



Subject	Complaints & Compliments Policy
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Policy Holder	Kerry Smart

Policy Statement

This Policy sets out best practice for Life’s complaints and compliments handling process, to enable a positive complaints and compliments culture across the Charity.

Life is committed to providing a high-quality service. The Complaints and Compliments policy enables Life to respond clearly and promptly to complaints and compliments and to know when and why people are satisfied or dissatisfied with our services, so that Life can continue to improve on them.

The early and local resolution of issues is key to effective complaint handling. Complaints can be made in writing, in person, over the phone or online via email, messaging or using our online form.

If a member of staff or volunteer are in receipt of a complaint or dissatisfaction where they must offer the opportunity for a complaint to be made, the staff member or volunteer can do any of the following:

- direct the individual to our website where they will find our complaints page which has our policy and more details around how they can make a complaint. [Complaints - Life \(lifecharity.org.uk\)](https://lifecharity.org.uk/complaints)
- share the complaints email address complaints@lifecharity.org.uk with the individual so the complaint can be sent directly to the complaints inbox.
- Or, take a short brief of what the individual is unhappy with. Take their name, phone number and email address and send the information to the complaints email address directly themselves.

All complaints must go through the central complaints handler to ensure appropriate handling of complaints is maintained in line with this policy.

1. Definition of a Complaint

- a. Effective complaint handling enables complainants to be heard and understood. The starting point for this is a shared understanding of what constitutes a complaint.
- b. A complaint must be defined as:

‘an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the charity/landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, of an individual or group of people’ (made by anyone including residents, clients, and/or members of the public)’

- c. An individual does not have to use the word ‘complaint’ for it to be treated as such.
- d. Whenever an individual expresses dissatisfaction the Charity must give them the choice to make complaint. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative must be handled in line with the Charity’s complaints policy.
- e. Staff must recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint. A service request is a request from a service user to the Charity requiring action to be taken to put something right. Service requests are not complaints, but must be recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly.
- f. A complaint must be raised when an individual expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, even if the handling of the service request remains ongoing. The Charity must not stop their efforts to address the service request if the service user complains.
- g. An expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a survey is not defined as a complaint, though wherever possible, the person completing the survey should be made aware of how they can pursue a complaint if they wish to. Where the Charity asks for wider feedback about their services, they also must provide details of how a service user can complain.

2. Exclusions

- a. Life will accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so. If the complaints handler decides not to accept a complaint, they will evidence their reasoning. Each complaint will be considered on its own merits.
- b. A complaint will be excluded if:
 - The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over 12 months ago
 - Legal proceedings have started. This is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court
 - Matters have previously been considered under the complaints policy
- c. Life will accept complaints referred to them within 12 months of the issue occurring or the individual becoming aware of the issue, unless they are excluded on other grounds. The Charity must consider whether to apply discretion to accept complaints made outside this time limit where there are good reasons to do so.

- d. If the Complaints handler decides not to accept a complaint, an explanation will be provided to the complainant setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the relevant regulatory body. If the regulatory body does not agree that the exclusion has been fairly applied, the regulator may tell the Charity to take on the complaint.
- e. Life will consider the individual circumstances of each complaint.

3. Complaints Process

Complainant: person making the complaint

Complaints team: Person or persons monitoring the complaints inbox

Complaint handler: Person handling the complaint

Complaint investigator: Person allocated the complaint to investigate (This may or may not be the complaint handler)

All complaints will be acknowledged within five working days through the central complaints email. Where an email is not available the allocated complaints handler will be informed by the complaints team to contact the complainant via phone or by other means as appropriate. Complaints will be investigated fully and fairly in an efficient manner. At all stages of the complaint process every effort will be made to understand the complaint and any outcomes the complainant is seeking (this is known as the complaint definition). If there are any parts of the complaint that Life is not responsible for this will be explained fully to the complainant at the time the complaint is made. Life will consider any reasonable adjustments required under the Equality Act 2010 (Amendment) Regulations 2023 to ensure the process remains appropriate and accessible. All complainants have the right to have a representative deal with the complaint on their behalf and/or be accompanied at any meetings that may be offered.

Employees should use Life's Grievance Policy and Procedure as their route to lodge a complaint. Employees should read & use Life's "Whistleblowing" procedure if it is more appropriate.

All complaints will be allocated a unique reference number by the complaints team, before being allocated to a complaint handler that is deemed to have no conflict of interest when dealing with the complaint. If the complaint is a stage 2 complaint, the complaints handler will always allocate the complaint to a complaints investigator that has not been involved at any prior stage. This is to ensure the process remains fair and transparent.

Stage 1

Most stage 1 complaints can be resolved promptly, and an explanation, apology or resolution provided to the complainant. Stage 1 complaints will usually be fully resolved within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged. Life will decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform the complainant of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 10 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the complainant.

Complaint handlers must confirm the following in writing to the complainant at the completion of Stage 1 in clear, plain language:

- a. the complaint stage;
- b. the complaint definition;
- c. the decision on the complaint;

- d. the reasons for any decisions made;
- e. the details of any remedy offered to put things right;
- f. details of any outstanding actions; and
- g. details of how to escalate the matter to stage 2 if the individual is not satisfied with the response

If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the complainant's satisfaction at stage 1, it must be progressed to stage 2 of the complaints procedure. Stage 2 is the final stage and final response. Complainants can do this verbally or in writing through any of the channels they have access to.

Stage 2

Complaints escalated to stage 2 should be acknowledged by the Complaints handler, defined and logged within 5 working days of the escalation request being received. Complainants must not be required to explain their reasons for requesting a stage 2 consideration. Reasonable efforts will be made by the complaints handler to understand why the complainant remains unhappy. Final responses should be issued within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged. Life will decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform the complainant of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 20 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the complainant.

Complaint handlers must confirm the following in writing to the complainant at the completion of stage 2 in clear, plain language:

- a. the complaint stage;
- b. the complaint definition;
- c. the decision on the complaint;
- d. the reasons for any decisions made;
- e. the details of any remedy offered to put things right;
- f. details of any outstanding actions; and
- g. details of how to escalate the matter to the relevant external agency if the individual remains dissatisfied.

If the complaint is related to:

- **Counselling** - the complainant can contact the British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy (BACP) [How to complain about a BACP member](#)
- **Fundraising** - the complainant can contact the Fundraising Regulator [Make a complaint | Fundraising Regulator](#)
- **Housing** - the complainant can contact either:
 - Housing Ombudsman Service. Details of how to do this can be found on the Housing Ombudsman website [Free for Residents | Make a complaint | Housing Ombudsman \(housing-ombudsman.org.uk\)](#), alongside their revised complaint handling code that Life adheres to.
 - The relevant Commissioning Body if the service is provided under a support contract
- **Retail** - the complainant may contact the Retail Ombudsman or Citizens Advice. More details can be found on the consumer rights section of the Government's website here [Consumer rights - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- **The Charity** - the complainant can contact the Charity Commission if they are concerned about the charity's conduct. More information on how to do this can be found here [Raising Concerns · Starter Portal \(charitycommission.gov.uk\)](#)

4. Time Limits/Stopping the Complaint

If for any reason the time frames at any stage cannot be met the complainant will be informed and an alternative time frame for resolution will be offered. In addition, suitable arrangements for updates on progress will be agreed with the complainant.

If the complainant wishes to withdraw the complaint at any time this can be done verbally or in writing to the allocated complaints handler. The log will then be updated to reflect this.

5. Review

Life's Complaints team collates quarterly information about complaints and any learning and changes to policy, procedure and practice made as a result. This is reported to all stakeholders including Service Users, the Senior Leadership Team and the Board of Trustees every quarter. Life also produces an annual complaints report that is published on the website. The board also has an appointed member known as the 'Member Responsible for Complaints' (MRC) that ensures that information regarding complaints are appropriately made available for scrutiny by the Board of Trustees.

Compliments

All compliments that are received should be logged within the relevant Microsoft Teams channel. Every effort should be made by all staff and volunteers to comment on and recognise when good work is being done. Managers should be made aware of any direct feedback that is shared with staff or others about their direct reports, so the appropriate recognition and reward can be offered.

Life – Trauma Informed promise

By submitting this Policy the author is confirming that they have considered the six principles of a Trauma Informed approach as a means for reducing the negative impact of trauma experiences and supporting mental and physical health outcomes. This includes putting people before protocol, creating a culture of thoughtfulness and communication, and continuously doing our best to learn about and adapt to the different and changing needs of the individuals we work with.