

Complaints Policy

1. Purpose

Exeter Foodbank is committed to delivering a high standard of service to anyone who engages with our work. We welcome feedback from clients, referral agencies, volunteers and anyone else we come into contact with in our work. These help us to see what we are doing well and where we can make improvements.

We aim to promote an environment where people feel able to raise concerns informally and at an early stage. Where this happens, we seek to address the concerns straightaway and agree a mutually acceptable way forward. Where informal resolution is not possible, it is important that people have a route to raise their concerns formally.

This policy sets out how Exeter Foodbank will receive, manage, investigate, and respond to complaints from volunteers, clients, members of the public, and other external stakeholders. We aim to do so fairly, promptly, transparently and in line with UK legal and regulatory good practice, ensuring that complaints are used as a means to improve our services and accountability.

2. Definitions

- **Complaint:** An expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, by Exeter Foodbank volunteers (including trustees) or by external stakeholders including clients about our standards of service, actions, or lack of action by the Exeter Foodbank, or about the conduct of a staff member, volunteer or trustee.
- **Stakeholders:** Exeter Foodbank volunteers (including trustees) and people or organisations external to Exeter Foodbank, including but not limited to clients, service users, members of the public, funders and service-partners.
- **Informal complaint:** A concern or issue raised first with staff, volunteers or trustees, which may be resolved without the need to become formal.
- **Formal complaint:** A complaint made in writing, or one which remains unresolved after an informal stage, which requires investigation and a written response.

3. Scope

This policy covers complaints from Exeter Foodbank volunteers (including trustees) and external stakeholders including clients and service users, members of the public, funders and partner organisations.

It does **not** cover:

- Internal staff grievance matters (those are dealt with under our *Grievance Policy*)
- Safeguarding concerns, child protection or abuse allegations (these follow our *Safeguarding Policy*)
- Legal claims or insurance matters (these are handled under relevant legal and insurance procedures)

4. Principles

Exeter Foodbank is committed to:

- Treating every complainant with respect, courtesy, fairness and professionalism
- Ensuring confidentiality and data protection
- Being impartial and unbiased; ensuring investigations are carried out by persons with no conflict of interest
- Acknowledging complaints promptly and responding within reasonable timescales
- Keeping complainants informed of progress, outcome, and any remedial action
- Learning from complaints and using them to improve our services

5. How to Raise a Complaint

Complaints may be made:

- In person, to any of our staff or volunteers
- By telephone: 07818 226524
- By email: info@exeterfoodbank.org.uk
- By post: Exeter Foodbank, 174/175 Cowick Street, Exeter. EX4 1AA

To help us respond effectively to a complaint, we ask that the complainant supplies:

- Their name and contact details
- A description of their complaint.
- The outcome they are seeking in raising the complaint.

This information is set out on Exeter Foodbank's external website and is available at the Exeter Foodbank's distribution centres.

6. Stages of Complaint Handling

Stage	What happens	Timescale*
I. Informal	Aim to resolve promptly. Investigate the issue, discuss with complainant and propose resolution.	Acknowledge within 3 working days of receipt; full response within 10 working days of receipt

II. Formal Complaint	If an issue is not resolved informally or a formal written complaint is received. The complaints handler will investigate, which may involve interviewing individuals and reviewing documents. They will then provide the complainant with a written response which includes detail of the findings, their decision and any actions arising.	Acknowledgement within 3 working days of receipt; full response within 20 working days of formal complaint receipt
III. Appeal	If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the formal process, they may appeal the decision within five working days of receiving the outcome. The appeal hearer will examine whether due process was followed and whether the decision was fair. They will have the authority to uphold, amend, or overturn previous decision.	Acknowledgement within 3 working days of receipt; response within 15 working days of appeal receipt.

**Working days exclude public holidays and weekends. Exeter Foodbank may advise the complainant of a different timescale if the complaint is complex and requires further investigation.*

7. Hearing Complaints

The Strategic Director will be responsible for designating an appropriate person to hear a complaint against Exeter Foodbank, a volunteer or a member of staff. This should be done within three working days of receipt and the name confirmed to the complainant.

In the event that the Strategic Director or a trustee is the subject of the complaint, the complaint will be heard by a nominated trustee, with any appeal typically heard by the Board of Trustees. To ensure that the Board is able to act independently in this situation, the trustee who heard the formal complaint will be recused.

There may be situations (eg. to avoid a conflict of interest) where the Board of Trustees determines that it is appropriate for an independent third-party to be engaged to conduct a formal complaint or an appeal, or to advise the trustees on the best course of action. In deciding to engage third parties, the Board of Trustees will take into account the cost implications for Exeter Foodbank.

8. Confidentiality & Data Protection

All complaints are handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulations. Personal data collected is used only for handling the complaint or for lawful related purposes.

Records of complaints and outcomes will be stored securely, with access limited to those who need to see them.

Complainants can request access to their own complaint file under data protection rights.

The complainant's identity will not be disclosed to other parties beyond what is necessary. Exeter Foodbank staff, volunteers or trustees who are the subject of a complaint will be informed in order to respond, but confidentiality will be maintained as far as possible.

9. When Complaints Won't Be Actioned

There may be very rare circumstances in which Exeter Foodbank would not action a complaint or respond to a complainant. Examples might include where:

- a complaint is submitted anonymously. Whilst the complaint will still be considered the anonymous nature of it will prevent a response being given.
- a complaint is about something with which Exeter Foodbank has no direct connection.
- someone unreasonably continues to pursue a complaint which the Exeter Foodbank has already considered and responded in line with this policy.
- anyone is abusive, prejudiced or offensive in their manner or harasses a volunteer, employee, trustee or anyone connected with Exeter Foodbank.

Where a complainant persists in pursuing a complaint despite their complaint having been considered and addressed in line with this policy, the Exeter Foodbank will not continue to direct charitable resources to resolving the complaint.

10. Monitoring & Reporting

The Operations Manager will maintain a log of all formal complaints and appeals, including final outcomes, time taken to respond and actions taken. As part of their six-monthly report to the Board of Trustees, they will share complaints data and identify any trends, systemic issues or areas for improvement.

To show accountability, summaries of formal complaints (without identifying individuals, unless agreed) may be included in Exeter Foodbank's annual report.

11. External Escalation

If, after exhausting this internal complaints procedure, the complainant is still dissatisfied, they may raise their concerns with:

- The **Charity Commission** (for complaints about how a charity is run)
- The **Fundraising Regulator** (if complaint relates to fundraising practices)
- Other regulatory or oversight bodies as applicable.

We will provide complainants with contact details for these bodies as applicable, upon request or when giving a final decision.

12. Review of This Policy

- This policy will be reviewed annually to take account of changes in legal or regulatory requirements and of any experience arising from dealing with complaints.
- The review will be undertaken by the Strategic Director and Operational Manager and overseen by the Board of Trustees.

Date Adopted:	November 15 th 2025
Date for Renewal:	AGM 2026
Signed:	Gary Flint
Position:	Chair of Trustees