



Complaints Policy

Purpose:

The Sussex Reptile Rescue Centre is committed to providing a professional, respectful and high-quality service to the public, animal owners, adopters, supporters, donors, volunteers and other organisations with whom we work.

We recognise that, on occasion, someone may be dissatisfied with our services, conduct or decisions. We welcome legitimate feedback and complaints as an opportunity to address concerns, learn from our experiences and improve the way the charity operates.

This policy sets out how complaints will be received, investigated and resolved fairly, consistently and transparently.

Scope:

This policy may be used to raise concerns or complaints relating to:

- The standard of service provided by the charity;
- The conduct or behaviour of a volunteer, trustee or person acting on behalf of the charity;
- Animal welfare or standard of care;
- The rescue, surrender, fostering or rehoming of animals;
- Educational activities, events or public engagement;
- Fundraising activities
- Communication or customer service
- Equality, accessibility or reasonable adjustments
- Any other aspect of the charity's activities

This policy does not replace safeguarding, whistleblowing, grievance, disciplinary or serious incident procedures where one of those procedures is more appropriate.



Our principles:

The Sussex Reptile Rescue Centre shall:

- treat complaints seriously and respectfully;
- handle complaints fairly and impartially;
- investigate complaints proportionately;
- provide people with an opportunity to explain their concerns;
- avoid conflicts of interest when deciding who investigates a complaint;
- maintain appropriate confidentiality;
- keep appropriate records;
- make reasonable adjustments to the complaints process where required;
- explain the outcome of a complaint wherever reasonably possible; and
- use complaints to identify opportunities to improve the charity.

No person will be treated unfairly simply because they have made a complaint in good faith.

4. Making a Complaint

We encourage concerns to be raised as soon as reasonably possible so that they can be investigated effectively.

Complaints should preferably be submitted in writing by email or through any complaints/contact facility provided on our website.

A complaint should, where possible, include:

- the complainant's name and contact details;
- details of what happened;
- relevant dates, locations and individuals involved;
- any supporting information or evidence;
- details of any previous attempts to resolve the matter; and
- what the complainant would like the charity to do to resolve the matter.

The email address to send a written complaint to shall be: info@thesussexrrc.org.uk



5. Informal Resolution

Where appropriate, we will initially try to resolve straightforward concerns informally.

A member of the charity may discuss the matter with the complainant, explain what happened, correct a misunderstanding or take reasonable steps to resolve the concern.

A complainant may request that their concern is considered formally where they believe informal resolution is inappropriate or has been unsuccessful.

6. Stage One – Formal Complaint

Formal complaints will normally be acknowledged within **5 working days**.

The complaint will be allocated to an appropriate person to investigate. The investigator should not normally investigate a complaint where they are personally the subject of the complaint or have another significant conflict of interest.

The investigation may include:

- reviewing correspondence and records;
- speaking with relevant volunteers, trustees or other individuals;
- reviewing animal care or rehoming records where relevant;
- reviewing photographs, CCTV, messages or other evidence where lawfully available; and
- obtaining further information from the complainant.

We aim to provide a substantive response within **20 working days** of receiving a formal complaint.

Where an investigation is particularly complex, additional time may be required. If this happens, the complainant will normally be informed of the delay and provided with an updated timescale.



7. Outcomes

Following an investigation, the charity may:

- uphold the complaint;
- partially uphold the complaint;
- not uphold the complaint; or
- determine that there is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion.

Where appropriate, action may include:

- an explanation;
- an apology;
- correcting inaccurate information;
- reviewing an operational decision;
- improving a procedure or policy;
- providing additional training;
- implementing animal welfare or safeguarding improvements; or
- taking appropriate management, disciplinary or governance action.

For reasons of confidentiality and data protection, we may not be able to provide details of action taken against an individual.

8. Stage Two – Review

If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the Stage One response, they may request a review.

Requests should normally be submitted within **20 working days** of the Stage One response and should explain why the complainant believes the response or investigation was inadequate.

Where reasonably possible, the review will be undertaken by a trustee or other appropriate person who was not responsible for the original investigation.

Where the complaint concerns a senior member of the charity, the Chair or Board of Trustees may appoint an appropriate trustee or independent person to consider the matter.

Where the complaint concerns the Chair, the complaint should be handled by another trustee who is not involved in the matter.

The Stage Two decision will normally represent the conclusion of the charity's internal complaints procedure.



9. Complaints About Trustees

Complaints involving a trustee will be handled in accordance with this policy and the charity's governing document.

A trustee who is the subject of a complaint, or who otherwise has a conflict of interest, should not participate in determining the outcome of that complaint except where their evidence is required.

Where appropriate, the remaining trustees may appoint an independent person to assist with the investigation.

10. Animal Welfare and Safeguarding Concerns

Any complaint suggesting that a person or animal may be at immediate risk will be treated as a priority.

Where appropriate, the charity may refer concerns to relevant authorities or professional organisations, including veterinary professionals, the police, local authorities or safeguarding services.

The safety and welfare of animals and people will take priority over the normal complaints timetable where urgent action is necessary.

11. Fundraising Complaints

Complaints relating to fundraising will be handled in accordance with this policy and applicable fundraising standards.

Where a fundraising complaint cannot be resolved internally, the complainant may be able to refer the matter to the Fundraising Regulator where the complaint falls within its remit.

12. Serious Regulatory Concerns

Most complaints should first be raised directly with the charity.

Certain serious concerns about the administration or operation of a registered charity may fall within the regulatory remit of the Charity Commission for England and Wales.

Examples may include serious financial misconduct, significant misuse of charitable assets, serious harm to beneficiaries or others, or other serious misconduct or mismanagement.

Nothing in this policy prevents an individual from contacting an appropriate regulator, law-enforcement agency or other statutory authority where they are entitled to do so.



13. Unreasonable or Persistent Complaints

We will not classify a complaint as unreasonable merely because someone is persistent, disagrees with our decision or challenges the charity.

However, we may take proportionate steps to manage communications where behaviour becomes abusive, threatening, discriminatory, excessively repetitive or otherwise places an unreasonable burden on the charity.

This may include:

- requiring communication to be in writing;
- nominating a single point of contact;
- limiting the frequency of correspondence;
- declining to reconsider matters that have already completed the complaints process unless significant new evidence is provided; or
- ending communication where abusive or threatening behaviour continues.

Any restrictions should be proportionate and should not prevent legitimate safeguarding, whistleblowing or regulatory concerns from being raised.

Threats of violence, harassment or suspected criminal conduct may be reported to the police or another appropriate authority.

14. Confidentiality and Data Protection

Complaints will be handled with appropriate confidentiality.

Information will normally only be shared with people who need it for the purpose of investigating, managing or responding to the complaint, or where disclosure is otherwise required or permitted by law.

Records relating to complaints will be stored securely and handled in accordance with the charity's data protection responsibilities.

15. Accessibility and Reasonable Adjustments

We want our complaints procedure to be accessible.

Where someone has a disability, communication difficulty or other accessibility requirement, we will consider reasonable adjustments to enable them to participate effectively in the complaints process.

A person may also be supported by a representative or advocate where appropriate.



16. Learning From Complaints

Complaints provide an important source of information about the charity's performance.

The Board of Trustees may periodically review complaints to identify:

- recurring issues;
- risks to animal welfare or public safety;
- training requirements;
- weaknesses in policies or procedures; and
- opportunities to improve the charity's services.

Serious matters will be escalated to the trustees promptly rather than waiting for a routine review.

17. Record Keeping

The charity will maintain appropriate records of formal complaints, including:

- the nature of the complaint;
- relevant evidence;
- actions taken;
- the investigation and decision;
- correspondence with the complainant; and
- any organisational learning or corrective action identified.

Records will be retained only for as long as reasonably necessary and in accordance with applicable data protection requirements and the charity's retention arrangements.

18. Responsibility

The **Board of Trustees of The Sussex Reptile Rescue Centre** has overall responsibility for ensuring that the charity maintains an appropriate complaints procedure.

Day-to-day administration of complaints may be delegated to an appropriate member of the charity.

The trustees retain oversight of serious complaints, complaints presenting significant risk to the charity, and complaints involving senior members of the organisation.



19. Policy Review

This policy will normally be reviewed annually, or sooner where:

- legislation or regulatory guidance changes;
- a serious complaint identifies weaknesses in the existing procedure;
- the charity's activities materially change; or
- the trustees otherwise consider a review necessary.

Written on 20th September 2026 to be reviewed annually