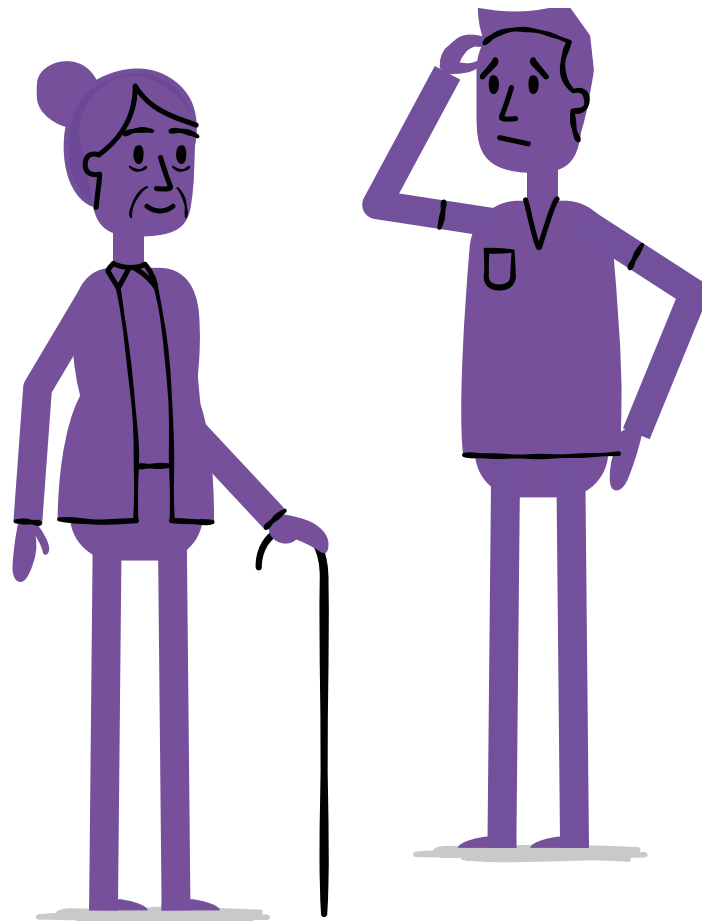
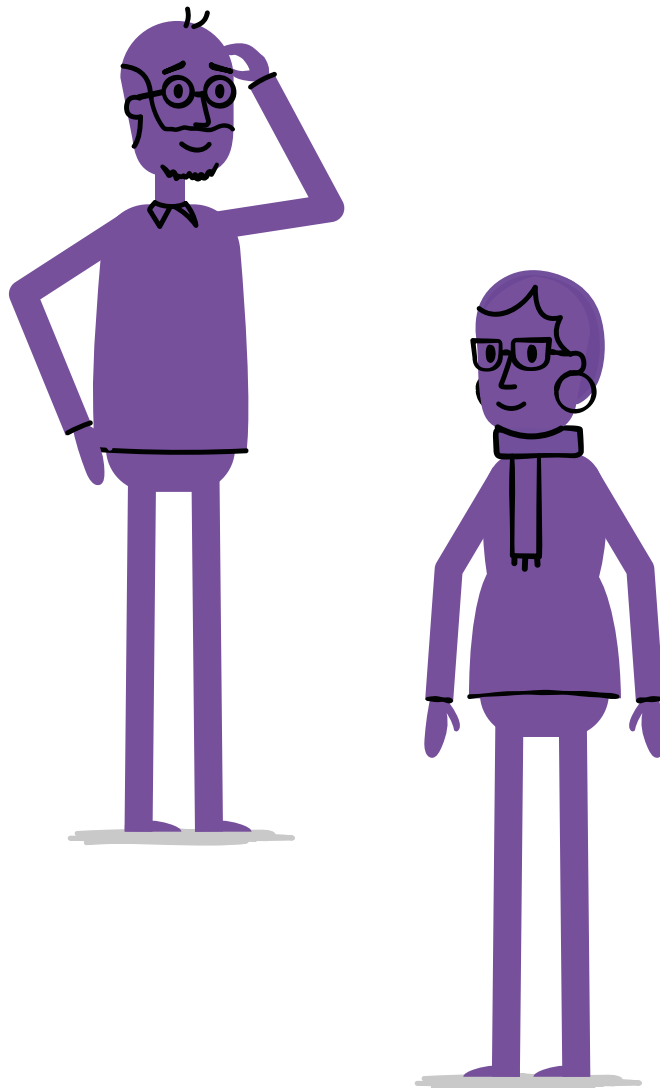


# Making sure people know how to complain



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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 the [UK Central Government Complaint Standards](#).

This guide explains how you can make sure your service users (and anyone who represents them) know that your organisation welcomes feedback, including complaints, and will use it to improve services for everyone.

It explains how you can make sure people:

- know how to make a complaint
- know about the different ways they can do this
- know where they can get help, advice and support with raising their complaint.

Read this guide alongside the [Model complaint handling procedure](#). You can find guides on related topics on our [website](#).

# What standards and regulations are relevant to this guide?

How organisations tell people about how to complain is governed by a range of standards and Civil Service guidance, including:

- The Ombudsman's Complaint Standards
- Relevant statutory and national guidance
- Financial and Civil Service publications.

## What the Complaint Standards tell us

### Welcoming complaints in a positive way

- Organisations clearly publicise and promote how people can raise complaints in a range of ways that suits them and meets their specific needs. They make it easy for everybody to understand how the process works. This includes being clear about who can make a complaint and what will happen next.
- Organisations make sure service users know how to get advice and support when they make a complaint. This includes giving details of appropriate independent complaints support and advice providers, and other support networks.
- Organisations regularly promote their wish to hear from service users and show how they are using learning from all feedback (including complaints) to improve services.

### Being thorough and fair

- Organisations publish a complaints procedure that meets the Complaint Standards and all relevant Government guidance. Each procedure clearly sets out how colleagues will handle complaints and which quality standards and behaviours they are expected to follow when doing so.

### What the other guidance tells us

#### Managing Public Money says:

- 'A4.14.1 Public sector organisations should operate clear accessible complaints procedures. They are a valuable source of feedback which can help shed light on the quality of service provided, and in particular how well it matches up to policy intentions. So all complaints should be investigated.'

# What you need to do

This section explains what your organisation needs to do to make sure the people who use your services:

- know how to complain
- have the support they need to do so.

One of the best ways to learn and improve is to listen to and act on what people tell us about how we are doing. But research shows that service users, and those who support them, are often reluctant to speak up.

This can be for several reasons. For example, they may:

- have had a bad experience of making a complaint in the past
- worry that complaining will have a negative impact on the services they receive
- believe nothing will change because Government organisations are too busy to listen to them and act on what they say.

This guide will help you encourage people to come forward and make sure that the process is as easy as possible.

## Build trust



Make it clear to everyone who uses your service, and anyone who supports them, that you welcome complaints as a way to help improve your service.



Tell people they can raise their concerns with any colleague and be confident that the matter will be taken seriously.

Make sure all colleagues, particularly those with an outward-facing role, know that listening to service users and dealing with complaints is an important part of their work. Colleagues should be:

- trained and supported in how to deal with complaints as they come up
- confident in explaining how to make a complaint and how it will be dealt with
- able to signpost people to any internal or external sources of help, advice and support they can access when making a complaint.

## Encourage people to speak up

One of the main reasons people give for not raising their concerns is they think Government organisations are too busy to listen and they do not think their complaint will make a difference.



Encourage people to speak up by showing them that:

- you have the time to listen and act on what they say
- taking the time to complain can make a difference.



Share the actions you have taken and the changes you have made as a result of someone making a complaint – for example, on posters, in a publication, or through digital media. Be as creative as you can.



Whatever approach you choose, make sure it tells service users that speaking up has led to positive change for them, your organisation and other service users.

## Tell people how they can raise a complaint

As well as telling people how much you value their complaints, it is important to share clear information about:

- how people can raise a complaint
- any available help, advice and support.

There are lots of ways to do this.







Think about how people get information about, or interact with, your service. They might look at your website, see day-to-day communications, receive newsletters or information sheets, hear from national and local charities and advice organisations, or by visiting your organisation in person.



Once you have identified these communication channels, think about how you could use them to share information about making a complaint or giving feedback.




## Communicate in different ways

Once you have worked out how and where people get information about your service, you need to develop information about your complaints process:

-  Different people like accessing information in different ways, so provide the information in a range of formats and make sure it's visible and easy to access.
-  Give contact details that clearly explain how people can raise their concerns with your organisation.
-  Include contact details of any help that is available. This could include advice organisations or networks.
-  Communicate clearly what people can expect when they raise a complaint with you.

## Explain where people can get help, advice and support

Some people are worried about making a complaint because they think it will be difficult and they do not have any help or advice. That's why it is important that all staff recognise when someone is sharing information that might lead to their making a complaint and signpost them to suitable sources of help.

-  If your organisation provides sources of advice and support for service users, make sure these are impartial and independent of your service provision.
-  Make sure the colleagues who give advice are trained in supporting service users through your complaints process.
-  As far as possible, signpost people to support from organisations independent of your own.



To signpost people effectively, make sure you know about and can identify all the sources of external and independent support relevant to your service. This will usually include:

- local and national organisations (including charities) that specialise in supporting people who want to make a complaint
- national organisations like Citizen's Advice
- It may also be helpful to consider appointing an independent advice and support provider, such as a professional advocacy service, to help your service users.



Once you have identified all relevant sources, tell service users about them and give details so they can access this support if they need to. See the guidance module on 'Independent help, support and advice' for more information.

### **Consult service users**



Once you have identified sources of support, including up-to-date contact details, you need to find the most effective way to share this information.



When you develop communication channels, involve service users and people who support and represent them. They can help you understand what approach will be most effective for specific audiences. This will make sure any materials you produce, such as leaflets or posters, and the different options for making a complaint, meet your service users' needs.

### **Measure your success**

Regularly ask service users, and the people who represent them, if they know how to raise a complaint. This is important to confirm you are giving people the information they need in the ways that work best for them.

Doing this will also help you measure the success of your complaint service and improve the information you provide over time.

### **Examples from Government organisations**

#### **Examples of how to tell service users you welcome their complaints:**

##### **Cabinet Office**

'The Cabinet Office is committed to providing a high-quality service to everyone we deal with. In order to do this, we need you to give us any comments about our service, and to tell us when we get things wrong. We want to help you resolve your complaint as quickly as possible. We treat as a complaint any expression of dissatisfaction with our service which calls for a response. We listen to your complaints, treat them seriously, and learn from them so that we can continuously improve our service.'



## **Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA)**

‘Customers are at the heart of our business and we are committed to providing a high quality of service to everyone. We value your feedback and are committed to act on any concerns or complaints about the service we provide.

We aim to:

- objectively investigate all complaints and put things right for you when it is possible
- learn from where we went wrong
- make sure we do not make the same mistake again.’

## **High Speed 2 (HS2)**

‘We know that building HS2 will affect the lives of thousands of people. We need many other companies to do work on our behalf and we will all always try to do the right thing and reduce disruption as much as we can. But if you’re unhappy about anything we do, or about anything another company does on our behalf, please tell us. We will treat this as a complaint. We have a process to make sure your complaint is dealt with by the right person, as quickly as possible. Please follow this process to help us get the best result for you.’

### **Examples of how to encourage service users to speak up**

**HS2: ‘You said, we did’ example:**

[You said, we did on construction, landscape design, recreational opportunities, viaduct design and noise requirements](#)

**Cafcass: example of how to encourage children and young adults to speak up:**

‘We want your Feedback! Tell us how we did. We want to hear from you if you thought we helped and supported you or if you want to complain.

- Did you understand what was happening during your court proceedings?
- Did you feel that you were listened to?
- Did we share our thinking and recommendations with you?
- What could we have done differently or better?

We need this information for us to learn and so we can improve the service we provide to other children and young people who may be going through a similar experience to you.’

**Developing information about your complaints process:**

Cafcass:

[Concerns and complaints factsheet](#)

[Children’s complaints factsheet](#)

# Practical tools

'You said, we did' poster templates

A quick guide to the complaints process for service users

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

**Let's make  
complaints  
count!**

