Connecting Boroughs

Complaints Policy & Procedure

Charity Number: 1211291

Policy Owner: Connecting Boroughs CIO

Approved by: Board of Trustees

Review Frequency: Annually, or sooner where required

Next Review: September 2027

1. Policy Statement

Connecting Boroughs is committed to providing respectful, safe and effective support. We welcome feedback and take complaints seriously because they can help us identify concerns, resolve problems and improve our services.

People making a genuine complaint will be treated fairly and respectfully and should not experience disadvantage simply because they have raised a concern.

2. Purpose

This policy provides a clear process for receiving, recording, investigating and responding to complaints about Connecting Boroughs, its activities or people acting on its behalf.

- make it straightforward for people to raise concerns;
- respond fairly and proportionately;
- resolve concerns as early as reasonably possible;
- identify safeguarding or serious incident issues promptly;
- keep appropriate records; and
- use learning from complaints to improve the charity.

3. Scope

This procedure may be used by beneficiaries, parents and carers, volunteers, donors, partners, members of the public and other people affected by Connecting Boroughs' work.

Complaints may relate to services, activities, behaviour, communication, decisions, events, volunteers, staff or other aspects of the charity's work.

4. Matters Managed Under Other Procedures

Some concerns require a different or additional procedure.

- safeguarding concerns will be managed under the Safeguarding Policy;
- concerns about serious wrongdoing may fall under the Whistleblowing Policy;
- data protection complaints may also require action under the Data Protection & UK GDPR Policy;
- fraud or financial misconduct concerns will be handled under relevant financial and anti-fraud procedures; and
- criminal or immediate safety concerns may need to be referred to the police, emergency services or another appropriate authority.

A complaint will not be delayed where immediate safeguarding or safety action is required.

5. How to Make a Complaint

A complaint may be raised verbally or in writing with an appropriate representative of Connecting Boroughs.

Complainants should, where possible, provide:

- their name and contact details, unless there is a good reason for anonymity;
- a clear description of what happened;
- relevant dates, locations or people involved;
- any supporting information; and
- what outcome or resolution they are seeking.

Reasonable assistance should be offered to people who need support to make a complaint.

6. Informal Resolution

Where appropriate and the matter is not serious, Connecting Boroughs may try to resolve a concern informally and promptly.

An informal approach will not be used to avoid properly investigating safeguarding, serious misconduct, discrimination, fraud or other significant concerns.

7. Formal Complaint – Stage One

Formal complaints should be acknowledged as soon as reasonably practicable.

An appropriate person who is sufficiently independent from the issue should review the complaint, gather relevant information and provide a response.

The response should normally explain the outcome, any action that can appropriately be disclosed, and how the complainant can request a review if dissatisfied.

8. Review – Stage Two

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may request a review by a trustee or other appropriate person who was not responsible for the original decision where reasonably possible.

The reviewer should consider whether the complaint was handled fairly, whether relevant information was considered and whether the outcome was reasonable in light of the information available.

The Stage Two response will normally represent the end of Connecting Boroughs' internal complaints process.

9. Complaints About the Founder/CEO or a Trustee

A complaint about the Founder/CEO should be referred to an appropriate trustee so that it is not investigated solely by the person complained about.

A complaint about a trustee should be referred to the Chair or another trustee who is not directly involved.

Where a complaint concerns several trustees or creates a significant conflict of interest, the Board should consider an appropriately independent way of reviewing the matter.

10. Complaints About Volunteers or Staff

Complaints about a volunteer or staff member should be handled fairly and confidentially.

The individual complained about should normally be given an appropriate opportunity to respond, unless doing so would create a safeguarding risk, compromise an investigation or conflict with advice from an external authority.

Temporary changes to duties may be considered where necessary to protect beneficiaries or the integrity of an investigation.

11. Safeguarding Complaints

Where a complaint indicates that a child or adult may be at risk of abuse, neglect, exploitation or other harm, the matter must be referred immediately through Connecting Boroughs' safeguarding procedure.

The complaints process must not delay safeguarding referrals or emergency action.

12. Confidentiality

Complaints will be handled as confidentially as reasonably possible.

Information will only be shared with people who need it to investigate, respond to or oversee the complaint, or where disclosure is required for safeguarding, legal or regulatory reasons.

Absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed where information must be shared to protect someone from harm or comply with a legal obligation.

13. Anonymous Complaints

Anonymous complaints may be considered where sufficient information is available to identify a genuine concern.

The charity's ability to investigate or provide an outcome may be limited where the complainant cannot be contacted for further information.

14. Unreasonable or Abusive Behaviour

Connecting Boroughs will seek to remain accessible and fair to complainants, including people who are upset or distressed.

However, threatening, discriminatory, abusive or persistently harassing behaviour towards beneficiaries, volunteers, staff or trustees is not acceptable.

Where necessary, the charity may set reasonable boundaries on the method or frequency of communication while still considering any legitimate outstanding complaint.

15. Complaints Involving Social Media or Public Allegations

Public or social media allegations should not automatically replace the formal complaints process.

Where Connecting Boroughs becomes aware of a serious allegation made publicly, the charity may consider whether safeguarding, legal, regulatory or reputational action is required even if no formal complaint has been submitted.

Confidential beneficiary or personnel information will not be publicly disclosed merely to respond to criticism.

16. Records

Connecting Boroughs will maintain appropriate records of formal complaints, including the nature of the complaint, key actions taken, outcome and any learning or follow-up required.

Records will be stored securely and handled in accordance with the Data Protection & UK GDPR Policy.

17. Learning from Complaints

Complaints should be used constructively to identify improvements.

Where appropriate, recurring themes or significant complaints should be reported to trustees without unnecessary disclosure of personal information.

Policies, training, risk assessments or working practices may be updated where learning identifies a need for change.

18. External Complaints

Depending on the subject of the complaint, a complainant may also have the right to contact an appropriate external body, regulator, local authority, funder or other organisation.

Connecting Boroughs will cooperate appropriately with legitimate external investigations or regulatory requirements.

19. Responsibilities

The Board of Trustees has overall oversight of the complaints framework and significant complaints affecting governance, safeguarding or the charity's reputation.

The Founder/CEO and designated leads are responsible for ensuring complaints are recorded, handled appropriately and escalated when necessary.

Everyone representing Connecting Boroughs should cooperate honestly with legitimate complaint investigations.

20. Related Policies

This policy should be read alongside:

- Safeguarding Policy;
- Code of Conduct;
- Volunteer Policy;
- Whistleblowing Policy;
- Data Protection & UK GDPR Policy;
- Privacy & Confidentiality Policy;
- Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy;
- Serious Incident Reporting Policy; and
- Anti-Fraud, Bribery & Corruption Policy.

21. Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed by the trustees at least annually and sooner where significant complaints, regulatory changes or organisational learning make this necessary.

Approved by the Board of Trustees: _____

Date approved: _____

Signed on behalf of the trustees: _____

Next review date: _____