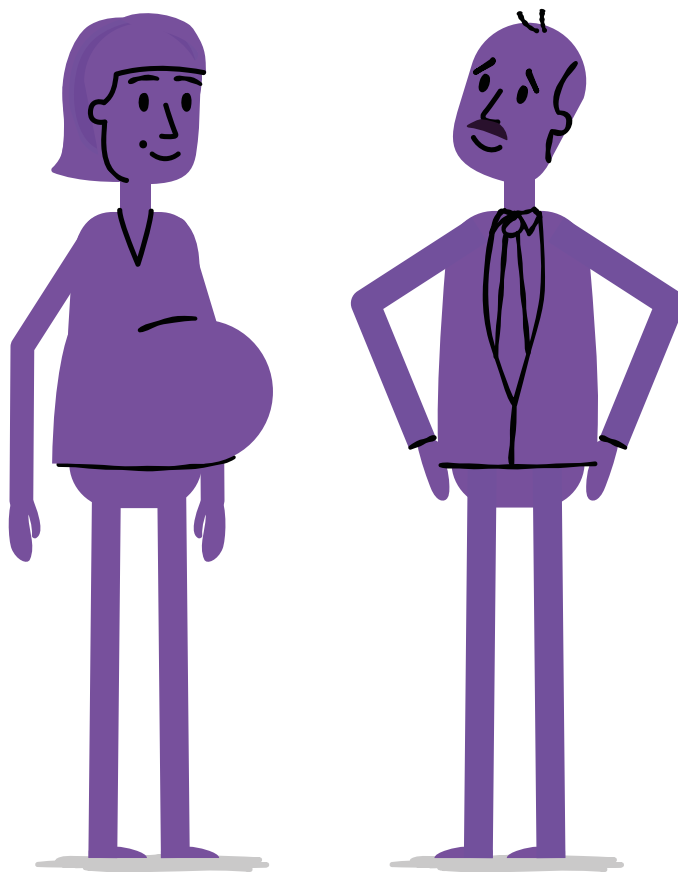
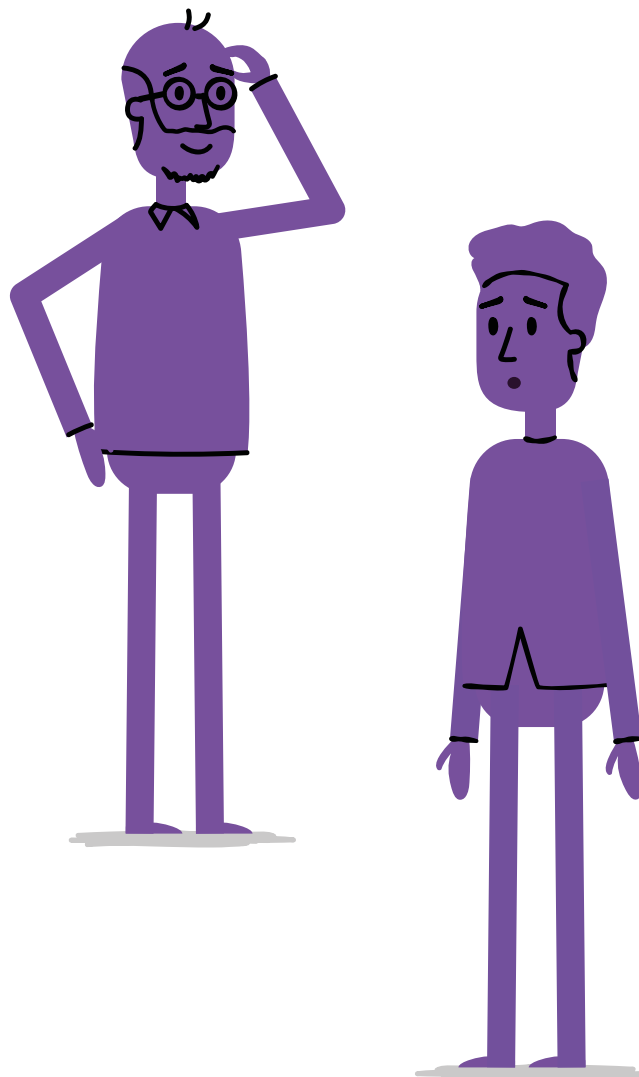


# Complaints involving multiple service areas or organisations



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# Welcome to this guide

This guide is one of the Good Complaint Handling series. These are designed to help you meet and deliver the expectations in the [Complaint Standards](#).

The guide explains what you should do when you receive a complaint that involves:

- more than one of your service areas, or service providers,
- or another organisation(s) that delivers UK government funded services.

It will also help when you receive a complaint that is covered by more than one complaint process or resolution route.

Read this guidance alongside the UKCG [Model Complaint Handling Procedure](#). There are also guides to related topics on our [website](#).

# What standards and regulations are relevant to this guide?

- The [Complaint Standards](#) set out expectations to help you deliver good complaint handling in your organisation.
- This guide works alongside several other requirements and national guidance.



If you identify that a complaint, or a part of a complaint, does not fall under your complaints procedure or the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's jurisdiction, you should refer to any relevant procedures and guidance when you deal with these complaints.



Factor this in when you discuss and plan the investigation of the complaint. [See guidance on complaints and other procedures.](#)

## What the Complaint Standards say

### Being thorough and fair

- For complaints that involve multiple service areas or organisations, the colleagues and organisations involved should work together to deliver a co-ordinated and comprehensive response and ensure learning from complaints.

### Other requirements and guidance you can consult include:






- A Modern Civil Service
- The Civil Service Code
- The Seven Principles of Public Life (the Nolan Principles)
- Managing Public Money
- The Public Value Framework
- Delivering better outcomes for citizens
- The corporate governance code for central government departments.

# What you need to do

You should investigate a complaint that involves more than one service area in your organisation. You should also investigate complaints about service providers commissioned by your organisation or bodies that collaborate with the service area or organisation complained about.

Agree between you who will lead and who will be responsible for overseeing and co-ordinating the consideration of the complaint. The lead service area or organisation should be the one that is responsible for updating the person who complained and should make sure they receive a co-ordinated response.

If more than one organisation is involved in providing the service complained about, the service user (or their representative) should be able to complain to any of the organisations involved and should not have to contact each of them separately.

-  If you regularly work with an organisation on complaints, consider setting up a local agreement or memorandum of understanding that sets out how joint complaints will be handled and defines roles and responsibilities. Any agreement should include an appropriate data and personal information sharing arrangement.
-  If you receive a complaint about multiple organisations, you should contact the other organisations involved, carry out a joint investigation if possible and practical, and provide a co-ordinated or single joint response.
-  If a person complains to you but your organisation is not responsible for the service they are complaining about, do not turn them away. With the person's consent, you can share the complaint with the relevant organisation(s) or you can give them the organisation's contact details so they can approach it with their complaint.
-  Remember consent issues – you will need to get the service user's consent before you share information and talk to the other organisations about their complaint. Use the sample consent form in the practical tools section of this guide.
-  Once you are satisfied that the service user making the complaint has given their consent (see [guidance - Who can make a complaint, consent and confidentiality](#)), explain to them that you want to make sure that:
  - The organisations consider their complaint in a co-ordinated way
  - they have a single point of contact
  - they receive a co-ordinated response.

## Agreeing the lead organisation and named contact

Once you have consent, talk to the other organisations to decide who will be the lead. This is usually the organisation that has the most responsibility for the service complained about, but could be the body that the service user has the best relationship with. If possible, talk to the service user about which organisation will be the lead.



Identify a single named contact at the lead organisation for the service user.



Confirm the contact details with the service user and explain how they will be kept up to date.



Give the service user information about any sources of help and advice that are available to them.

## Responsibilities of the lead organisation and key contact

Talk to the organisations about how the complaint will be handled, both within and between the organisations. If necessary, the named contact should use a joint consent form for information sharing and disseminating learning so that the service user only has to give consent once.

If you are the lead organisation, you should make sure that:

- everyone involved understands their role and responsibilities
- your investigation plan takes account of any other complaint process or resolution route
- there is a clear understanding of the complaint and desired outcomes, and all parties are aware of this
- there is a clear investigation plan and realistic timetable to which each organisation has agreed
- the service user understands the investigation plan and the timescale
- the service user is involved and updated on progress throughout the investigation.

The key contact should co-ordinate any meetings that are required and each organisation should provide relevant information and attend or be represented at any meetings.





At the end of the process, the lead organisation should co-ordinate a single joint response to the complaint. This should be based on the contributions and information of all the organisations.

If you are the lead organisation, you may have to:










Draft a single response or report based on each organisation's submission.

- Talk to the organisations if you need further information.

-  Give contributing organisations the opportunity to comment on the content before you share it with the service user who raised the complaint.
-  Share all comments and reflect them in the final written response.
-  Make sure any actions set out in the final response are completed, and tell the service user once this is has happened.
-  Capture and share any learning in line with the Complaint Standards and good practice guidance.

### **Responsibilities of contributing organisations**

Contributing organisations have several responsibilities. If you are a contributing organisation, you must have a clear understanding of the role and responsibilities you agreed with the lead organisation. You must also agree the matters you will investigate, together with key milestones and target dates and, as far as possible, meet these targets.

-  Keep the lead organisation updated regularly (at agreed times) so they can update the service user who made the complaint.
-  Co-operate with any requests for meetings.
-  Submit your response to the lead organisation so they can produce a single joint response wherever possible.
-  Respond promptly to any questions or requests for more information.
-  Respond promptly with any comments on the co-ordinated response.
-  Make sure any actions set out in the final response are completed to agreed timescales.
-  Give the key contact your evidence of completed actions so it can be shared with the service user who raised the complaint.

## **What to do if the organisations involved cannot agree or do not co-operate**

As the lead organisation, your role is to co-ordinate the investigation. Your aim should be to give the service user who made the complaint a single, joint response on behalf of all the organisations involved.

Some complaints will involve separate issues and elements that will lend themselves to separate investigation strands. In these cases, as the lead organisation, you will only need to set out the details and outcome of each investigation strand, then add a conclusion.

Other complaints, however, will require each organisation to agree the resolution and remedy, and this could lead to tension and disagreement. There may also be times when an organisation simply fails to co-operate with the complaint handling process. Where these problems lead to an impasse, you should refer the situation to senior leaders in each organisation to try to resolve it.

If the issue still cannot be resolved, a senior leader for the lead organisation should write to the service user who made the complaint. They should respond to the complaint as far as possible, explaining where and why they have been unable to provide a full response and why agreement cannot be reached. They should then signpost the person who made the complaint to any independent tier or explain how they can approach their MP and ask them to refer the matter to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, should they wish to take it further.

## **Practical tools**

Template for consent for multi-organisational complaints



If you would like this document in a different format, such as Daisy or large print, please contact us.

**Let's make  
complaints  
count!**

