

Complaints Policy

Purpose

Down Syndrome Cheshire is committed to providing high-quality services and maintaining the trust and confidence of the people we support, their families, staff, volunteers, and partners. We recognise that, on occasion, individuals may feel dissatisfied with the way the organisation, its staff, or its volunteers have acted. This policy sets out how we will respond to complaints fairly, consistently, and promptly, and how we will use feedback to improve our services.

Scope

This policy applies to:

- Anyone who uses or has used Down Syndrome Cheshire's services.
- Family members, carers, or advocates.
- Staff, volunteers, or members of the public.

It covers complaints about:

- The standard or quality of services provided.
- The behaviour of staff, volunteers, or representatives of the organisation.
- Decisions or actions taken by Down Syndrome Cheshire.

This policy does **not** cover:

- Appeals against employment or HR decisions (which are covered by the Grievance Policy).
- Safeguarding concerns (which must be reported under the Safeguarding Policy).

Our Commitment

- We take all complaints seriously.
- We will treat all complainants with respect and confidentiality.
- Complaints will be acknowledged and investigated promptly.
- We will learn from complaints to improve our work.
- No one will be treated unfairly or differently because they have made a complaint

How to make a complaint

Complaints can be made in any of the following ways:

- **In writing:**
Down Syndrome Cheshire, Denton House, Denton Drive, Northwich, CW9 7LU
- **By email:** admin@dscheshire.org.uk
- **By phone:** 01606 330884 / 07518 590300
- **In person:** By speaking with a member of staff, who will ensure the concern is passed to the appropriate person.

If the complainant requires support to make a complaint (e.g., due to communication or learning needs), assistance will be provided wherever possible.

Informal Resolution (Stage 1)

We aim to resolve most issues quickly and informally.

- The staff member or line manager involved will listen carefully and try to address the concern immediately.
- If the issue is resolved at this stage, no further action is needed.
- If the complainant is not satisfied, or if the issue is serious, the matter will move to a formal complaint.

Formal Complaint (Stage 2)

Formal complaints should be submitted in writing, outlining:

- What happened.
- When and where it occurred.
- Who was involved (if applicable).
- What outcome the complainant is seeking.

Process:

1. The complaint will be acknowledged within **5 working days** of receipt.
2. It will be investigated by an appropriate manager or designated lead who has not been directly involved in the matter.
3. The outcome will normally be communicated in writing within **20 working days**.
4. If the investigation requires more time, the complainant will be informed of the reason and given an updated timescale. The response will outline:
 - Findings of the investigation.
 - Any actions taken or planned.
 - The complainant's right to appeal if dissatisfied.

Appeal (Stage 3)

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the formal investigation, they may request an appeal within **10 working days** of receiving the outcome.

The appeal will be reviewed by a senior manager or trustee not previously involved in the complaint. The final decision will be communicated in writing within **20 working days** of the appeal being received.

The decision at this stage will be final.

Learning from Complaints

All complaints are logged and monitored.

Down Syndrome Cheshire will review complaint trends regularly to identify areas for improvement and share learning with relevant teams and trustees.

Confidentiality & Record Keeping

All complaints will be handled sensitively and in line with data protection requirements.

Records of complaints and outcomes will be stored securely and kept only as long as necessary, in accordance with our **Data Policy**.

Accessibility

We aim to make our complaints process easy to access and understand. Alternative formats (e.g., easy read, large print, or accessible versions) can be provided upon request.

External Escalation

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after exhausting all internal stages, they may contact the **Charity Commission for England and Wales** for further advice:

<https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-charity>