



Complaints Handling Policy (6) combined with Complaints Policy and Procedures (11)

Background

A Complaints Handling Policy is highly recommended by the Charity Commission. It ensures that if a member of the public, a Society member, or a volunteer is unhappy with an event, a publication, or a decision, the issue can be resolved locally and fairly. For a society like ours, the policy is structured in a simple two-stage process:

Stage 1 (Informal/Local Resolution): Handled by the relevant branch or Society Officer.

Stage 2 (Formal Escalation): Handled by the Executive Committee or Chair.

1. Statement of Intent

The Lincolnshire Family History Society (LFHS) aims to provide an excellent service to our members and the wider public. However, we recognise that occasionally things can go wrong. We take all complaints seriously, treat them confidentially, and use them as an opportunity to learn and improve our operations.

2. What is Covered by this Policy?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by LFHS, its volunteers, or its trustees. This includes:

- i. Unsatisfactory service at the Lincoln Resource Centre or local branch meetings.
- ii. Errors or issues regarding membership subscriptions, bookstall orders, or digital downloads.
- iii. The conduct or behaviour of any LFHS officer, volunteer or trustee.

3. The Complaints Procedure

Stage 1: Informal and Local Resolution

In the first instance, complaints should be raised directly with the volunteer responsible for the area concerned (e.g. the Membership Secretary or the Resource Centre Manager).

Action: The volunteer will attempt to resolve the matter informally immediately.

Timeline: Most minor issues should be resolved at this stage within 5 working days.

Stage 2: Formal Escalation

If the matter cannot be resolved informally, or if the complainant feels the response is unsatisfactory, they can submit a formal complaint in writing to the LFHS Secretary (or the Chairman if the complaint concerns the Secretary).

Acknowledgment: The Secretary (or Chairman) will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within 5 working days, confirming who is investigating the matter.

Investigation: A designated trustee, independent of the complaint, will investigate the facts thoroughly and objectively.

Final Response: The complainant will receive a full, written response detailing the findings and any corrective actions taken, within 20 working days of the acknowledgment. If the investigation takes longer, the complainant will be updated with a revised timeline.

4. Finality of Decisions

The decision of the Executive Committee regarding the complaint is final. If the complaint involves a breach of charity law that the Society cannot resolve internally, the complainant may choose to escalate the matter to the Charity Commission for England and Wales

<https://forms.charitycommission.gov.uk/raising-concerns/>.

5. Recording and Learning

The Secretary will maintain a confidential log of all formal Stage 2 complaints, including the outcomes. A summary of anonymised complaints will be reviewed by the Executive Committee annually to identify operational trends or required policy updates.

APPENDIX: Step-by-Step Procedure Checklist for LFHS Volunteers

- Step 1: Immediate Log — Record the complainant's full name, contact information, the exact date, and a brief description of the issue. Avoid recording down personal guesses or opinions.
- Step 2: Immediate Local Check (Stage 1) — Can this be fixed immediately? (e.g. replacing a faulty journal print run or correcting a web link). If yes, issue an apology and correct the issue within 5 working days. Log the resolution.
- Step 3: Escalation Trigger (Stage 2) — If the issue cannot be resolved on the spot, or if the individual remains unhappy, tell them politely that the matter is being escalated. Forward your written log to the Society Secretary within 24 hours.
- Step 4: Formal Acknowledgment — The Society Secretary will send a formal letter or email to the complainant within 5 working days to let them know the complaint is being reviewed.
- Step 5: Independent Evaluation — The designated Trustee will investigate the facts by speaking to the relevant (branch) volunteers or checking transaction data.
- Step 6: Official Closure — Issue the official final response to the complainant in writing within 20 working days, explicitly outlining what steps the Society has taken to resolve the issue.

Review of this Policy

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Executive Committee at its first meeting following the Annual General Meeting. The Committee may review and amend this policy at any time if changes in legislation, Charity Commission guidance, best practice, or the Society's circumstances make this necessary. The date of the most recent review will be recorded in the Committee minutes.

Approved by the Executive Committee: 24 September 2026

Last reviewed: No reviews to date

Chairman: Colin Ashworth

Next review: First Committee meeting following the 2027 AGM