

Complaints Policy

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US Complaints Policy

Our Commitment

We aim to provide a high standard of service to our members, supporters, volunteers, beneficiaries, visitors and users of our services. If we fall short, we want to hear about it, respond fairly and promptly, and use what we learn to improve.

Purpose and Principles

The United Synagogue treats complaints as an important opportunity to listen, resolve issues where appropriate, and improve the way we work. This policy explains how complaints may be made, how they will usually be handled, and how they may be escalated if a complainant remains dissatisfied.

In applying this policy, the Charity will seek to:

- Treat complainants with courtesy, respect and fairness.
- Acknowledge complaints promptly and explain what will happen next.
- Investigate complaints proportionately, objectively and without unnecessary delay.
- Keep complainants informed of progress where a response will take longer than expected.
- Provide a clear response which explains the outcome and, where appropriate, any action to be taken.
- Protect confidentiality and personal data, subject to any legal, safeguarding or regulatory obligations.
- Make reasonable adjustments where needed so that people can access the complaints process.
- Identify lessons learned and make improvements where appropriate.

Scope

This policy applies to complaints about services, activities, conduct, decisions or omissions for which the United Synagogue is responsible. This includes complaints about the US Centre and Member Synagogues where the matter falls within the Charity's governance or operational responsibility.

This policy does not replace specialist procedures that apply to certain issues. Complaints or concerns will be referred to the relevant procedure where required by law, regulation, United Synagogue policy or the nature of the issue. For example:

- Safeguarding concerns must be referred immediately to the [US Safeguarding team](#) and, where required, to statutory authorities.
- Staff grievances, disciplinary matters and whistleblowing concerns will be handled under the relevant [HR or whistleblowing procedures](#).
- Data protection rights requests, including subject access, rectification, erasure, restriction, objection or portability requests, and complaints about the handling of personal data, will be handled under [US data protection procedures](#).

- Serious incidents may need to be escalated under the [Charity's risk, safeguarding, governance or regulatory reporting procedures](#).
- Matters that are primarily religious, halachic or ecclesiastical may need to be referred to the appropriate rabbinic or Beth Din authority.
- Complaints relating to volunteers will be handled under the [US Volunteer Problem Solving Policy](#).

Where a complaint raises more than one type of issue, the Charity may decide which procedure, or combination of procedures, should apply. We will tell the complainant if this affects how the matter will be handled.

Legal and Governance Framework

This policy is intended to align with applicable law, regulation and United Synagogue governance documents, including:

- [The Charities Act 2011](#) and related charity law, reporting, accounting and governance requirements.
- [The Charities Act 2016](#).
- [UK GDPR](#) and the [Data Protection Act 2018](#).
- [The Equality Act 2010](#).
- [Safeguarding law](#), statutory guidance and local safeguarding arrangements for children, young people and adults at risk.
- [The Fundraising Regulator's Code of Fundraising Practice](#).
- [Charity Commission guidance and regulatory expectations](#).
- [The United Synagogues Act 1870](#), US Statutes, Member Synagogue Byelaws, Election Regulations and other relevant US governance documents.
- [US policies and procedures on safeguarding, data protection, whistleblowing, HR, risk management, serious incident reporting and record retention](#).

What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about an act, omission, decision, service, standard, conduct or communication by the Charity, a Member Synagogue, a member of staff, a volunteer or someone acting on the Charity's behalf, where the complainant reasonably expects the Charity to consider the matter and respond.

Informal resolution

Some concerns can be resolved quickly and informally. Where appropriate, the Charity will try to resolve matters at the earliest possible stage. A complainant may still ask for the matter to be treated as a formal complaint if informal resolution is not appropriate or has not resolved the issue.

Informal resolution may include clarifying what happened, correcting a misunderstanding, providing information, offering an apology where appropriate, or agreeing a practical step to address the issue. Where the matter raises learning, risk, safeguarding, data protection, governance or regulatory issues, the outcome should be recorded.

How to make a complaint

Complaints should usually be made as soon as possible after the issue arises, while information is still available. If there has been a significant delay, we may not be able to investigate fully, although we will still consider whether there is anything we can reasonably do.

Please include:

- Your name and preferred contact details.
- What happened, when it happened and who was involved, where known.
- Whether the matter relates to a Member Synagogue, the United Synagogue Centre, or another US service.
- What you have already done to try to resolve the matter, if anything.
- What outcome or remedy you are seeking.

No Victimisation and No Detriment

The Charity encourages concerns and complaints to be raised in good faith and recognises that people must be able to do so without fear of adverse consequences.

No individual will be treated less favourably, disadvantaged, victimised or retaliated against because they raise, assist with, provide information for, or otherwise engage with a complaint in good faith.

Making a complaint will not, of itself, affect a person's membership status, access to services, participation in communal life, eligibility for synagogue honours, burial scheme entitlement, volunteering opportunities, or any other rights or benefits properly available through the Charity.

Anyone who believes they have suffered adverse treatment, victimisation, retaliation or other detriment because they raised a complaint should report this to the Chief Executive or Compliance / External & Legal Services. Such concerns will be taken seriously and, where appropriate, investigated separately.

This does not prevent the Charity from taking reasonable and proportionate action where a complaint is made dishonestly, maliciously, in bad faith, or in a manner that is abusive, discriminatory, harassing or otherwise unacceptable under Charity policies. No adverse treatment will arise merely because a complaint is not upheld.

The following sections explain who will usually handle different types of complaint before setting out the general handling process, review stages and possible external routes.

Complaints about a Member Synagogue

Where a complaint relates to a Member Synagogue, and does not concern a volunteer, it should normally be raised first with the Chair unless there is a good reason not to do so. The Chair should seek prompt resolution, informally where possible.

If informal resolution is inappropriate or unsuccessful, the complaint should be considered formally by at least three Synagogue Council members, including, where possible, at least one Local Honorary Officer. Those considering it must have no conflict of interest.

The complaint should be referred to the Chief Executive where local handling would not be independent, appropriate or proportionate, including where:

- There are insufficient independent Synagogue Council members to consider it.
- The Chair, Synagogue Council or Local Honorary Officers are the subject of the complaint.
- The complaint raises a significant conflict of interest, governance, safeguarding, legal, regulatory or reputational issue.
- It would otherwise be inappropriate for the Member Synagogue to handle the complaint locally.

Complaints about Religious Leadership

Complaints about the conduct, behaviour, professionalism, pastoral care, communication, or other actions of a Rabbi, Rebbetzen, Chazan or other religious leader, will not normally be determined solely at local Synagogue level.

Such complaints should be raised with the synagogue Chair in the first instance, where appropriate, but the Chair's role will usually be to acknowledge the concern, record it and refer it for appropriate review. Formal consideration should normally involve the relevant HR business partner and may be escalated to the Chief Executive, who may appoint an appropriate senior manager, HR representative or suitably independent person to oversee or conduct the review. The Office of the Chief Rabbi may be consulted or involved where appropriate and in accordance with its role and responsibilities.

Complaints about religious leaders will be handled fairly, independently and proportionately, with appropriate regard to confidentiality, safeguarding obligations and natural justice.

This procedure does not ordinarily apply to religious, halachic or ecclesiastical determinations made in a rabbinic capacity, including matters properly within the jurisdiction of the London Beth Din.

Concerns about the conduct, behaviour, courtesy, responsiveness, professionalism, safeguarding responsibilities or administrative actions of religious leaders remain within scope and will be considered under this policy where appropriate. Any investigation will be completed in line with relevant rabbinic policies and procedures.

Complaints relating to Volunteers

Complaints against, or otherwise relating to, volunteers will be dealt with under the [US Volunteer Problem Solving Policy](#) rather than this complaints process.

Complaints about the US Centre or Central Services

Complaints about the Centre, or a central service or department, should normally be sent to the responsible Director. If the Director is the subject of the complaint, or should not handle it for another reason, it should be sent to the Chief Executive, who may appoint another Director or appropriate senior person to consider it.

Contact Details

Post	Chief Executive, United Synagogue, 305 Ballards Lane, London N12 8GB
Email	complaints@theus.org.uk
Telephone	020 8343 8989

How we will handle complaints

Where possible, complaints and reviews should be handled by someone who was not directly involved in the matter and can consider it fairly and objectively. Any actual or potential conflict of interest should be identified early and managed appropriately.

Complaints will be handled proportionately to their seriousness and complexity. The usual process is set out below, but may be adapted where necessary, to deal fairly with the circumstances.

Stage	What happens	Usual timescale
Acknowledgement	We acknowledge the complaint, identify a point of contact and explain the next steps.	Acknowledgement within 5 working days* where possible. Investigator, reviewer or contact confirmed within 10 working days* where needed.
Initial resolution / Stage 1	The relevant Chair, Director or appointed person seeks informal resolution where appropriate, or conducts a proportionate review.	Full response aimed within 20 working days* of receipt.
Investigation	For more complex matters, we may gather documents, speak to relevant people and consider relevant policies, procedures and governance requirements.	If more time is needed, we will explain why and give a revised expected response date.
Escalation / appeal	If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may request a review. This will usually consider whether the complaint was handled fairly, relevant information was considered, and the outcome was reasonable.	Normally requested within 10 working days* of the Stage 1 response. Timescales will depend on complexity and be confirmed to the complainant.

* Working days exclude Jewish festivals, fasts and communal office closure days.

Outcomes and Remedies

Where a complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the Charity will consider an appropriate and proportionate remedy. Depending on the circumstances, this may include:

- An explanation of what happened.
- An apology where appropriate.
- Correction of an error or misunderstanding.

- A change to a process, communication, or practice.
- Additional guidance, training or supervision for staff or volunteers.
- Referral to a more appropriate procedure or decision maker.
- Another proportionate action designed to put matters right where possible.

If a Complaint Cannot be Upheld

If a complaint is not upheld, we will explain the reasons as clearly as we can, subject to confidentiality and legal obligations. We will also explain whether any further internal review is available.

Appeals and Final Internal Review

If a complainant remains dissatisfied following the Charity's response, they may request a final internal review, normally within 10 working days* of receiving the response. The request should explain why the outcome was incorrect, unreasonable or incomplete, or why relevant information or procedural issues were not properly considered.

The review will not normally be a full reinvestigation, but will usually consider:

- Whether the complaint was handled fairly and in line with this policy.
- Whether relevant evidence and information were properly considered.
- Whether the findings and conclusions were reasonable on the information available.
- Whether any material new information could affect the outcome.
- Whether the proposed remedy or response was proportionate.

However, where the appeal Chair or reviewer considers it necessary and proportionate, they may direct further enquiries or a reinvestigation of all or part of the complaint.

A review will normally be acknowledged within five working days* of receipt of the request, with a substantive response aimed within 20 working days* of receipt. If more time is needed, the complainant will be told why and given an anticipated completion timescale.

The review will ordinarily be undertaken by someone with no previous substantive involvement. If the Chief Executive or proposed reviewer has already been involved, the Charity will appoint a suitably independent alternative.

For significant or particularly sensitive matters, or where the Charity considers it appropriate, the matter may be referred to a panel of at least two Trustees with no previous involvement. The panel may uphold, vary or overturn the original decision, recommend further investigation, propose additional remedial action, or conclude that no further action is required.

The review outcome will be communicated in writing with reasons. Unless stated otherwise, a Trustee review is the final stage of the Charity's internal complaints process. After that, complainants may, where appropriate, pursue any external routes identified in this policy.

* Working days exclude Jewish festivals, fasts and communal office closure days.

Escalation to External Bodies

The internal complaints process is intended to resolve matters directly and fairly wherever possible. However, it does not prevent complainants from referring a matter to an external body

where they remain dissatisfied, the issue falls outside the Charity's remit, requires urgent external action, or remains unresolved after the internal process.

The table below gives examples of relevant external bodies. The appropriate route will depend on the nature of the complaint, and some matters may need urgent referral before the internal process has concluded.

Fundraising complaints	If a fundraising complaint remains unresolved after the Charity's internal process, the complainant may contact the Fundraising Regulator . Complaints are normally expected within two months of the charity's final response.
Charity governance or regulatory concerns	The Charity Commission may consider serious charity concerns, particularly involving governance, safeguarding, misconduct, mismanagement or risk to charity assets or beneficiaries.
Data protection concerns	If the issue concerns personal data handling, the complainant may contact the US Data Protection Officer . If dissatisfied, they may contact the Information Commissioner's Office .
Mobile phone / SMS giving	Where the complaint relates to SMS giving or mobile bill charges and remains unresolved, the complainant may contact the relevant provider, payment intermediary or regulator.
Safeguarding	Safeguarding concerns may need referral to statutory authorities. This policy must not delay urgent safeguarding action.

Anonymous Complaints

We may not be able to respond to anonymous complaints, but will consider them and, where there is sufficient information, may investigate or use them to identify learning or risk issues. Anonymous complaints raising safeguarding, criminal, regulatory or serious governance concerns will be escalated as appropriate.

Complaints We May Not Respond to Further

As a charity with finite resources, we must use them responsibly. We may reasonably and proportionately decide not to respond further to, or continue correspondence about, a complaint where:

- The matter has no direct connection to the Charity, or the Charity has no responsibility for it.
- The complaint has already been considered and answered, with no materially new information provided.
- The complainant is pursuing the matter in an unreasonable, abusive, discriminatory, harassing or disproportionate manner.
- The complaint is incoherent, illegible or lacks enough information for a meaningful response.
- The complaint appears to be part of a bulk mailing or campaign and does not require an individual response.
- The complaint is about events that occurred a significant period of time ago, and we determine that no meaningful investigation is possible and there is no current risk to beneficiaries, volunteers, staff or the public.

- Responding would risk breaching confidentiality, legal privilege, data protection, safeguarding duties or another legal obligation.
- The issue is more appropriately handled under another procedure, or by another organisation or regulator.

Any decision not to respond further to a complaint will ordinarily be taken or ratified by the Chief Executive. Where we decide not to respond further, we will normally tell the complainant and explain why, unless doing so would be inappropriate or unsafe.

Nothing in this section affects the safeguarding triage process set out in the Safeguarding and Serious Incidents section below, and any safeguarding concerns identified in a complaint will be considered under that process.

Confidentiality, Data Protection and Record Keeping

The Charity will handle complaints sensitively and share information only as needed to consider and respond to the complaint, manage risk, comply with legal or regulatory obligations, or identify learning. Where appropriate, information may be shared with a Member Synagogue, relevant department, Trustees, professional advisers, insurers, regulators or statutory authorities.

The Charity will record complaints, outcomes, actions and learning points, and retain complaint records in accordance with United Synagogue data retention requirements and applicable data protection law. Complainants' personal data rights are set out in the United Synagogue Privacy Policy.

Equality, Accessibility and Reasonable Adjustments

The Charity is committed to making this process accessible and will consider reasonable adjustments where needed, including alternative formats, help to make a complaint, or changes to communication methods. Complainants should tell us as early as possible if they need an adjustment.

Safeguarding and Serious Incidents

Every complaint, concern or expression of dissatisfaction received under this policy must be screened on receipt for potential safeguarding issues, regardless of how it is worded, who has raised it, whether it is anonymous, or whether it appears minor, unclear, unreasonable or outside the scope of this policy. This initial safeguarding triage should take place as soon as reasonably practicable and, in any event, within one working day* of receipt. If the complaint indicates that a child, young person or adult at risk may be at risk of harm, it must be referred immediately to the US Safeguarding team and, where required, to statutory authorities. Urgent safeguarding action must not wait for the complaints process.

If a complaint raises a serious incident or a regulatory, legal, financial, reputational or governance issue, it must be escalated internally under US risk management and reporting arrangements. This may include deciding whether the matter should be reported to the Charity Commission, police, local authority, Information Commissioner's Office, Fundraising Regulator, insurer or another relevant body.

* Working days exclude Jewish festivals, fasts and communal office closure days.

Learning and Improvement

The United Synagogue is committed to learning from complaints to improve services, decision making, governance and accountability.

An anonymised complaints summary will be prepared at least annually, reviewed by appropriate senior staff and reported to the Trustees or a committee acting on their behalf. Where appropriate, it will include:

- The number and broad categories of complaints received.
- Key themes, trends and recurring issues.
- Outcomes reached and remedies provided.
- Significant safeguarding, legal, regulatory, reputational or governance issues.
- Lessons learned and actions taken or proposed.
- Recommendations for policy, procedural, operational or training improvements.

Reports will ordinarily be anonymised and focused on organisational learning, risk management and service improvement rather than personal details. Personal data will only be included where necessary and lawful.

Where complaint themes indicate a significant risk, systemic issue, safeguarding concern, regulatory matter or governance weakness, the matter may be escalated outside the normal reporting cycle, to senior management, the Trustees, the Audit and Risk Committee or another appropriate body for consideration and action.

The Trustees will use complaint information, alongside other assurance sources, to assess the effectiveness of the Charity's services, controls, governance and risk management, and to support continuous improvement.

Roles and Responsibilities

Synagogue Chairs and Local Honorary Officers	Support prompt local resolution of complaints about Member Synagogues and escalate where appropriate.
Synagogue Councils	Consider formal complaints about Member Synagogues where they can do so independently and without conflict.
Directors	Consider complaints about their departments, ensure appropriate investigation, and implement learning.
Chief Executive	Consider escalated complaints and appoint appropriate reviewers where needed.
Trustees	Provide final review or oversight where appropriate, particularly for governance or significant matters.
Compliance / External & Legal Services	Maintain this policy, advise on complex or regulatory complaints and support consistency of approach.

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed periodically and updated where necessary to reflect changes in law, regulation, governance arrangements, organisational learning or operational practice.

Appendix A: Complaint handling checklist

Step	Action	Completed / notes
1	Record date received, complainant details, subject, and preferred contact method.	
2	Screen every complaint on receipt for potential safeguarding issues, regardless of how it is worded, who raised it, or whether it appears minor, unclear, anonymous or outside scope. Complete this initial safeguarding triage as soon as reasonably practicable and, in any event, within one working day* of receipt. Also check whether urgent data protection, HR, whistleblowing, serious incident, or regulatory escalation is needed.	
3	Acknowledge complaint and identify point of contact.	
4	Confirm who will handle the complaint and expected response timetable.	
5	Gather relevant information and consider conflicts of interest.	
6	Provide a response with the outcome, reasons and any remedy or learning.	
7	Record outcome and any follow-up action.	
8	If escalated, arrange review by appropriate senior person or Trustee(s).	
9	Update complaints log and assess wider learning or reporting requirements.	

* Working days exclude Jewish festivals, fasts and communal office closure days.