

CORNWALL FEDERATION OF WOMEN'S INSTITUTES

COMPLAINTS POLICY

1. Introduction

If possible, complaints should be resolved informally. This may involve those involved in the complaint sitting down together, talking through the issue and reaching a resolution, or a neutral person guiding those involved in the complaint to reach a resolution.

Where a matter is unable to be resolved informally and a formal complaint is made, this policy should be followed. All complaints must be made as soon as possible and within 3 months of any incident, by writing, either via email to complaints@cornwallwi.org.uk or letter to the Complaints Team Chy Noweth an Conteth, Truro Business Park, Threemilestone, Truro, TR4 9NH, marked Private and Confidential, detailing the nature of the complaint.

Appendix A contains guidance on what information should be provided by the complainant before the complaints process begins.

Appendix B contains guidance on what information should be provided to the complainant when the complaints process ends.

Appendix C contains the CFWI Complaint Form. A paper copy can be obtained from the CFWI Chy Noweth an Conteth Truro Business Park, Threemilestone, Truro, TR4 9NH

2. Purpose of the policy

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Offer an avenue of redress for members and non-members of the Cornwall Federation of WIs.
- Ensure complaints are resolved in a timely manner.
- Identify procedures to reduce the risk of complaints occurring again, monitor themes and address system, organisational and thematic issues.
- Ensure support and information is provided where needed.

3. CFWI commitments

CFWI is committed to ensuring complaints are dealt with professionally, appropriately and in a timely manner. All complaints will be handled in accordance with the following standards:

- Complaints will be treated seriously and managed in a fair and transparent way.
- Everyone involved in a complaint will be treated respectfully and in accordance with the organisation's values throughout the complaints process.
- Complaints will be responded to in a timely manner in accordance with this policy.
- Complaints will be kept confidential as far as possible and where this is not possible those involved will be notified.
- Complaints will be handled without discrimination or judgement and those received from members and non-members will be treated equally and with objectivity.
- Complaints team will provide support to WI's in the management of complaints.

- External regulatory bodies, such as the Charity Commission and the Information Commissioner's Office, will be notified as appropriate depending on the nature of the complaint.

4. Scope

This policy applies to any person wishing to make a complaint. This includes trustees at all levels of the organisation, WI members and non-WI members (members of the public).

Complaints by third parties that is those that have not witnessed the behaviour or been a victim of the behaviour will be advised to encourage the witness or victim to complete the complaint form. Where complainants need additional support through disability or language barriers this should be facilitated and their consent obtained.

Where a second or subsequent complaints are received about the same concern, the complainants will be informed that there is an open complaint, and their complaint will be added to the open complaint and dealt with as one complaint. The investigations will be combined to avoid confusion and keep disruption to a minimum. It remains the decision of complaints team whether to open any new complaints or combine them. Complaints that are broadly the same as a previous complaint from the same complainant will not be accepted.

The complaints team decision about whether to open a new complaint is final.

Complaints received by the complaints team will be assessed to determine the appropriate level (WI, CFWI or NFWI) and the complainant will be notified accordingly, advised and supported to contact the relevant WI or NFWI. It remains their responsibility to make the complaint at the correct level.

Complaints about an entire WI Committee, the CFWI Board of Trustees or CFWI sub committees will be escalated to the next level as appropriate.

5. Complaints at WI Level

Complaints regarding a WI should be in writing to the WI Secretary (or president if the secretary is involved in the complaint) and acknowledgement given in writing within 10 working days of receipt.

The complaint will be dealt with by the officers of the WI, and a written response explaining the decision and outcome within eight weeks of the complaint being made. Where a complaint cannot be completed in that monthly updates should be given to the complainant. (LINK TO BE ADDED TO LETTERS).

Complaints involving an officer of a WI Committee in any capacity will preclude them from the complaints process. If the complaint involves all officers, the complaint should be sent to the complaints team for allocation.

The decision of the WI officers can be appealed by writing to complaints team, within 28 days of receiving the WI's decision. The communication should include information about

the complaint, the correspondence surrounding the decision and grounds for appeal. An appeal can only be made on the grounds of evidence that was not considered or concerns that the relevant complaints policy and procedures were not followed appropriately.

6. Complaints at CFWI level

Complaints about CFWI, or an appeal of a WI complaint, should be sent to complaints team and acknowledged in writing within 10 working days of receipt.

The complaint will be dealt with by the complaints team and a written response will be sent explaining the decision and outcome within eight weeks of receipt. Where this is not possible an update will be sent monthly.

If the complaint mentions a member of the complaints team, they will not take part in the complaints process. If the complaint mentions all the officers at CFWI level, the complaint should go straight to the NFWI following the below process.

The decision of the complaints team can be appealed, and this should be sent to the Membership Support Officer within the NFWI Membership and Engagement Team within 28 days. The appeal should include information about the complaint, any decisions made and grounds for appeal. An appeal can only be made on the grounds of new evidence that was not originally considered or concerns that the relevant complaints policy was not followed appropriately.

When a complaint is received details should be sent to the complaints team for recording purposes, this will allow for support or advice to be given as required. A further update should be sent with the outcome of the process.

7. Complaints at NFWI level

Complaints about the NFWI, or appealing a complaint, should be sent to Membership and Engagement Team within 28 days of receiving the outcome of the complaint, using the NFWI Complaint Form and acknowledgement will be in writing within 10 working days of receipt where possible. If the NFWI are able to look into the complaint it will be dealt with by the Membership and Engagement Team in conjunction with the relevant department a written response will be sent explaining the decision and outcome within eight weeks of receipt where possible.

Where appropriate the complaint will be formally investigated. Such an investigation will be supported by a relevant trustee or staff member. Where an investigation is undertaken then the response time is likely to be increased and the complainant will be notified of the revised timescales when the complaint is acknowledged.

The decision of the Membership and Engagement Team can be appealed and should be in writing to the NFWI CEO, within 28 days of receiving the Membership and Engagement Team's decision. The appeal should include information about the complaint, any previous decisions and grounds for appeal. An appeal can only be made on the grounds of new evidence that was not originally considered or concerns that the NFWI complaints policy was not followed appropriately.

The NFWI CEO will work on the appeal with the NFWI Board of Trustees where required. A written response will be sent explaining the decision and outcome within eight weeks of receipt where possible. The decision of the NFWI CEO is final.

If the NFWI are made aware of issues, they may choose to follow these up as a formal complaint even where this has not been specifically requested and the complainant will be contacted about this.

8. Sensitive complaints

CFWI acknowledges that there may be occasions when complainants are unable to follow the guidance in this policy given due to the sensitive nature of the issues concerned. Complaints of this nature should be directed to NFWI membership and Engagement team

9. Complaints by non-members (members of the public)

Complaints by non-members follow the same process as members.

10. Investigations

Complaints where possible should be dealt with informally, however, where complaints are complicated, involve several people or information is not readily available an investigation may be appropriate. Further guidance is available from complaints team or written guidance on the website.

Complainants have the right to withdraw their complaint at any time, however if the information given is deemed to possibly affect the organization or the reputation of the organisation then the complaints team may consider continuing with the complaint. They will inform the complainant of their intentions.

11. Timeframes

The timeframes stipulated in this policy must be adhered to by all parties. If the timeframes cannot be met the reasons for this must be communicated to the people involved and new timeframes set out. This includes if further time is required for an investigation.

12. Serious incident reporting

The Charity Commission requires charities to report serious incidents. A serious incident is an adverse event, whether actual or alleged, which results in or risks significant:

- harm to your charity's beneficiaries, staff, volunteers or others who come into contact with your charity through its work.
- loss of your charity's money or assets.
- damage to your charity's property; and/or
- harm to your charity's work or reputation.

Therefore, complaints that follow this policy and other incidents may need to be reported to the Charity Commission and the trustees are responsible for this. Please see the [NFWI Serious Incident Reporting: Guidance for federations and WIs](#) for more information.

13. involvement of advisors

Advisors will not routinely be informed of complaints about their WIs as this information is considered confidential, However with the agreement of the complainant or the person to whom the complaint refers the advisor may be informed to offer support.

Where specialist knowledge is required the complaints team may approach a suitably trained advisor such as for financial, legal or safeguarding.

14. Confidentiality and data protection

All complaints will be handled confidentially and in accordance with applicable data protection legislation. You have the right to contact the [Information Commissioner's Office \(ICO\)](#) about data protection matters.

For more information about data protection, please contact dataprotection@nfwl.org.uk.

Details of the complaint will be kept for five years from the time that the complaint is reported.

Anonymised data about the nature of complaints will be shared with the board of trustees.

Where a complaint is likely to have an impact on the CFWI or NFWI, the Chair of the Board of Trustees will be briefed on the circumstances, actions to be taken and support put in place but the details of the people involved will not be disclosed.

15. The Charity Commission and the Fundraising Regulator

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your complaint, you have the right to complain to the [Charity Commission](#) and/or the [Fundraising Regulator](#).

16. Relevant documents

This policy should be read alongside: ADD LINKS

- The NFWI Charter
- The NFWI Code of Conduct
- The NFWI Complaints Handling Guide
- The NFWI Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

These documents can be found on MyWI.

16. Updating this policy

This policy will be reviewed annually or as required. Any updates will be communicated to WIs who should cascade this information on to their members.

Appendix A: Information to be provided by the complainant before the complaints process begins

When making a complaint, the complainant must include the following information:

- Whether they are a member of the WI or not. If they are, their WI and federation.
- The nature of the complaint, e.g., breach of the Constitution, discrimination, bullying.
- A summary of the complaint including relevant dates and events in chronological order.
- Any supporting documentation that is relevant to the complaint.
- The outcome they would like from the process.
- Whether they have contacted their WI, CFWI, the NFWI or the Charity Commission about the complaint.

Please note if the complainant is complaining to the NFWI, they must use the NFWI Complaint Form.

Appendix B: Information to be provided to the complainant when the complaints process ends

When communicating the outcome and decision of the complaint, the complainant must receive the following information:

- The information has been reviewed, assessed and investigated as appropriate
- Who carried out the investigation and the outcome.
- The decisions on the issues and overall outcome.
- Any necessary action points and next steps, including appeals process
- Confirmation that all people involved have been informed of the outcome

Appendix C: CFWI Complaint Form

If you submit a complaint in accordance with the CFWI Complaints Policy, please complete the below form and return it to the complaints team using the contact details below. Please ensure you also include any relevant supporting documentation. This form is also available on request and on the CFWI website.

1. Name:
2. Please provide phone number and email address, indicating your preferred means of contact
3. If you are a member of the WI, please tell us your WI and Federation:

4. Please tell us the nature of the complaint e.g., breaches of the code of conduct
5. Please tell us about the key elements of the complaint using bullet points: please use additional paper if required
6. if you know the outcome you would like from the complaints process, please tell us what this is:
7. Please tell us whether you have complained to a WI or another federation about this matter and if so what the outcome was:
Have you sought advice from your local advisor or any member of the board of trustees? If so who?
8. Please tell us whether you have spoken to the Charity Commission about this complaint:

You may submit the CFWI Complaint Form to the complaints team complaints@cornwallwi.org.uk or by posting it to CFWI, complaints team, Chy Noweth an Conteth, Truro Business Park, Threemilestone, Truro TR4 9NH. Marked private and confidential.

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