

POLICY – Complaints

Children Universal

Policy Author	Laura Dickie, Head of Policy
Approval Date	Feb 2026
Policy Approver	Jo Dunn, Compliance, Regulation and Quality Director
Next Review Date	Feb 2029
Version No.	001
Policy Level	Homes and Education
Staff groups affected	All Homes and Education Staff

Monitoring and Review

This policy will be monitored on an ongoing basis through the service's established governance and quality assurance systems. Responsibility for ensuring that the policy remains compliant with legislation and regulatory frameworks sits with the Responsible Individual or Senior Leader. A formal review of this policy will be undertaken no later than three years from the date of approval, or sooner if changes in legislation, regulatory guidance, or operational requirements necessitate it.

The Head of Policy will support this process by identifying relevant changes in legislation, regulation, national standards and emerging best practice. The Head of Policy will also incorporate learning from inspections, audits and practice developments into future revisions whilst overseeing all proposed amendments to this policy to ensure accuracy, consistency and compliance.

Local or service-level alterations may not be made without approval through the organisation's policy governance process.



April 2026

Tawanda Madhlangobe

Headteacher

Terminology

Our aim is to use consistent terminology throughout this policy and all supporting documentation as follows:

'Establishment' or 'Location'	This is a generic term which means the home/school/college owned by CareTech.
Individual	Means any child or young person under the age of 18 or young adult between the ages of 18 and 25.
Service Head	This is the senior person with overall responsibility for the school/college/home.* dual registered locations need to include Service Head and Registered Manager if they are not the same person.
Key Worker	Members of staff that have special responsibility for Individuals residing at or attending the Establishment.
Parent	means parent or person with Parental Responsibility
Regulatory Authority	Regulatory Authority is the generic term used in this policy to describe the independent regulatory body responsible for inspecting and regulating services. E.g Ofsted, DfE, CIW, CIS, ESTYN, HMIE etc)
Social Worker	This means the worker allocated to the individual. If there is no allocated worker, the Duty Social Worker or Team Manager is responsible.
Placing Authority	Placing Authority means the local authority/agency responsible for placing the child or commissioning the service
Local Authority	This means the local authority for the location.
Staff	All staff working at the Location including employed staff, students on placement, contractors, agency staff, volunteers and proprietors.
Company	Any service owned by CareTech

1. Legal Context

This policy is aligned with the following legislation and guidance:

England

- Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and Quality Standards
- CQC Regulation 16 – receiving and acting on complaints for regulated activities
- Children Act 1989 & 2004
- Education Act 2002
- Education and Inspections Act 2006
- Independent School Standards 2014
- Care Act 2014

Wales

- Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2005
- Representations Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014
- Children Act 1989 & 2004
- Education Act 2002
- Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014
- Education and Inspections Act 2006

Scotland

- SPSO Complaints Handling Principles, Process and Procedure Guidance 2025
- Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Act 2002
- Care Inspectorate Complaints Handling Procedure 2014 (amended 2020)
- Children (Scotland) Act 1995
- Health and Social Care Standards 2017 (updated 2022)
- Education (Scotland) Act 1980 & 2016

2. Purpose

Everyone has the right to speak up when something does not feel right. This policy explains how children, young people, and adults who receive our services—as well as families, social workers and other involved professionals, advocates, or members of the public—can tell us when they are unhappy or worried about something.

It sets out the different ways you can make a complaint, how we will listen and respond, and what you can expect from us at every stage. Our aim is to make sure that raising a concern feels safe, simple, and respectful, and that everyone involved understands the process clearly.

3. Our Commitment

We believe everyone deserves to feel safe, respected, and listened to. When you share a concern, we will do the following:

- Listen carefully and without judgment.
- Thank you for speaking up.
- Make sure you are safe.
- Take your views seriously.
- Act fairly, quickly, and keep you informed.

Our approach is trauma-informed. This means we understand that past experiences may affect how you feel when raising a concern. We will help you feel safe and in control.

4. Who Can Complain?

Anyone who is connected to our service can make a complaint, including:

- Children/young people/adults receiving services from us
- Parents, carers, family members and important others
- Social workers and local authorities.
- Advocates or any trusted adult.
- Members of the public.
- Other professionals.

5. Who this policy is not for

This Complaints Policy is for children/young people/adults we provide services to, their families/carers/wider network, placing authorities, external professionals and members of the public.

Staff must not use this policy for their own concerns. Employment-related concerns must be raised through the organisation's Grievance Procedure or Whistleblowing policy.

Concerns about unsafe practice, risk, harm and any concerns about the immediate safety of a child or young person must follow the Safeguarding and Child Protection Procedure.

6. What You Can Complain About

You can complain about anything that feels:

- Unfair.
- Unkind.
- Unsafe.
- Confusing.
- Not working well—This might include how you were spoken to, a decision made about you or somebody important to you, something that happened, or something that worries you.

7. How to Make a Complaint

You can choose the way that feels safest and most comfortable, such as:

- Speaking to a staff member you trust.
- Talking to your social worker.
- Asking an advocate for help.
- Texting, emailing, or writing a note.
- Asking someone else to speak for you.

You do not need to use formal language. Just tell us in your own words.

8. What Happens Next?

When you make a complaint, we will:

- Make sure you are safe.
- Listen to your concern.
- Ask what outcome you hope for.
- Explain what will happen.
- Keep you updated regularly.

We will always check how you would like to be communicated with—written, spoken, or another accessible format.

9. Stages of the Complaints Process

Stage 1 – Early Resolution

We try to resolve concerns quickly—usually within 5 working days.

Stage 2 – Formal Complaint

If the complaint has not been resolved at Stage 1, a manager who was not involved will investigate and may speak to you, staff, and others. They will respond within 20 working days. Where it is necessary to take longer to ensure a thorough and fair investigation, the Investigating Manager will write to you to explain the reason for the delay and provide an updated expected timescale.

Stage 3 – Independent Review

If you feel unhappy about how the complaint has been dealt with, an independent person or panel will review what happened. They will look at everything fairly and share their findings.

10. Advocacy and Support

We want you to feel confident and supported when you raise a concern. You never have to do it alone and can always have an advocate, a trusted adult, or someone you choose to speak with you or on your behalf.

An advocate is independent — they are there to help you express your wishes, understand your rights, and feel safe throughout the process. Their role is not to take sides, but to make sure your voice is heard clearly and respectfully, especially if the situation feels worrying, overwhelming, or emotional.

If you would like advocacy support, we will help you get it. For children and young people, this includes providing information about local and national advocacy services and supporting you to make contact. For adults, we will ensure the process is accessible and that you can involve a representative of your choice.

Our staff understand that raising a complaint can feel stressful, personal, or even intimidating, particularly if you have had difficult experiences before. We will always check what support you need and make sure you feel safe and listened to throughout the process.

11. Rights and Standards

Your rights are at the heart of this complaints process. Across England, Wales, and Scotland, the laws and national standards that shape our work are designed to make sure you are treated fairly, with dignity, and that your views influence the decisions that affect you. These laws and standards recognise your right to speak up, your right to be involved, and your right to expect a safe and high-quality service.

This means:

- We will put your wishes, feelings, and experiences at the centre of every decision.
- We will treat you with respect and ensure the process is accessible and inclusive.
- We will take a trauma-informed approach, recognising that past experiences can influence how you feel when raising a concern.
- We will uphold safeguarding duties, equality standards, and regulatory requirements from all nations in which we operate.

Our role is to make sure you feel safe speaking up — and that your complaint is handled with care, transparency, and professionalism.

12. Learning From Complaints

Complaints are not treated as problems — they are valued opportunities for us to learn, reflect, and improve what we do. Every concern raised helps us understand more about the experiences of the children, young people, adults, and professionals who use our service.

When someone raises a complaint, we do more than resolve the individual issue. We also:

- Look for patterns or themes, such as communication, decision-making, or consistency of practice.
- Identify where things could be better, clearer, or safer.
- Share learning with our leadership team and, where necessary, with regulators.
- Use complaints to guide our training, our planning, and our quality improvement work.

We want you to feel confident that your voice doesn't just lead to a response — it leads to real and meaningful change that makes the service better for you and for others.

13. Keeping You Informed

You deserve to know what is happening with your complaint at every stage. We will make sure the process is transparent and easy to understand, and we will keep you updated in a way that works best for you — whether that is by talking, writing, email, or another method you prefer.

When we share the outcome of your complaint, we will explain:

- What we looked at
- What we found
- What decisions were made and why
- What will happen next

If your complaint is not upheld or only partly upheld, we will explain this openly, without jargon, and with respect for your feelings and experiences. We will also tell you what your options are if you would like the decision to be reviewed or escalated.

Our goal is to ensure you are never left wondering what is happening and that you always feel informed, respected, and in control.

14. Accessibility

We want everyone to be able to understand this policy and use the complaints process comfortably and confidently. That means making the policy accessible, inclusive, and adapted to different needs.

We can provide the policy and any information about your complaint in:

- Easy Read
- Symbols or visual supports
- Large print
- Different languages
- Alternative formats based on individual needs

If you have communication needs, learning needs, sensory needs, or prefer information in a particular style, we will make sure you receive support that suits

you. This includes explaining things step-by-step, giving written or spoken summaries, or offering additional time and support during discussions.

Accessibility is not an add-on — it is a fundamental part of your rights. We will always work with you to make sure the process is clear, comfortable, and respectful.

15. Unreasonable Complaints

Most complaints are honest and valid. However, a complaint may become unreasonable when someone:

- Repeats the same issue after a full investigation.
- Uses abusive, threatening, or aggressive language.
- Makes excessive demands or refuses reasonable boundaries.
- Will not accept a clear explanation or outcome.

When behaviour becomes unreasonable, we may:

- Set boundaries around communication.
- Limit contact to one method (e.g., email).
- Pause or close a complaint if behaviour prevents progress.

We will always explain this and continue supporting any child/young person/adult involved.

16. Associated Documents

Complaints SOP

Managing Parental and School Complaints Policy

Equality Impact Statement

This policy has been developed to promote equality, safeguard individual's rights, and ensure fair and inclusive practice across all services. The potential impact of the policy on children, young people, young adults, families, and staff with protected characteristics has been considered in line with the Equality Act 2010.

No negative impacts have been identified. Staff must apply this policy with sensitivity to individual need and make reasonable adjustments to ensure equitable access, safety, wellbeing, and participation for every individual. Any emerging risks of differential impact should be reported and addressed through ongoing review and quality assurance.