

The Bircham Centre views complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve, as well as a chance to put things right for the person or organisation that has made the complaint. Fortunately, the Centre rarely receives complaints. However, it is important both staff and volunteers are aware of how to deal with a complaint should the situation arise.

Our policy is:

- To provide a fair complaints procedure which is clear and easy to use for anyone wishing to make a complaint.
- To publicise our complaints procedure so that people know how to contact us to make a complaint.
- To make sure everyone at the Bircham Centre knows what to do if a complaint is received.
- To make sure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely manner.
- To make sure that complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are repaired.
- To gather information which helps us to improve what we do.

## **Definition of a Complaint**

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect of the Bircham Centre.

## **Where Complaints Come From**

Complaints may come from any person or organisation using the facilities and services of the Bircham Centre, including hirers, customers and members of the local community.

A complaint can be received verbally, by phone, by email or in writing.

This policy does not cover complaints from staff, which should use their individual Discipline and Grievance procedure within their contract.

## **Confidentiality**

All complaint information will be handled sensitively, informing only those who need to know and following any relevant data protection requirements.

## **Responsibility**

Overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation lies with the board of Trustees.

## **Publicised Contact Details for Complaints:**

Written complaints may be sent to the Centre Manager at the Bircham Centre, Market Place, Reepham, NR10 4JJ or by e-mail at [thebirchamcentre@gmail.com](mailto:thebirchamcentre@gmail.com)

Verbal complaints may be made by phone to 01603 879242 or in person to any of the centre's staff, volunteers or Trustees.

## **Receiving Complaints**

Complaints may arrive through channels publicised for that purpose or through any other contact details or opportunities the complainant may have. Complaints received by telephone or in person need to be recorded on the Bircham Centre Complaints Pro Forma.

The person who receives a phone or in person complaint should:

- Write down the facts of the complaint.
- Take the complainant's name, address and telephone number.
- Note down the relationship of the complainant to the Bircham Centre (for example: room hirer, shop customer)
- Tell the complainant that we have a complaint procedure
- Tell the complainant what will happen next and how long it will take.
- 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.
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## **Resolving Complaints**

### **Stage One**

In many cases, 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.

Whether or not the complaint has been resolved, the complaint information should be passed to the Centre Manager or a Trustee within one week.

On receiving the complaint, the Centre Manager should record 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.

If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a fair opportunity to respond.

Complaints should be acknowledged by the person handling the complaint within one week. The acknowledgement should say who is dealing with the complaint and when the person complaining can expect a reply. A copy of this complaint's procedure should be attached.

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 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.

## **Stage Two**

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

The request for Board level review should be acknowledged within one week of receiving it. The acknowledgement should say who will deal with the case and when the complainant can expect a reply.

The Centre Manager or nominated Trustee may investigate the facts of the case themselves or delegate a suitably senior person to do so. This may involve reviewing the paperwork of the case and speaking with the person who dealt with the complaint at Stage One.

If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a further opportunity to respond.

The person who dealt with the original complaint at Stage One should be kept informed 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.

## **External Stage**

The complainant can complain to the Charity Commission at any stage.

Information about the kind of complaints the Commission can involve itself in can be found on their website at: [www.charitycommission.gov.uk/publications](http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/publications)

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

## **Monitoring and Learning from Complaints**

All complaints are reviewed by the Trust Board to identify any trends which may indicate a need to take further action.

**Approved by Trustees: March 2023**

**Next Review: March 2025**

## **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 reflecting 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
- 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
- Copies of the Complaints Pro Forma are available in the office and the Complaints Folder.

**Bircham Centre Complaints Pro Forma**

<b>Date Complaint Received:</b>	
<b>Received By:</b>	
<b>Complaint Details:</b>	
<b>Name of Complainant:</b>	
<b>Address:</b>	
<b>Contact Details:</b>	
<b>Relationship with the Bircham Centre i.e. Hirer</b>	
<b>Action Requested:</b>	
<b>Complaint Passed to:</b>	
<b>Bircham Centre Action:</b>	
<b>Final Resolution:</b>	
<b>Date Complaint Closed:</b>	