Complaints Policy

Harwich Festival and Harwich Arts & Heritage Centre
Policy 06 | Version 2.0 | Revised 25 October 2026
Owner: General Manager and Chair of Trustees | Scheduled review: 25 October 2027

Our commitment

We welcome feedback about Harwich Festival and HAHC and use complaints to improve our services. We will listen, respond fairly and explain our decisions. Making a complaint in good faith will not affect fair access to our services or opportunities.

This policy covers dissatisfaction with our events, services, decisions or the conduct of people acting for us. It does not replace urgent safeguarding or safety reporting, staff grievance procedures, whistleblowing or statutory rights. If an issue belongs under another procedure, we will explain the route and ensure urgent action is not delayed.

How to complain

Email contact@harwichfestival.com, telephone 01255 319191, speak to a member of staff, or write to Harwich Festival, Harwich Arts & Heritage Centre, Main Road, Dovercourt, Essex, CO12 4AJ. We will help someone record an oral complaint and consider accessible formats, communication support and authorised representatives.

Tell us what happened, when, who was involved, the effect on you and the outcome you seek. Include contact details if you want a response. Raise matters as soon as reasonably possible so evidence can be checked; there is no automatic refusal because a complaint is late. Anonymous concerns will be considered on the information available, although a personal response may not be possible.

Complaints involving management or trustees

If the complaint concerns the General Manager, write privately to the Chair of Trustees at the centre address, marking the envelope confidential. Do not use a shared mailbox if it could expose sensitive allegations to the person concerned. If the Chair is implicated, address it to the other trustees, who must appoint an unconflicted person. You may contact relevant statutory agencies directly, particularly where safety or safeguarding is at risk.

Acknowledgement and investigation

We aim to acknowledge complaints within five working days and give a substantive response within 20 working days. If more time is needed, explain why, give a revised date and keep the complainant informed. A suitable person who is not the subject of the complaint will coordinate the investigation. A complaint about management will be overseen by unconflicted trustees.

Clarify the issues, examine relevant evidence, hear the people involved and keep an accurate record. Consider support and immediate protective steps. Share information only as necessary for a fair process, legal duties or protection from harm; confidentiality cannot be absolute. Do not promise disclosure of other people's confidential records or disciplinary outcomes.

Outcome and review

Explain findings, reasons, any remedy or improvement, and how to request a review. Where a concern is upheld, consider an apology, correction, refund where justified or changes to practice. Remedies must reflect the facts and applicable rights.

If dissatisfied, ask for a review, normally within 20 working days of the response; consider reasonable extensions. State what was missed or why the outcome is disputed. An unconflicted trustee or suitable independent reviewer who was not responsible for the original decision will

review the handling and outcome. Aim to respond within 20 working days, or explain a revised timetable. Explain when HF's internal process is complete.

External routes

Our process does not prevent access to courts or relevant regulators. Complaints about fundraising may be taken to the Fundraising Regulator; privacy concerns may be taken to the ICO. The Charity Commission deals with serious concerns within its remit and is not a general appeal body for ordinary service disputes. Police, local safeguarding services and other authorities should be contacted directly where appropriate.

For a data-protection complaint, use the same contact details and identify the privacy issue. We will acknowledge it within the statutory maximum of 30 days, investigate and communicate the outcome without undue delay; our normal five-working-day acknowledgement aim remains. This is separate from the usual one-month timescale for exercising data rights.

Records learning and proportionate boundaries

Keep a secure complaints record, decisions, correspondence and action taken. The General Manager will monitor improvements and provide trustees with anonymised trends where possible. Retain records under Policy 20. We may set proportionate communication boundaries to protect people from threats or abuse, but must explain and review restrictions and continue to consider the substance of legitimate concerns. Review this policy annually.

Prepared for adoption. Record authorised approval in the master register. Review sooner after a significant change or incident.

Reference guidance
gov.uk - safeguarding and protecting people for charities and trustees
ico.org.uk - how to deal with data protection complaints
fundraisingregulator.org.uk - code