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COMPLAINTS POLICY

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Purpose

1.1 The Independent Living Centre (ILC) aims to provide the best possible service to clients.

1.2 The ILC views all feedback including 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.

1.3 The ILC recognises that there may be occasions when individuals consider that the quality or level of service provided is less than could reasonably be expected. The ILC is committed to responding to such concerns fairly and appropriately.

Scope

2.1 A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about any aspect of the ILC's services, staff, facilities, conduct or the way in which the ILC has carried out its work. A complaint may be made whether or not the ILC considers the complaint to be justified.

2.2 We welcome feedback, comments and compliments as well as complaints. Feedback that can be resolved quickly and informally may not need to be dealt with through the formal complaints procedure, provided the person is satisfied with the response.

2.3 A complaint may be made by a client, their representative, carer, family member, advocate, professional or any other person who has been affected by the ILC's services or actions.

2.4 Complaints about safeguarding concerns, suspected abuse or neglect, serious health and safety concerns, suspected fraud, serious data protection breaches or other matters requiring an immediate response will be dealt with under the relevant policy or procedure as appropriate. Where appropriate, a complaint may also be dealt with under this complaints procedure.

2.5 Complaints relating to the employment or conduct of a member of staff may need to be dealt with under the relevant internal HR procedure rather than through this complaints procedure. The complainant will be informed where this is the case, subject to confidentiality requirements.

Principles



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3.1 Our complaints procedure will:

3.1.1 Provide a fair, clear and accessible procedure for anyone wishing to make a complaint.

3.1.2 Make information about how to make a complaint readily available to clients, visitors, staff and other people who use or come into contact with the ILC.

3.1.3 Ensure that complaints can be made in a way that is appropriate to the complainant's circumstances, including verbally, in writing or by email.

3.1.4 Make reasonable adjustments where necessary to enable a person with a disability or communication difficulty to make or participate in a complaint.

3.1.5 Allow complainants to be supported by a representative, advocate, family member, carer or other appropriate person where they wish.

3.1.6 Ensure that complaints are investigated fairly, objectively and within a reasonable timescale.

3.1.7 Ensure that anyone investigating or making a decision about a complaint is appropriately independent and has no actual or perceived conflict of interest.

3.1.8 Treat complainants and staff involved in complaints with dignity and respect.

3.1.9 Handle complaint information sensitively and in accordance with data protection and confidentiality requirements.

3.1.10 Wherever possible, resolve complaints and take appropriate action to put things right.

3.1.11 Use complaints, compliments, comments and other feedback to identify learning and improve the services we provide.

3.1.12 Ensure that no person is disadvantaged or treated less favourably because they have made a genuine complaint.



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Procedure

4.1 A complaint can be made in writing, by email, by telephone or in person. Complaints may be made using the ILC's complaints form, although this is not required.

4.2 Complaints may be made to any member of staff. Staff receiving a complaint should listen carefully, record the relevant information and ensure that the complaint is passed promptly to the person responsible for dealing with it.

4.3 A person does not need to use the word "complaint" for their concern to be considered under this procedure. Where someone expresses dissatisfaction that cannot be resolved immediately, staff should consider whether it should be recorded and dealt with as a complaint.

4.4 Where a complaint is made verbally, the person receiving it should record sufficient information to understand the nature of the complaint, including, where appropriate, the complainant's name and contact details, the date and method of the complaint, the issues raised and any action already taken.

4.5 Where appropriate, the complainant may be asked to provide further information or a written account. However, a person will not be required to submit a written complaint where this would create an unnecessary barrier to making a complaint.

4.6 Where a complaint is made on behalf of another person, the ILC may need to confirm that the complainant has the person's permission to act on their behalf, unless there is a legitimate reason why this is not appropriate, for example where safeguarding or other legal considerations apply.

4.7 The ILC will make reasonable adjustments to enable people with disabilities or communication difficulties to make and participate in a complaint. This may include allowing additional time, communicating in an alternative format, or allowing a representative, advocate, family member or carer to assist.

4.8 The person receiving the complaint should explain what will happen next and, where possible, provide an indication of when the complainant can expect a response.



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4.9 Complaints will be handled sensitively. Information will only be shared with those who need to know for the purpose of investigating and responding to the complaint, or where disclosure is necessary or permitted for safeguarding, legal, regulatory or other legitimate purposes.

4.10 Complaints should be recorded and passed to the person responsible for dealing with them as soon as reasonably practicable.

4.11 A complaints leaflet or other information explaining how to make a complaint should be available to clients and other people using the ILC's services.

4.12 Anonymous complaints will be considered where sufficient information is provided to enable the ILC to investigate or respond appropriately. Where a complainant does not provide contact details, the ILC may be unable to provide a response or seek further information.

Resolving Complaints

5.1 Stage One

5.1.1 Wherever possible, complaints should be resolved promptly and informally by the person responsible for the issue being complained about, provided that this is appropriate and the complainant is satisfied with the response.

5.1.2 Where a complaint cannot be resolved informally, or where the complainant wishes to make a formal complaint, it will be dealt with at Stage One.

5.1.3 Stage One complaints will normally be investigated by the Chief Executive or another suitably senior member of staff who has not been directly involved in the matter being complained about.

5.1.4 Where the complaint concerns the Chief Executive, a Trustee or another person who would ordinarily be responsible for investigating the complaint, the complaint will be referred to an appropriate Trustee or other suitably independent person.

5.1.5 The person responsible for investigating the complaint will consider the information provided by the complainant, review relevant records and speak to relevant people where necessary.



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5.1.6 Where a complaint relates to a specific member of staff, that person will be informed of the complaint and given a fair opportunity to respond. Information will be shared with them only to the extent necessary to enable the complaint to be investigated.

5.1.7 The complaint will normally be acknowledged within 2 working days. The acknowledgement will confirm who is dealing with the complaint and, where possible, when the complainant can expect a full response.

5.1.8 The ILC will aim to provide a full written response within 20 working days. If this is not possible, for example because further investigation is required, the complainant will be informed of the reason for the delay and given an indication of when a full response is expected.

5.1.9 The response will explain how the complaint has been investigated, the conclusions reached and any action taken or proposed as a result.

5.1.10 Where a complaint is upheld or partially upheld, the ILC will take appropriate action to address the issues identified and, where appropriate, prevent them from recurring.

5.2 Stage Two

5.2.1 If the complainant remains dissatisfied following the Stage One response, they may request that the complaint is reviewed at Stage Two.

5.2.2 A request for a Stage Two review should normally be made within 20 working days of the Stage One response. This timescale may be extended where there is a reasonable explanation for the delay.

5.2.3 The Stage Two review will normally be undertaken by a Trustee who was not involved in the Stage One investigation or decision.

5.2.4 Where appropriate, the Trustee may ask another suitably independent person to assist with or undertake the review.

5.2.5 The Stage Two reviewer will consider whether the Stage One complaint was investigated fairly and whether the conclusions reached were reasonable based on the information available. They may also consider any new relevant information provided by the complainant.



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5.2.6 The Stage Two review will normally be acknowledged within 5 working days. The acknowledgement will confirm who is dealing with the review and, where possible, when the complainant can expect a response.

5.2.7 The ILC will aim to provide a full response within 20 working days. If this is not possible, the complainant will be informed of the reason for the delay and given an indication of when a full response is expected.

5.2.8 The Stage Two response will explain the outcome of the review and any action that the ILC considers appropriate.

5.2.9 The Stage Two decision is normally the final stage of the ILC's internal complaints procedure.

5.3 External Escalation

5.3.1 The Charity Commission regulates registered charities in England and Wales. It does not normally act as an appeal body for individual complaints about the services provided by a charity.

5.3.2 If a complaint raises concerns about serious wrongdoing, regulatory compliance, governance or the conduct of Trustees, the complainant may be able to raise the matter with the Charity Commission. Further information about the types of concerns the Charity Commission can consider is available on its website.

5.3.3 Where another organisation has responsibility for regulating or investigating a particular matter, the complainant may also have the option of contacting that organisation. The ILC will provide information about any relevant external route where appropriate.

5.4 Variation of the Complaints Procedure

5.4.1 Anyone involved in receiving, investigating or making a decision about a complaint must declare any actual or perceived conflict of interest.

5.4.2 Where a conflict of interest exists, the complaint will be allocated to another suitably independent person wherever possible.



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5.4.3 The procedure may be varied where necessary to ensure that a complaint is handled fairly and appropriately. This may include where a complaint concerns the Chief Executive, Chair, another Trustee, a member of staff or another person who would normally be responsible for handling the complaint.

5.4.4 Any significant variation to the procedure will be documented, together with the reason for the variation.

5.5 Unreasonable or abusive behaviour

5.5.1 The ILC recognises that people making complaints may be upset or frustrated. Staff will remain respectful and will seek to understand and address legitimate concerns.

5.5.2 The ILC will not tolerate threatening, abusive, discriminatory or offensive behaviour towards staff, Trustees, volunteers or others involved in dealing with a complaint.

5.5.3 Where a person's behaviour is unacceptable, the ILC may take reasonable steps to protect staff and others. This may include limiting communication to a particular method, limiting the frequency of contact, requiring communication through a nominated person, or ending a particular interaction.

5.5.4 A complaint will not be considered unreasonable simply because it is persistent, difficult to resolve or because the complainant disagrees with the outcome.

5.5.5 Where a complaint is considered to be persistent or unreasonable, the Chief Executive or an appropriate Trustee may decide how further correspondence will be managed. Any such decision will be proportionate and will not prevent the ILC from responding to new or significant information.

Accountability, Monitoring, and Learning from Complaints

6.1 The ILC will maintain a record of complaints received, including the nature of the complaint, how it was handled, the outcome and any action taken as a result.

6.2 Complaint information will be handled in accordance with data protection requirements and only information necessary for monitoring and learning will be reported to the Board.



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6.3 Complaints will be reviewed by the Board at least annually, or more frequently where appropriate, to identify recurring issues, trends, risks or opportunities for improvement.

6.4 Where a complaint identifies a need for improvement, the ILC will consider what action should be taken and, where appropriate, who is responsible for implementing that action.

6.5 Complaints will be used positively to improve the quality, accessibility and effectiveness of the ILC's services.

6.6 This policy will take effect from February 2026. The Board of Trustees has overall responsibility for implementing and monitoring this policy, which will be reviewed on a regular basis following its implementation and additionally whenever there are relevant changes in legislation or to our working practices.

6.7 Any queries or comments about this policy should be addressed to the Board of Trustees.



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Appendix 1: Practical Guidance for Handling Verbal Complaints

- Remain calm, respectful and professional throughout the conversation.
- Listen carefully and allow the person to explain the complaint in their own words.
- Do not interrupt unnecessarily or become defensive.
- Obtain the details of the complaint before requesting unnecessary personal information.
- Ask for clarification where necessary.
- Reflect back what you have understood to check that you have understood the concern correctly.
- Acknowledge the person's feelings without necessarily agreeing with their version of events. For example: "I understand that this situation has been frustrating for you."
- Do not make promises about the outcome or admit liability on behalf of the ILC unless you are authorised to do so.
- Where appropriate, apologise for the experience the person has had. An apology does not necessarily mean that the ILC accepts that it was at fault.
- Ask the person what they would like to happen to resolve the issue, while being clear that the ILC cannot always provide the outcome requested.
- Explain what you can do, what will happen next and, where possible, how long it will take.
- Do not promise something that you cannot deliver.



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- Give clear and reasonable explanations where a request cannot be met.
 - Record the complaint accurately and objectively and pass it to the person responsible for dealing with it.
 - Offer information about the complaints procedure and explain how the person can make a formal complaint if the issue cannot be resolved informally or they remain dissatisfied.
 - Consider whether the matter raises a safeguarding, health and safety, data protection or other serious concern which needs to be dealt with under another procedure.
 - If the person requires additional support or a reasonable adjustment to make their complaint, discuss what assistance may be appropriate.