



Complaints Policy

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1. Policy Statement

Zest of Mind is committed to providing high-quality services to young people and their families. We value feedback and recognise that complaints are an important way to learn, improve our services, and ensure we meet the needs of those we support.

We aim to resolve complaints fairly, quickly, and effectively while maintaining the dignity and respect of all parties involved. Our complaints procedure is designed to be accessible, transparent, and supportive, particularly for young people who may need additional support to raise their concerns.

This policy sets out clear procedures for making and handling complaints, ensuring that all concerns are taken seriously and dealt with appropriately.

2. Purpose and Scope

This policy aims to:

- Provide a clear, accessible process for making complaints
- Ensure all complaints are handled fairly, promptly, and confidentially
- Enable us to learn from complaints and improve our services
- Protect the rights of complainants and maintain their dignity throughout the process
- Ensure compliance with relevant legislation and best practice standards

This policy applies to:

- All young people who receive our services
- Parents, carers, and family members
- Partner organisations and referral agencies
- Members of the public
- All complaints about Zest of Mind services, staff, volunteers, or contractors

This policy covers complaints about:

- The quality or level of service provided
- Treatment by staff, volunteers, or contractors
- Delays in service delivery
- Communication issues
- Decisions made about service provision
- Discrimination or unfair treatment
- Facilities or accessibility issues
- Any other aspect of our service delivery

3. What Constitutes a Complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about our services, actions, or lack of action that requires a response from us. Complaints can be made verbally, in writing, by email, or through other accessible formats.

Examples of complaints include:

- Dissatisfaction with the quality of service received
- Concerns about staff behaviour or professionalism
- Disagreement with decisions made about service provision
- Concerns about discrimination or unfair treatment
- Issues with accessibility or reasonable adjustments
- Problems with communication or information sharing
- Concerns about safeguarding procedures (note: immediate safeguarding concerns should be reported through our safeguarding procedures)

What is not covered by this policy:

- Safeguarding concerns (these should be reported immediately through our Safeguarding Policy procedures)
- Staff disciplinary matters (these are dealt with through internal HR procedures)
- Issues that are more appropriately handled through our Whistleblowing Policy
- Requests for information (these should be directed through our normal communication channels)

4. How to Make a Complaint

We want to make it as easy as possible for people to raise concerns with us. Complaints can be made in several ways:

For Young People

Young people can make complaints:

- **In person** - speak to any member of staff who will help you raise your concern

- **By phone** - call us on 07956 478 393 or 07930 634 523
- **By email** - send an email to admin@zestofmind.com
- **In writing** - send a letter to us at 56 Guildford Street, Chertsey, England, KT16 9BE
- **Through a trusted adult** - ask a parent, carer, teacher, or other trusted adult to help you make a complaint
- **Through an advocate** - we can help arrange for an independent person to support you

For Parents, Carers, and Other Adults

Complaints can be made:

- **By phone** - call us on 07956 478 393 or 07930 634 523
- **By email** - send an email to admin@zestofmind.com
- **In writing** - send a letter to us at 56 Guildford Street, Chertsey, England, KT16 9BE
- **In person** - speak to any member of staff or arrange to meet with a senior member of staff

Support for Making Complaints

We recognise that making a complaint can be difficult, particularly for young people. We offer:

- **Language support** - translation services or help with communication needs
- **Advocacy support** - independent support to help you make your complaint
- **Accessible formats** - we can provide information in different formats to meet your needs
- **Emotional support** - we will treat you with respect and sensitivity throughout the process

What Information to Include

When making a complaint, it helps if you can provide:

- Your name and contact details (unless you wish to remain anonymous)
- Details of what happened and when
- Names of any staff members involved
- What outcome you would like to see
- Any supporting information or evidence you have

If you need help gathering this information, we will support you to do so.

5. Complaints Process

We follow a clear, step-by-step process for handling complaints:

Stage 1: Initial Response (Within 2 Working Days)

- **Acknowledgement** - we will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within 2 working days
- **Initial assessment** - we will assess the nature and urgency of your complaint
- **Assignment** - your complaint will be assigned to an appropriate person to investigate
- **Information gathering** - we may contact you for additional information if needed

Stage 2: Investigation (Within 10 Working Days)

- **Thorough investigation** - we will investigate your complaint fairly and thoroughly
- **Information gathering** - we will gather all relevant information and speak to relevant staff
- **Evidence review** - we will review any documentation or evidence related to your complaint
- **Interim updates** - we will keep you informed if the investigation is taking longer than expected

Stage 3: Response (Within 15 Working Days)

- **Written response** - we will provide a written response to your complaint within 15 working days of receiving it
- **Findings** - our response will explain our findings and the reasons for our decision
- **Actions taken** - we will outline any actions we have taken or will take as a result of your complaint
- **Apology** - if appropriate, we will provide a sincere apology
- **Next steps** - we will explain what happens next and your right to appeal if you remain dissatisfied

Complex Complaints

For complex complaints that require more extensive investigation, we may need longer than 15 working days. In such cases, we will:

- Contact you within 10 working days to explain why more time is needed
- Agree a new timescale with you
- Provide regular updates on progress
- Ensure you are kept fully informed throughout the process

6. Complaints About Senior Staff

If your complaint is about the Director (Alastair Coward) or another senior member of staff who would normally handle complaints, you can:

- **Contact the Board of Trustees directly** at admin@zestofmind.com, marking your email "CONFIDENTIAL - FOR TRUSTEES"
- **Write to the Chair of Trustees** at 56 Guildford Street, Chertsey, England, KT16 9BE, marking your letter "CONFIDENTIAL - FOR CHAIR OF TRUSTEES"

- **Request a meeting** with a Trustee by calling 07930 634 523

In these cases:

- Your complaint will be handled by a Trustee who is independent of the situation
- The same timescales and procedures will apply
- We will ensure confidentiality and impartiality throughout the process
- An external investigator may be appointed for serious complaints

7. Anonymous Complaints

We accept anonymous complaints, though this may limit our ability to:

- Provide you with updates on progress
- Ask for additional information or clarification
- Inform you of the outcome
- Ensure we have fully understood your concerns

However, we will:

- Take your complaint seriously and investigate it thoroughly
- Use the information to improve our services
- Take appropriate action if we identify problems
- Learn from the issues raised

If you make an anonymous complaint, please provide as much detail as possible to help us investigate effectively.

8. Record Keeping and Data Retention

We maintain comprehensive records of all complaints to help us learn and improve our services:

What We Record

- Details of the complaint and when it was made
- How the complaint was investigated
- The outcome and any actions taken
- Communications with the complainant
- Any lessons learned and improvements made

How We Store Records

- All complaint records are stored securely in accordance with our Data Protection Policy
- Access is limited to staff who need to know for investigation or learning purposes
- Physical records are kept in locked filing cabinets

- Electronic records are password protected and encrypted

How Long We Keep Records

We retain complaint records for the following periods:

- **General complaints** - 6 years from resolution
- **Complaints involving safeguarding concerns** - in accordance with our Safeguarding Policy retention schedule
- **Complaints involving legal issues** - 12 years from resolution
- **Anonymous complaints** - 3 years from receipt

After these periods, records are securely disposed of in accordance with our Data Protection Policy.

Your Rights Regarding Your Data

In accordance with data protection legislation, you have the right to:

- Access the information we hold about your complaint
- Request correction of any inaccurate information
- Request deletion of your data in certain circumstances
- Object to processing in certain circumstances

For more information, see our Data Protection Policy or contact us at admin@zestofmind.com.

9. Appeals Process

If you are not satisfied with our response to your complaint, you can ask for it to be reviewed:

Internal Appeal (Stage 1)

- **Request a review** within 20 working days of receiving our response
- **Review by senior staff** - your appeal will be reviewed by a senior member of staff who was not involved in the original investigation
- **Response time** - we will respond within 15 working days of receiving your appeal
- **Outcome** - we will either uphold the original decision, modify it, or overturn it

Trustee Review (Stage 2)

If you remain dissatisfied after the internal appeal:

- **Request Trustee review** within 20 working days of receiving the internal appeal response
- **Independent review** - a Trustee who was not involved in the previous stages will review your case
- **Response time** - we will respond within 20 working days
- **Final internal decision** - this represents our final position on the matter

External Review Options

If you remain dissatisfied after exhausting our internal complaints procedure, you may wish to contact:

- **Local Authority** - if your complaint relates to services they fund or commission
- **Relevant professional bodies** - if your complaint involves professional conduct
- **Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman** - for complaints about council-funded services
- **Your local MP** - who may be able to provide advice or assistance
- **Citizens Advice** - for general advice about your rights and options

10. When We May Not Respond to a Complaint

There are some circumstances where we may decide not to investigate a complaint or may stop investigating:

We will not normally respond to complaints when:

- **About another organisation** with no connection to Zest of Mind - we will try to direct you to the appropriate organisation
- **Pursuing an unreasonable complaint** that has already been thoroughly investigated and responded to - we will inform you of our decision and explain why
- **Clearly abusive, prejudiced, or offensive** - we will not tolerate abuse of our staff and will inform you if we consider your behaviour unacceptable
- **Harassing staff or volunteers** - we have a duty of care to our staff and will take appropriate action to protect them
- **Vexatious or frivolous** - complaints made without genuine cause or to cause annoyance

Anonymous complaints

When complaints are made anonymously:

- We cannot respond directly to the complainant
- We will still investigate the complaint where possible
- We will use the information to improve our services
- We will take appropriate action if problems are identified

In all cases where we decide not to respond:

- We will inform the complainant of our decision (unless the complaint is anonymous)
- We will explain our reasons clearly
- We will provide information about external organisations that may be able to help
- We will review our decision if new evidence comes to light

11. Links to Related Policies

This Complaints Policy should be read in conjunction with our other policies:

- **Whistleblowing Policy** - for reporting concerns about wrongdoing, illegal activities, or professional misconduct
- **Grievance Policy** - for employment-related complaints from staff
- **Safeguarding Policy** - for concerns about the safety and welfare of young people or vulnerable adults
- **Data Protection Policy** - for information about how we handle personal data
- **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy** - for our commitment to fair treatment and non-discrimination

If you are unsure which policy applies to your concern, please contact us and we will help direct you appropriately.

12. Support and Resources

Internal Support

We provide various forms of support throughout the complaints process:

- **Staff support** - designated staff members can help you make your complaint
- **Advocacy services** - we can help arrange independent advocacy support
- **Emotional support** - we recognise that making a complaint can be stressful and will treat you with sensitivity
- **Regular updates** - we will keep you informed throughout the process
- **Accessible formats** - we can provide information in different formats to meet your needs

External Support and Advice

- **Citizens Advice** - free, independent advice: www.citizensadvice.org.uk or call 03444 111 444
- **Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman** - www.lgo.org.uk or call 0300 061 0614
- **Advocacy services** - independent support for young people and adults: contact your local authority for details
- **NSPCC Helpline** - for concerns about children: 0808 800 5000
- **ChildLine** - confidential support for young people: 0800 1111

13. Monitoring and Review

Learning from Complaints

We view complaints as an opportunity to improve our services. We:

- **Analyse trends** - look for patterns in complaints to identify systemic issues
- **Share learning** - discuss lessons learned at team meetings and training sessions
- **Implement improvements** - make changes to our services based on complaint outcomes

- **Monitor satisfaction** - track complainant satisfaction with our complaints handling
- **Report to Trustees** - provide regular reports on complaints and improvements made

Regular Review

This policy is reviewed annually to ensure it remains:

- **Effective** - achieving its aims of fair and timely complaint resolution
- **Accessible** - easy for all service users to understand and use
- **Compliant** - meeting legal requirements and best practice standards
- **Responsive** - adapted to changing needs and feedback

Quality Assurance

We monitor the quality of our complaints handling through:

- **Response times** - tracking how quickly we respond to complaints
- **Resolution rates** - monitoring how many complaints are resolved satisfactorily
- **Complainant feedback** - asking for feedback on our complaints handling
- **External review** - periodic independent review of our complaint's procedures
- **Staff training** - ensuring all staff understand their role in complaints handling

14. Contact Information

Making a Complaint

Primary Contact:

- Email: admin@zestofmind.com
- Phone: 07930 634 523
- Address: 56 Guildford Street, Chertsey, England, KT16 9BE

Director: Alastair Coward

- Phone: 07956 478 393
- Email: alastair@zestofmind.com

Complaints About Senior Staff

Board of Trustees:

- Email: admin@zestofmind.com (mark "CONFIDENTIAL - FOR TRUSTEES")
- Address: Chair of Trustees, 56 Guildford Street, Chertsey, England, KT16 9BE (mark "CONFIDENTIAL - FOR CHAIR OF TRUSTEES")

Office Hours

Monday to Friday: 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM

For urgent complaints outside office hours, please email us and we will respond at the next available opportunity.

This Complaints Policy demonstrates our commitment to listening to feedback and continuously improving our services. We welcome all feedback and are committed to resolving concerns fairly and effectively.