

THE ROYAL LIFE SAVING SOCIETY

POLICY NO:	RLSS018
POLICY:	COMPLAINTS HANDLING
ORIGINAL POLICY:	21 February 2017
LAST REVIEW DATE:	Issue 7, 24th September 2025
REVIEW DATE:	September 2028

1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS) views complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve for the future, a chance to put things right for the person or organization that has made the complaint and for maintaining and building relationships with the people on whom the charity depends.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- To provide a fair complaints procedure which is clear and easy to use for anyone wishing to make a complaint;
- To make sure everyone at the RLSS knows what to do if a complaint is received;
- To make sure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way;
- To make sure that complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are maintained;
- To gather information which helps us to improve what we do.

2. DEFINITIONS

Complaint in this policy means any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect of the RLSS. (Note: for harassment related complaints refer RLSS009 – Anti Harassment *and* Bullying Policy)

3. SCOPE AND CONTEXT

This Policy includes RLSS Directors, Trustees, Volunteer members of RLSS Committees and Working Groups. It also includes individuals and organisations that deal with the RLSS. *(NB: RLSS Staff are governed by procedures within their conditions of employment)*

This Policy should be read in conjunction with other RLSS policies including:

- RLSS007 – Grievance Policy
- RLSS009 – Anti Harassment and Bullying Policy
- RLSS013 – Whistle Blowers Policy
- RLSS014 – Risk Management Policy
- RLSS022 – Privacy and Data Protection Policy

4. POLICY STATEMENTS

4.1 Where Complaints Come From

- a. Any person or organisation that has a legitimate interest in or has a relationship with the RLSS can make a complaint under this policy.



- b. A complaint can be received verbally; however it must be then substantiated in writing via post or by email before any action can be taken.
- c. Written complaints may be sent to the RLSS Headquarters, the contacts details for which are as outlined below.
- d. Verbal complaints may be made by phone or in person to the Deputy Commonwealth President or the Operations Manager via the RLSS Headquarters, the contacts details for which are as outlined below.

4.2 Confidentiality

- a. All complaint information will be handled in confidence and with sensitivity, telling only those who need to know and following any relevant data protection requirements.
- b. All information will be handled in line with Data Protection Act 2018 (UK) and The UK General Data Protection Regulation as updated under the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025

4.3 Receiving Complaints

- a. Complaints may arrive through channels publicised for that purpose or through any other contact details or opportunities the complainant may have.
- b. Complaints received verbally by telephone or in person need to be recorded in writing. The person who receives a telephone or in person complaint should:
 - i. Write down the facts of the complaint.
 - ii. Take the complainant's name, address and telephone number.
 - iii. Note down the relationship of the complainant to the RLSS.
 - iv. Tell the complainant that we have a complaints procedure.
 - v. Tell the complainant what will happen next and how long it will take.
 - vi. Request the complainant to send a written account by post or by email so that the complaint is recorded in the complainant's own words.
 - vii. Further guidelines about handling verbal complaints are provided in clause 4.6.

4.4 Resolving Complaints

a. Preliminary Stage

- i. It is important at the outset to determine if a complaint is legitimate as at times there can be complaints that are perceived and without merit.
- ii. On receiving a complaint, the person receiving the complaint should ascertain if the complainant has made an effort to directly address their concern with the individual or organisation involved or responsible. If there has been no contact, then the complainant should be encouraged to attempt to resolve the matter with the individual involved.

b. Stage One

- i. A complaint is best resolved by the person responsible for the issue being complained about. If the complaint has been received by that person, they may be able to resolve it swiftly and should do so if possible and appropriate.
- ii. Whether or not the complaint has been resolved, the complaint information should be passed to the RLSS Operations Manager within 14 days.
- iii. On receiving the complaint, the RLSS Operations Manager records it in the complaints log. If it has not already been resolved, they delegate an appropriate person to investigate it and to take appropriate action.
- iv. If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed *by the RLSS Operations Manager* and provided with a clear statement of the nature of the complaint and what exactly is being investigated and given a fair opportunity to respond and present their version of events by provide supporting information.
- v. Complaints must be acknowledged in writing by the person handling the complaint within 7 days. The acknowledgement should say who is dealing with the complaint and when the person complaining can expect a reply. A copy of this complaints handling policy should be attached.



- vi. Complainants should receive a definitive reply within 28 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.
- vii. 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.

c. Stage Two

- i. If the complainant feels that the problem has not been satisfactorily resolved at Stage One, they can request that the complaint is reviewed by the Deputy Commonwealth President (*or a panel of 2 Commonwealth Board Members if the Deputy Commonwealth President is the subject of the complaint*)
- ii. The Deputy Commonwealth President (*or Panel*) may investigate the facts of the case themselves or delegate a suitably senior person to do so or engage a suitable person to assist him/her in the investigation. This may involve reviewing the paperwork of the case and speaking with the person who dealt with the complaint at Stage One, and possibly the complainant.
- iii. The Deputy Commonwealth President (*or Panel*) may, as a result of *their* investigation, determine the complaint is to be reviewed by the Board in accordance with Stage 3.

d. Stage Three

- i. The request for Board level review should be acknowledged in writing within 7 days. The acknowledgement should identify the persons (minimum of two) who will deal with the case and when the complainant can expect a reply.
- ii. If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a further opportunity to respond.
- iii. The person who dealt with the original complaint at Stage One should be kept informed.
- iv. Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within 28 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.
- v. 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.
- vi. The decision taken at this stage is final, unless the Board decides it is appropriate to seek external assistance with resolution.

4.5 Monitoring and Learning from Complaints

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

4.6 Guidance for Handling Verbal Complaints

- a. Remain calm and respectful throughout the conversation.
- b. Be conscious of the possibility of language barriers and the potential need for a translation service.
- c. Listen - allow the person to talk about the complaint in their own words.
- d. Don't debate the facts in the first instance, especially if the person is angry.
- e. Show an interest in what is being said.
- f. Obtain details about the complaint before any personal details.
- g. Ask for clarification wherever necessary.
- h. Show that you have understood the complaint by reflecting back what you have noted down.
- i. 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 RLSS. e.g. "I understand that this situation is frustrating for you"
- j. If you feel that an apology is deserved for something that was the responsibility of the RLSS, then apologise.
- k. Ask the person what they would like done to resolve the issue.
- l. Be clear about what you can do, how long it will take and what it will involve.



- m. Don't promise things you can't deliver.
- n. Give clear and valid reasons why requests cannot be met.
- o. Make sure that the person understands what they have been told.
- p. Wherever appropriate, inform the person about the available avenues of review or appeal.
- q. A summary of the verbal discussion should be followed up in writing confirming what was said or agreed.

5. ACCESS TO POLICY

This policy will be available for viewing by any person on RLSS's website or a copy will be sent upon request.

6. FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information on complaints handling and management within RLSS, please contact:

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Worcester WR5 2JG,
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Email: commonwealth@rlss.org.uk

Website: <http://www.rlsscommonwealth.org>

Attention: Deputy Commonwealth President

