

Customer Engagement & Complaints Policy

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1 Policy Statement

Derby Food 4 Thought Alliance is committed to delivering high-quality, respectful and accessible services to all people we support, partners, stakeholders and community members. In line with our values of Dignity, Compassion, Resourcefulness, Partnership and Championing, this policy establishes our Service Charter, an accessible complaints process, and a fair and transparent Complaints Procedure that:

- People accessing our services understand what support they can expect from us.
- Concerns or complaints are handled promptly and impartially.
- Lessons are learned and service quality continually improves.
- People we support, partners and community members may also submit compliments or suggestions to help us do even better.

This statement is endorsed by the DF4TA Board and will be communicated to all stakeholders.

2 Purpose & Scope

2.1 Purpose

To define standards for respectful, accessible and consistent engagement with people accessing DF4TA services, outline how personal data will be protected, and detail steps for raising, investigating and resolving complaints.

2.2 Data Protection

All personal information relating to people accessing DF4TA services will be processed in accordance with the Data, Privacy & IT Use Policy and GDPR requirements, retained securely for complaint years, and then disposed of.

2.3 Scope

Applies to anyone receiving, requesting or affected by Derby Food 4 Thought Alliance services — including people we support, carers, partner agencies and community stakeholders. All staff, volunteers and trustees must follow this policy when engaging with or responding to enquiries, compliments, suggestions or complaints.

2.4 Definitions

- **People We Support:** Any individual or organisation accessing, requesting or affected by Derby Food 4 Thought Alliance services or activities
- **Complaint:** An expression of dissatisfaction about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the Alliance.
- **Compliment/Suggestion:** Positive feedback or ideas for improvement submitted via our website form.
- **Acknowledgement:** Formal confirmation that a complaint has been received.
- **Complaint Handler:** The person responsible at each stage of the process.

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2.5 Matters Outside This Procedure

The following matters are not normally handled under this procedure and may instead be managed under another DF4TA policy or external process:

- Safeguarding concerns or disclosures
- Staff grievances or employment matters
- Whistleblowing disclosures
- Anonymous complaints where insufficient information is provided
- Complaints subject to legal proceedings
- Allegations of criminal behaviour

Where appropriate, DF4TA will signpost concerns to the relevant process or agency.

3 Governance & Oversight

3.1 Organisational Responsibilities

Board of Trustees

- Approves and owns this policy.
- Reviews summary reports on complaints, feedback, KPIs and trends.
- Oversees any serious complaints, governance concerns or significant policy changes.

Chief Executive

- Champions and implements the policy day-to-day.
- Maintains oversight of the Complaints Log and Compliments Register.
- Coordinates investigations and reports on trends, themes and KPIs.
- Provides appropriate training and guidance for staff and volunteers handling concerns or complaints.
- Determines which staff members are authorised to act as Designated Complaint Handlers.

Designated Complaint Handlers

Designated Complaint Handlers are responsible for receiving, recording and managing complaints in line with this policy.

Complaint Handlers will normally include the leads responsible for:

- the DF4TA Office
- the Thoughtful Shop
- the DF4TA Resource Centre

Complaint Handlers will:

- respond to complaints sensitively and professionally

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- aim to resolve straightforward concerns informally where appropriate
- escalate serious or unresolved complaints
- maintain accurate and appropriate records
- maintain awareness of previous complaints, themes or recurring issues to support consistency, learning and service improvement
- seek support from the Chief Executive where needed
- Will receive appropriate guidance and support from the Chief Executive to carry out their role, including any necessary training or briefing on handling complaints fairly and consistently

Staff & Volunteers

- Treat all concerns and complaints seriously and respectfully.
- Pass complaints to a Designated Complaint Handler promptly.
- Support people to access the complaints process where appropriate.

3.2 Review & Audit Cycle

The Chief Executive will monitor complaints, feedback and service issues on an ongoing basis and report significant themes or concerns to the Board of Trustees.

This policy will be formally reviewed by the Board every two years, or earlier where significant service, legislative or organisational changes arise.

4 Our Service Charter

At Derby Food 4 Thought Alliance, we aim to treat everyone with dignity, compassion and respect. We will:

4.1 Welcome & Respect

Greet everyone politely—whether in person, on the phone or online—and introduce ourselves by name.

4.2 Listening & Understanding

Take the time to hear your questions or concerns, ask clarifying questions where needed, and confirm our understanding before moving forward.

4.3 Clear Information & Communication

Explain our services, eligibility and processes in plain language—avoiding jargon—and signpost you to additional support if required.

Acknowledge all enquiries within **5 working days** and give you realistic timescales for updates or decisions.

Proactively notify you of any changes or delays so you always know what's happening.

4.4 Fairness & Consistency

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Treat every enquiry equally, acting without bias or favouritism, and ensure decisions are based on your needs and our policies.

4.5 Privacy & Confidentiality

Handle your personal data in line with our Data, Privacy & IT Use Policy —keeping it confidential, storing it securely and only sharing it with your consent or where we're legally required.

4.6 Accessibility & Inclusion

Ensure our buildings, online materials and forms are accessible to people with different needs; offer alternative formats or assistance on request.

Support people to raise concerns in ways that work for them, including verbally, with support from an advocate, or through alternative formats where needed.

We recognise that raising concerns can feel difficult, particularly during times of crisis or stress, and we will aim to handle complaints sensitively and without judgement

4.7 Resolving Concerns

Aim to resolve straightforward enquiries at first contact. For more complex matters, keep you updated on progress until a final response is issued.

4.8 Learning & Improvement

Encourage your compliments and suggestions via our online form. We'll review all feedback quarterly and share how it has shaped improvements.

5 Respectful Behaviour

5.1 Expectations of Conduct

While we're committed to great service, we also expect mutual respect—please treat our staff and volunteers courteously so we can continue to help others effectively.

5.2 Managing Unreasonable Behaviour

DF4TA is committed to treating everyone with dignity and respect and expects the same in return.

We understand that people may sometimes feel distressed, frustrated or upset when raising concerns. However, abusive, threatening, discriminatory or repeated unreasonable behaviour towards staff or volunteers will not be tolerated.

Where behaviour becomes unacceptable, DF4TA may:

- limit communication to specific methods
- end meetings or calls
- require future contact in writing
- involve relevant agencies where safety is at risk

6 Complaints Procedure

6.1 How to Raise a Complaint

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Complaints can be raised through the online complaints form or in writing. Staff and volunteers can support people to record complaints where needed.

Once a complaint is submitted, the Complaint Handler will:

1. **Acknowledge** receipt within **3 working days**.
2. **Investigate** the matter, gathering facts and evidence, within **30 working days**.
3. **Issue** a written outcome explaining findings and any proposed resolution.

Where appropriate, complaint responses may be reviewed by another Designated Complaint Handler before being issued to help ensure consistency, fairness and clarity.

Complaints involving serious organisational, reputational or legal concerns will be discussed with the Chief Executive before a final response is issued.

4. **Offer** a meeting with the Chief Executive if the person we support remains dissatisfied.
5. **Escalate** to the Chair of Trustees for independent review if still unresolved.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after completing the DF4TA complaints process, they may seek independent advice or refer the matter to an appropriate external body where applicable.

Where a complaint concerns the Chief Executive or a trustee, the complaint will be managed by an appropriate trustee or independent person appointed by the Board.

6.2 Informal Concerns and Formal Complaints

DF4TA recognises that many concerns can be resolved quickly and informally without needing to enter the formal complaints process.

Staff and volunteers should aim to respond helpfully and promptly to everyday concerns, questions or misunderstandings wherever possible.

A concern may become a formal complaint where:

- the issue is serious
- the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied
- the matter relates to service quality, conduct or organisational decisions
- a formal response is requested

Formal complaints will normally be recorded in the Complaints Log and managed in line with this procedure.

6.3 Complaint Stages and Timescales

Stage	Action	Timescale
Submission	Complaints submitted via the website form (preferred) or by letter if no online access.	
Acknowledgement	Complaint Handler sends an acknowledgement (with this procedure enclosed).	Within 3 working days
Investigation	Complaint Handler (or Chief Executive) reviews the submission, gathers facts and may consult staff or witnesses.	Usually within 30 working days

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Outcome Letter	Written findings and any proposed resolution sent to the complainant.	Usually within 30 working days
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Where additional time is needed due to complexity, availability of information or staff absence, the complainant will be kept informed and given a revised timescale.

6.4 Escalation & Review

Meeting	If still dissatisfied, the complainant may request a meeting with the Chief Executive.	Usually within 10 working days
Chair Review	If unresolved, the complainant may escalate to the Chair of Trustees for independent review. Where a senior individual, including a Trustee or the Chair, may be involved in a complaint, appropriate alternative oversight will be arranged to ensure impartial handling.	Usually within 20 working days
Final Response	Chair's decision is communicated in writing. This represents the final stage of DF4TA's internal complaints process.	Usually within 14 working days of Chair review

6.5 External Escalation

If still dissatisfied after the Chair's decision, the complainant may refer to appropriate external bodies such as the Charity Commission or Information Commissioner's Office where relevant.

Complaints overlapping with other policies (e.g. Safeguarding, Governance & Conduct) will follow the relevant procedure.

6.6 Conflicts of Interest in Complaint Handling

Where a designated complaint handler has been involved in, or is connected to, the matter being complained about, they must not handle the complaint.

In these cases, the complaint will be reassigned to another appropriate member of staff, usually the Chief Executive or another designated handler.

If there is any uncertainty about impartiality, the matter should be escalated to ensure an independent review of the complaint.

6.7 Withdrawal of Complaints

A complainant may choose to withdraw their complaint at any time by notifying DF4TA.

Where a complaint is withdrawn, DF4TA will:

- record the withdrawal in the Complaints Log
- note any actions already taken up to that point
- consider whether any further action is still required (for example, where safeguarding, legal, or serious conduct concerns are involved)

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The decision to close a complaint following withdrawal will be recorded by the relevant Designated Complaint Handler.

7 Compliments & Suggestions

7.1 Sharing Feedback

People we support are encouraged to share positive feedback or ideas for improvement via our Compliments & Suggestions form on the website.

7.2 Review & Learning

- Acknowledgement: All submissions receive email confirmation within 3 working days.
- Review: Chief Executive reviews all compliments and suggestions quarterly.
- Response: Where appropriate, DF4TA responds within 15 working days and implement improvements informed by feedback from people we support and partners.

8 Monitoring, Learning & Reporting

8.1 Service Standards

- 95% of complaints acknowledged within 3 working days.
- 90% of complaints responded to within agreed timescales

Compliance with this policy is overseen by the Chief Executive, who is responsible for ensuring that complaints, feedback and associated records are managed in line with the process set out in this policy. Any issues with compliance will be addressed promptly and escalated where necessary.

8.2 Complaints & Feedback Logs

The Chief Executive maintains the Complaints Log and Compliments Register to support oversight, consistency, trend monitoring and service improvement.

8.3 Reporting to Trustees

Summary of volumes, KPIs and lessons learned shared with the Board.

8.4 Continuous Improvement

Themes, trends and learning from complaints will be used to improve services, accessibility and communication.

One-page summary of the Charter and process is posted at each site and linked in the website footer.

9 Document Control & Distribution

9.1 Version History & Changelog

Version	Author	Implementation Date	Approval Date	Summary of Changes	Next Review
V1	RB	10/07/26	10/06/26	NA	June 2028

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9.2 Policy Review Dates

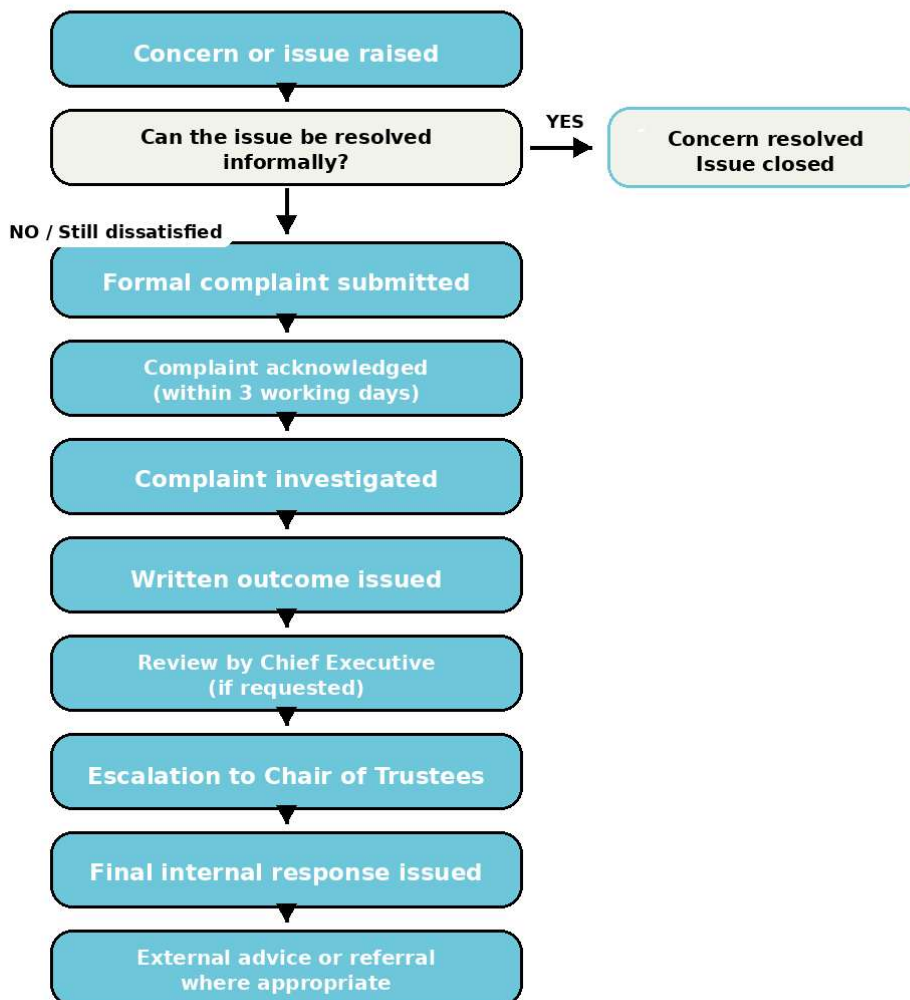
- Formal Review Cycle: This policy will be reviewed every two years or earlier where required.
- Next Scheduled Review: June 2028
- Interim Review Trigger: Significant incidents, legislative updates or major organisational changes.

9.3 Publication & Accessibility

- Master Copy: Held in the DF4TA Office (2.3 Litchurch Plaza, Litchurch Lane, Derby DE24 8AA)
- Site Copies: Read-only versions on noticeboards at the DF4TA Resource Centre and the Thoughtful Shop.
- Electronic Copies: Available on request via the Chief Executive.
- Queries: Contact the Chief Executive if you cannot locate a copy.

Appendix A - Complaints Process Flowchart

This flowchart summarises how DF4TA handles concerns and complaints.



DF4TA aims to resolve concerns fairly, respectfully and as early as possible wherever appropriate.

Support can be provided to help people raise concerns in accessible ways.

Safeguarding concerns, whistleblowing disclosures and staff grievance may follow separate procedures.

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Appendix B – Complaints Form Template

We welcome feedback and take complaints seriously.

If something has gone wrong, please complete this form so we can understand your concern and respond appropriately.

You can complete this form yourself or ask a member of staff, volunteer, advocate or representative to help you.

*This paper form is available for people who cannot access the online form or who would prefer support completing it.

Contact Details

Your name	
Preferred contact method	<input type="checkbox"/> Phone <input type="checkbox"/> Email <input type="checkbox"/> Letter
Phone number	
Email address	
Address (optional)	

Your Concern

Please tell us about your concern or complaint.

Include what happened, when it happened, and who was involved if known.

Desired Outcome

What outcome are you hoping for?

For example:

- an explanation
- an apology
- a review of a decision
- service improvements

Support Needs

Do you need any support or adjustments during the complaints process?

For example:

- communication support
- large print
- support from an advocate

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- contact by phone rather than email

Representative Details (Optional)

Is someone supporting you with this complaint?	
Name	
Relationship to you	
Contact details	

By submitting this form, you understand that DF4TA will use the information provided to review and respond to your complaint in line with our Data, Privacy & IT Use Policy.

I understand

****Complaints can also be raised verbally with support from a member of staff or volunteer where needed. ****

Appendix C – Complaints Log Template

This log is used to record, monitor and review complaints received by DF4TA.

It helps identify themes, improve services and ensure complaints are handled fairly, consistently and within expected timescales.

Ref No.	Date Received	Date Acknowledged	Complaint Received By	Nature of Complaint (e.g. communication, staff conduct, service quality, accessibility)	Complaint Handler	Actions Taken / Notes on Progress	Outcome <ul style="list-style-type: none"> resolved partially resolved not upheld withdrawn 	Date Outcome Issued (sent to complainant)	Complaint Status (Open / In Progress / Closed)	Escalated? Yes / No	Learning / Actions Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> updated website wording improved volunteer briefing signage added referral process clarified
COMP-2026-001	06/05/2026			Communication	J. Bloggs					Yes (Trustee review)	

Complaints logs should avoid unnecessary personal or sensitive information and be stored securely in line with DF4TA’s Data, Privacy & IT Use Policy.

Complaints logs should avoid including:

- complainant addresses
- detailed narratives
- witness evidence
- emotional commentary
- risk ratings
- safeguarding detail



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Repeated themes or serious concerns should be highlighted to the Chief Executive and Board of Trustees as part of ongoing service improvement and governance monitoring.

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Appendix D – Guidance for Staff & Volunteers Handling Concerns and Complaints

1. Purpose

This guidance supports staff and volunteers to respond consistently, respectfully and confidently when concerns or complaints are raised.

Most concerns can be resolved quickly through listening, clarification and practical support. This guidance aims to help people respond calmly, fairly and proportionately.

2. Responding Well to Concerns

When someone raises a concern:

- listen carefully and without interruption
- remain calm and respectful
- thank the person for raising the issue
- avoid becoming defensive or argumentative
- clarify what the concern is about
- ask what outcome the person is hoping for
- explain what will happen next
- avoid making promises you cannot keep

Where appropriate, staff and volunteers should aim to resolve straightforward concerns informally and as early as possible.

3. When to Escalate

Concerns should be escalated to a formal complaint where:

- the issue is serious or repeated
- the person remains dissatisfied
- the concern relates to conduct, discrimination or organisational decisions
- safeguarding or legal concerns are identified
- a formal response is requested

Safeguarding concerns, whistleblowing disclosures and staff grievances must be managed under the appropriate DF4TA policy.

4. Recording Concerns and Complaints

Concerns and complaints may be received:

- through the online complaints form
- by email or letter
- verbally in person or by telephone (Where appropriate, staff and volunteers may help individuals complete the online or paper complaint form)
- through an advocate, support worker or representative

Staff and volunteers should respond supportively and ensure concerns are passed to an appropriate staff member where needed.

Formal complaints should be recorded promptly and accurately using the Complaints Log process.

Records should:

- be factual and objective
- avoid personal opinions or assumptions

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- include actions taken and outcomes
- avoid unnecessary sensitive detail

5. Managing Difficult Situations

People raising concerns may sometimes feel upset, frustrated or distressed. Staff and volunteers should respond with patience and empathy wherever possible.

However, abusive, threatening or discriminatory behaviour is not acceptable.

If a situation becomes unsafe or unmanageable:

- seek support from a manager or colleague
- end the conversation calmly if necessary
- move communication to writing where appropriate
- report serious incidents immediately

6. Confidentiality & Data Protection

Information relating to concerns and complaints should only be shared on a need-to-know basis and handled in line with DF4TA's Data, Privacy & IT Use Policy.

Confidentiality cannot always be guaranteed where safeguarding, criminal or serious governance concerns arise.

7. Support for Staff & Volunteers

Handling complaints can sometimes feel challenging or emotionally demanding.

Staff and volunteers should seek support from their line manager, Site Lead or the Chief Executive where needed, particularly following difficult or distressing situations.