

Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy

Introduction and Purpose

InterAct strives to provide a high standard of service, and we are committed to respecting the views of the families and individuals we support, our volunteers and other external stakeholders.

Feedback from our stakeholders is invaluable in helping us evaluate and improve our work.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that:

- External stakeholders know how to provide feedback and how a complaint will be handled.
- Complaints are dealt with consistently, fairly and sensitively within clear and acceptable timeframes.
- Individuals have an effective way to comment on InterAct's work and services.
- Compliments and complaints are monitored and used to improve our services.
- Complaints are responded to with a trauma informed and trauma responsive approach and are resolution focused.

Scope

This policy applies to all individuals acting on behalf of InterAct, who are responsible for receiving, recording, handling, or escalating feedback. This includes:

- All members of the Board of Trustees.
- The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the Senior Management Team (SMT).
- All permanent, fixed-term, and sessional employees.
- All volunteers and others who work for us or on our behalf.

This policy is designed for external stakeholders who interact with our services or organisation.

Anyone may use this process to submit a comment, compliment, or complaint, including:

- Service users - the children and young people supported by the charity.
- Parents, guardians, carers, and family members of our service users.
- Donors, supporters, and members of the public.
- Partner organisations, local authorities, and external contractors.

It does not apply to complaints from colleagues, which are governed by InterAct's HR policies and procedures. This policy covers any positive or negative feedback regarding the standard, quality, or delivery of InterAct's services, operational activities, and the conduct of its staff or volunteers.

Definitions

A **compliment** is any expression of positive feedback by an external stakeholder.

A **complaint** is any expression of dissatisfaction by an external stakeholder.

Legal and Regulatory Requirements

This policy has been developed with reference to relevant legislation, regulatory expectations, and recognised good practice guidance applicable to charities and organisations delivering services to children, young people, adults, families, volunteers, and the wider public.

InterAct will manage comments, compliments, concerns, and complaints in accordance with:

- Charities Act 2011;
- Charity Commission guidance, including:
 - CC3: The Essential Trustee;
 - Charity Governance Code;
 - guidance relating to safeguarding, complaints handling, and serious incident reporting;
- Children Act 1989 and 2004;
- Care Act 2014;
- Equality Act 2010;
- Human Rights Act 1998;
- Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR;
- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974;
- safeguarding legislation and statutory guidance;
- Working Together to Safeguard Children;
- relevant Southend, Essex and Thurrock (SET) safeguarding procedures;
- Fundraising Regulator Code of Fundraising Practice, where applicable; and
- any contractual, funding, commissioning, or regulatory requirements applicable to InterAct's services.

Roles and Responsibilities

Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees has overall responsibility for ensuring that InterAct maintains appropriate arrangements for receiving, managing, investigating, responding to, and learning from comments, compliments, concerns, and complaints.

Trustees are responsible for:

- promoting a culture of openness, accountability, and continuous improvement;
- ensuring complaints are managed fairly, proportionately, and consistently;
- ensuring appropriate governance oversight of complaints and serious concerns;
- monitoring themes, trends, risks, and learning arising from complaints;
- ensuring safeguarding, disciplinary, regulatory, or serious incident concerns are escalated appropriately;
- ensuring complaints processes remain accessible and appropriate; and
- ensuring compliance with legal, safeguarding, and regulatory obligations.

Trustees may review serious, complex, high-risk, or escalated complaints where appropriate.

Chair of Trustees

The Chair of Trustees is responsible for:

- overseeing complaints involving the CEO where appropriate;
- supporting trustee oversight of serious or escalated complaints;
- ensuring conflicts of interest are managed appropriately during complaint handling; and
- supporting fair and transparent governance arrangements.

Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) has overall operational responsibility for the implementation of this policy.

The CEO is responsible for:

- ensuring comments, compliments, concerns, and complaints are managed appropriately;
- ensuring concerns are investigated proportionately and fairly;
- ensuring safeguarding, disciplinary, health and safety, or serious incident concerns are escalated appropriately;
- ensuring complainants are treated respectfully and fairly;
- supporting learning and service improvement arising from complaints;
- ensuring appropriate records are maintained;

- ensuring trends, themes, risks, and recurring concerns are monitored;
- ensuring serious complaints are reported to trustees where appropriate; and
- ensuring regulatory, statutory, commissioning, or safeguarding reporting obligations are met where necessary.

The CEO may delegate elements of complaint handling to appropriate managers while retaining overall oversight.

Service/Project Managers

Service and Project Managers are responsible for:

- responding to concerns and complaints within their areas of responsibility;
- attempting to resolve low-level concerns promptly and informally where appropriate;
- ensuring concerns are taken seriously and responded to professionally;
- supporting investigations and information gathering where required;
- ensuring that safeguarding or serious concerns are escalated immediately;
- maintaining appropriate records relating to complaints and actions taken;
- identifying recurring issues or emerging risks within services; and
- supporting learning and improvement within their teams.

Staff and Volunteers

All staff and volunteers are responsible for:

- treating comments, compliments, concerns, and complaints respectfully and professionally;
- listening to concerns openly and without defensiveness;
- reporting complaints or concerns appropriately;
- cooperating with complaint investigations or reviews;
- maintaining confidentiality where appropriate;
- escalating safeguarding, health and safety, misconduct, discrimination, or serious concerns promptly; and
- supporting a culture of openness, accountability, and continuous improvement.

HR/Finance Officer

The HR/Finance Officer may support:

- complaint logging and administration;
- record keeping and document management;
- correspondence management;
- maintaining complaint records and audit trails; and
- supporting monitoring and reporting arrangements where appropriate.

Complainants

Individuals raising concerns are expected to communicate respectfully wherever reasonably possible and avoid abusive, discriminatory, threatening, or vexatious behaviour.

Policy

Accessibility and Third-Party Support

InterAct recognises that our service users, parents, or carers may sometimes face barriers to submitting feedback in writing. Therefore:

- Comments, compliments, or complaints can be submitted **in person** or **over the phone**. Where this occurs, the receiving staff member will accurately capture the details in writing on behalf of the individual.
- Complainants are welcome to be supported by a third party (such as a trusted friend, family member, or independent representative) to help them articulate their concerns if it makes them feel more comfortable.

Complaints and Safeguarding Concerns

InterAct recognises that comments, concerns, or complaints may sometimes identify safeguarding concerns. Where a comment or complaint:

- involves alleged abuse, neglect, exploitation, or harm;
- raises concerns about the behaviour or conduct of a staff member, volunteer, trustee, or another individual;
- relates to safeguarding practice or failures;
- indicates that an individual may be at risk of harm; or
- otherwise meets safeguarding thresholds,

the matter may be managed under InterAct's Safeguarding Policies and Procedures rather than solely through the complaints process.

In some circumstances:

- safeguarding processes may take priority over the complaints procedure;
- elements of a complaint investigation may be paused while safeguarding or criminal investigations take place; or
- information sharing may be restricted to protect individuals, investigations, or legal processes.

Please Note: The fact that a matter is managed under safeguarding procedures does not prevent InterAct from also considering complaints, service concerns, disciplinary matters, or organisational learning where appropriate.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

InterAct recognises the importance of handling comments, compliments, concerns, and complaints sensitively, fairly, securely, and in accordance with data protection and confidentiality requirements.

Information relating to complaints and concerns will normally be:

- treated confidentially;

- shared only on a need-to-know basis;
- stored securely; and
- accessed only by authorised individuals.

InterAct will manage complaint information in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018, UK GDPR, safeguarding obligations and relevant legal and regulatory duties.

InterAct recognises that confidentiality cannot always be guaranteed. Information may be shared where:

- there are safeguarding concerns;
- there is risk of harm to a child, adult, staff member, volunteer, or others;
- disclosure is required by law;
- criminal activity is suspected;
- regulatory or statutory reporting obligations apply;
- information is required for legal proceedings; or
- sharing information is otherwise necessary to protect individuals or the charity.

Where possible and appropriate, InterAct will seek to explain:

- why information is being shared;
- who it will be shared with; and
- the legal or safeguarding basis for sharing.

Individuals involved in complaints or investigations are expected to:

- maintain appropriate confidentiality;
- avoid inappropriate disclosure of sensitive information; and
- handle information responsibly and professionally.

Comments and complaints will be retained only for as long as necessary or legally required.

Related Policies and Procedures

This policy should be read alongside InterAct's:

- Safeguarding Policies;
- Whistleblowing Policy;
- Data Protection and Confidentiality Policies;
- Serious Incident Reporting Policy; and
- relevant disciplinary, grievance, and governance procedures.

Comments or Compliments Procedure

Any external individual wishing to submit a comment or compliment can do so by email to mail@interact.org.uk, by phone, in person, or by mail/by hand to the office address.

We will maintain a central record of comments and compliments. Any member of staff identified as being the subject of or contributing to any matter giving rise to a compliment will be notified in a timely fashion.

Complaints Procedure

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

InterAct aims to resolve any concerns raised about its work quickly and informally.

When an informal concern is raised, the receiving staff member will contact the relevant Service/Project Manager to report it or refer the complainant directly to the Service Manager to discuss the matter.

To ensure learning can be derived from all feedback, the staff member handling the discussion will make a brief record of the informal chat so the issue is noted by the service.

If requested at any stage, InterAct will escalate the concern immediately as a formal complaint.

Note: Serious incidents such as complaints relating to safeguarding, criminal activity, etc., must always be escalated as a formal complaint.

Stage 2 - Formal Complaint

Any external individual wishing to make a formal complaint should submit this via email, phone, or in writing, marked 'Confidential', to the Chief Executive (CEO) of InterAct at the office address below:

- InterAct (Chelmsford) Ltd, Unit 16, Old Park Farm, Ford End, Chelmsford, CM3 1LN

Or email below:

- CEO-Vickie Perkins vickie.perkins@interact.org.uk

Should the complaint concern the Chief Executive, the complaint should be addressed directly to the Chair of Trustees.

- Chair of trustees- Caroline Clements caroline.clements@interact.org.uk

The matter will be investigated by the CEO (or Chair of Trustees), in conjunction with the relevant manager.

Complaints will be recorded and acknowledged within five working days of receipt. The complainant will be advised that if they are not satisfied with the response to the complaint, they may appeal to the Chief Executive (or Chair of Trustees) in writing within fourteen days. The complaint will then progress to Stage 3.

Stage 3 - Appeal

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may appeal by writing to the Board of Trustees.

An impartial Trustee will be appointed, as appropriate, to re-investigate the matter. The complainant will receive written confirmation of the outcome of the appeal within twenty working days of receipt. Alternatively, the complainant may be invited to a meeting to resolve the issue. Where there are any delays, the complainant will be informed of the reasons.

This is normally the final internal stage.

External Redress & Regulatory Reporting

Stage 3 represents the final stage of InterAct's internal complaints procedure.

If a complainant remains dissatisfied with InterAct's internal review, the concern can be escalated to external regulatory bodies. For example:

The Charity Commission: For serious concerns regarding charity governance, illegal activity, or severe risk to beneficiaries, assets, or reputation.

- *Website:* www.gov.uk/complain-about-charity

The Fundraising Regulator: If the complaint concerns the charity's fundraising practices or marketing methods.

- *Website:* www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO): If the complaint relates to a breach of data protection, UK GDPR, or privacy.

- *Website:* www.ico.org.uk

Furthermore, if an internal investigation confirms that a serious complaint was well-founded and involved significant misconduct affecting the charity, InterAct will proactively self-refer and report the matter to the Charity Commission as a Serious Incident.

Monitoring and Governance Oversight

Compliments and complaints are vital tools for service evaluation. To ensure effective governance and continuous organisational learning:

- All complaints and compliments will be compiled and considered regularly by the CEO and Project/Service Managers at monthly intervals.
- An anonymised summary of all complaints and resolutions will be reviewed by the Board of Trustees at their quarterly trustee meetings.
- Wherever possible, this data will be utilised to directly improve and develop InterAct's services.

Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed at least annually, or sooner, where:

- legislation, safeguarding guidance, or regulatory expectations change;
- significant complaints or incidents occur;
- monitoring identifies concerns or weaknesses;

- organisational arrangements change; or
- improvements are identified through audits, reviews, complaints, safeguarding processes, or operational learning.

Version Control

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Change history

Version 1 [Sept 2023] Initial issue

Version 2 [22/05/26] Added multiple sections on roles and responsibilities, accessibility, confidentiality, safeguarding, external complaints, etc.

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Approved By: Vickie Perkins (CEO) and Rebecca Wade-Palmer (Trustee)