- Obtain details about the complaint before any personal details.
- Ask for clarification wherever necessary.
- Show that you have understood the complaint by reading back what you have noted down.
- Acknowledge the person's feelings (even if you feel that they are being unreasonable) - you can do this without making a comment on the complaint itself or making any admission of fault on behalf of the organisation, e.g. "I understand that this situation is frustrating for you.
- If you feel that an apology is deserved for something that was the responsibility of your organisation, then apologise.
- Ask the person what they would like done to resolve the issue.
- If you are able to offer them a response they are satisfied with explain that you will send them a copy of the conversation, that the CEO will be informed, a copy of the conversation kept on log and marked as resolved.
- If they are not satisfied with the response, explain that you will send them a copy of the conversation and the Complaints Policy, that the CEO will be informed and that someone will be assigned to investigate their complaint further.
- Ensure you have taken personal details, i.e. name, address/email, telephone number.
- Be clear about what you can do, how long it will take and what it will involve.
- Don't promise things you can't deliver.
- Give clear and valid reasons why requests cannot be met.
- Make sure that the person understands what they have been told.
- Wherever appropriate, inform the person about the available avenues of review or appeal.
- Once you have completed the conversation, ensure the information is written down and passed to the CEO so that a formal acknowledgement can be sent and an entry made in the Complaints Log.