Complaints Policy

CARA welcomes feedback, both positive and negative on any aspect of its services. Feedback is regarded as a useful tool to enable us to review and improve the services we provide.

This policy lays out CARA's formal complaints procedure and aims to ensure that all complaints are dealt with swiftly, appropriately and fairly.

An interpreter may be provided to support the complainant, if necessary.

Procedure

Wherever possible, complaints should be resolved informally through discussion between the complainant and a member of the CARA team. CARA's Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Sarah Clementson, can be contacted by telephone (01206 367881) or e-mail (sarah@caraessex.org.uk) to discuss the complaint and try and find an informal resolution.

If an informal solution cannot be found, the formal complaint should be set out in writing and addressed to the CEO. The complaint should include the name and contact details of the complainant, whom and/or what the complaint is about as well as all relevant dates. If the complainant is unable to put their complaint in writing they should telephone CARA on 01206 367881 and ask to speak to the CEO.

Any formal complaint will be acknowledged by the CEO, normally within five working days of receipt.

The CEO will investigate the circumstances outlined in the complaint and follow one of the following procedures:

1. If the complaint is about a specific member of staff or volunteer, the CEO will approach that person to discuss the complaint and any necessary action on a one-to-one basis.
2. If the complaint is not about a member of staff or volunteer, but relates to another issue, the CEO will assess the situation and take any necessary action.

The CEO will then inform the complainant in writing of what has been done to address their complaint, no later than 28 days after first receiving the complaint. She will also inform the Chair of Trustees that a formal complaint was received, its nature, and what action was taken.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the CEO's action on the complaint and wishes to escalate the matter, the complainant should inform the CEO and she will refer the complaint to the Chair of Trustees. The decision on what action to take is at the Chair's discretion. The Chair will inform the Trustee Board that a complaint has been made, its nature, and what action was taken.

The Chair will inform the complainant in writing of her decision, no later than 28 days after the escalated complaint was first received. If the complainant is not satisfied with the decision, they may write a letter of appeal to the Vice Chair(s) who will then need to bring the case before the Trustee Board.

The Trustee Board (without the Chair's involvement) will aim to come to a decision and to notify the complainant of its conclusions within 28 days of receiving the letter of appeal, together with a clear explanation of the reasons for reaching them. The decision of the Trustee Board is final.

If further time is needed at any stage of the complaint process due to the complexity of the complaint, or due to pre-planned leave, the CEO will let the complainant know along with an estimated response time. CARA does not take decisions to extend investigation or response periods lightly because of the potential distress it can cause for everyone involved.

If the complaint relates to the CEO, the complaint should be addressed to the Chair of the CARA Trustee Board, c/o CARA, Mailbox 302, Communications House, 9 St John's Street, Colchester CO2 7NN. If the complaint relates to the Chair of the Trustee Board, the complainant may directly contact the Vice Chair(s), at the same address.

All formal complaints received, together with a copy of the response to the complainant, will be retained for a minimum of 6 years, or more if they relate to a current member of the CARA staff team.

Formal complaints will be monitored, and information from this monitoring will be fed into the future planning process, as appropriate.

Complaints that are persistent or vexatious

At CARA, we understand that making a complaint can be difficult, especially about a service that supports victims and survivors. We are committed to treating everyone with fairness, dignity and respect, while prioritising safety and wellbeing.

However, we may receive complaints or communications that are persistent, abusive, threatening or unreasonable. When this affects our staff, volunteers or ability to provide services, we may limit or stop communication and take other appropriate action.

We do not tolerate abusive, threatening, racist, sexually inappropriate or discriminatory behaviour or communications. Where necessary, we may report such behaviour to the police or other relevant agencies.

Date procedure was agreed and adopted: March 2026

Date review due: March 2029

Person/s responsible for review: CEO/Trustees