Complaints Policy

Document reference	Q01
Policy owner	Board of Directors
Operational responsibility	Co-CEOs — Jo Rusbridge and Harry Deacon
Board approval date	03/11/2026
Board minute reference	AOB3-03/11/26
Effective date	04/11/2026
Next scheduled review	12 months after the effective date. Scheduled 02/11/2027
Related documents	Q01 Complaints Policy; Q02 Feedback and Service Improvement Policy; safeguarding framework

1. Purpose and principles

BLoT welcomes complaints as an opportunity to put things right, protect people and improve services. A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction about BLoT's actions, omissions, services, conduct or communications for which a response is sought or reasonably expected. A person need not use the word "complaint".

We will be fair, accessible, proportionate, transparent and prompt; treat complainants with respect; avoid retaliation; make reasonable adjustments; and explain decisions and any available review route. A complaint does not affect eligibility for BLoT services.

2. Scope and linked routes

This policy applies to complaints made by beneficiaries, community members, carers, donors, partners and others about BLoT activities, staff, volunteers, directors, contractors or services provided on BLoT's behalf. Feedback without an allegation requiring resolution is managed under Q02.

Concerns indicating a child or adult may be at risk, or alleging abuse by a worker or volunteer, must be acted on immediately under SG-CYP-01, SG-AD-01, SG-PRO-01 and SG-ALG-01; the complaints clock must never delay protective referrals. Employment grievances, whistleblowing and contract disputes may need their own procedures, but related safeguarding concerns must still be escalated.

Data protection complaints follow the applicable statutory route and BLoT privacy arrangements alongside this policy. This document is not a substitute for rights under data protection law, equality law or other legal protections.

3. How to complain

People may complain verbally at either Hub, by telephone, email, post or the website form. They can ask someone to help or complain on their behalf where lawful and appropriate. We will take account of confidentiality, consent and the wishes of the person affected.

Email: hello@blotcic.org | Freephone: 0800 009 6409 | Post/in person: BLoT, 48a Fore Street, Bugle, St Austell, Cornwall PL26 8PE.

We accept anonymous complaints. We will assess any credible information and act where possible, though anonymity may limit enquiries or a personal reply. Requests for Easy Read, translation, accessible formats, additional support or alternative channels will be accommodated where reasonably possible. Relay UK may be used.

4. Responsibility and independence

The Co-CEOs oversee complaints and appoint an unconflicted complaint handler. Harry Deacon monitors hello@blotcic.org and routes complaints promptly, subject to independence and confidentiality. Complaints involving Harry Deacon or Jo Rusbridge must be directed to Tracie, independent Board Director, at tracie@blotcic.org; neither Co-CEO will investigate or decide a complaint about either of them. Staff receiving such a complaint must forward it securely to Tracie without inappropriate circulation.

Complaints about both Co-CEOs, another director, systemic governance failures, or any matter where management independence is doubtful must go to Tracie or another unconflicted director as appropriate. Any review must be undertaken by a director or suitably independent person not involved in the original decision. If no independent director is available, the Board will seek appropriate external assistance.

Safeguarding information is referred under the safeguarding framework without requiring complainants to follow normal stages. Complaints involving Tracie as Safeguarding Director go to another unconflicted director.

5. Stage 1 — Early or informal resolution

Monitoring and triage: Harry checks the main email and routed website submissions on working days, logs formal complaints and routes them to an unconflicted handler. Any indication of immediate danger, safeguarding harm or urgent risk is escalated immediately when identified under BLoT's safeguarding procedures. The website form and automated acknowledgements must explain that these channels are not monitored continuously and must not be used for emergencies; call 999 for immediate danger.

Where safe and appropriate, the receiving worker should listen, clarify the desired remedy and try to resolve a straightforward issue promptly. The worker records significant concerns and the outcome. The complainant may request a formal investigation at any point. A serious, sensitive or disputed complaint is not to be held at Stage 1 merely for convenience.

If a matter cannot be resolved promptly or the complainant wants a formal response, route it to Stage 2 without requiring repetition of the account.

6. Stage 2 — Formal complaint

BLoT will acknowledge a formal complaint within five working days of receipt, stating the case reference, complaint handler, scope of the investigation, how we will contact the complainant, and an indicative response date. "Working days" exclude weekends and public/bank holidays in England.

We aim to provide a reasoned written or agreed accessible response within 20 working days of receiving the formal complaint. The handler will gather relevant evidence fairly, offer the person complained about an appropriate opportunity to respond, check records, consider impact and relevant policies, and document findings and remedies. Do not conduct internal safeguarding fact-finding that could prejudice statutory enquiries.

Where the investigation cannot reasonably finish in 20 working days, inform the complainant before the deadline, explain the reasons and provide a revised realistic date and progress updates. Do not promise to disclose confidential personnel or safeguarding details.

The outcome will distinguish what is upheld, partly upheld, not upheld or not determinable, explain reasons as far as lawful, identify any apology, practical remedy or improvement, and tell the complainant how to request Stage 3 review.

7. Stage 3 — Independent review

A complainant who remains dissatisfied may request review, preferably within 20 working days of receiving the Stage 2 outcome. Late requests will be considered fairly where circumstances justify this. The request may identify errors, missing evidence, perceived unfairness or an unsatisfactory remedy; no legal terminology is required.

An unconflicted director or suitably independent reviewer who did not make the Stage 2 decision will consider the handling, evidence, reasons and proportionality. The review is not automatically a new investigation, but further enquiries will be undertaken if necessary.

We aim to communicate the review decision within 15 working days of receiving the review request. Where more time is needed, we will explain why and give a new expected date. The review is BLoT's final internal stage and will identify any further appropriate external routes.

8. Safeguarding, safety and urgent allegations

If a complaint indicates a risk of harm to a child or adult, workers must take immediate protective action and use the statutory safeguarding routes as appropriate. Urgent risks are reported immediately; other safeguarding concerns are reported the same working day. Call 999 where someone is in immediate danger.

An allegation against staff, volunteers, a director or a partner representative must follow SG-ALG-01, including LADO or adult PiPoT routes where relevant. Keep complaint case-management and statutory enquiries coordinated but separate; preserve evidence and do not promise a normal complaint deadline where statutory processes legitimately affect disclosure.

9. Personal data and confidentiality

Record only information necessary to handle and review the complaint. Limit access to people with a defined role; store records in restricted WorkDrive locations separately from public website submissions and safeguarding case files. Keep factual records of contacts, evidence, decisions, communications, remedial actions, escalation and closure. Apply documented retention rules and respond to requests for access or correction under applicable law.

A complaint about handling personal data must be facilitated and acknowledged within 30 calendar days as required by data protection law; BLoT's ordinary five-working-day acknowledgement target should normally meet this sooner. Take appropriate steps and communicate progress and the outcome without undue delay. Refer data incidents to the appropriate data lead and assess statutory breach-notification duties.

10. External options and rights

Complainants may seek appropriate outside advice or raise concerns with relevant authorities at any stage, especially where safety or legal rights are involved. The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) handles eligible data protection concerns: ico.org.uk | 0303 123 1113.

The Fundraising Regulator may consider eligible complaints about charitable fundraising under its remit, generally after the organisation has had a chance to respond: fundraisingregulator.org.uk. The CIC Regulator considers matters within its specific regulatory remit, rather than ordinary service disputes: gov.uk/government/organisations/office-of-the-regulator-of-community-interest-companies.

Police, Cornwall Council safeguarding services and relevant statutory services should be contacted directly where appropriate. BLoT will not present any regulator as a general appeal body for all dissatisfaction.

11. Remedies, monitoring and learning

Possible remedies include an explanation, apology, correction, revised decision, changed service delivery, additional training, revised procedures or another proportionate response. A complaint will not be closed until the response and any assigned follow-up are recorded, subject to any separate ongoing safeguarding matter.

The Co-CEOs review anonymised trends and overdue actions operationally (excluding complaints where they are conflicted); Tracie oversees matters involving either Co-CEO and provide the Board with anonymised quarterly information on volumes, response timeliness, themes, escalations, remedies and outstanding improvements. Small numbers are suppressed where identification could occur. Improvements feed into Q02; safeguarding matters follow the safeguarding assurance process.

12. Fairness, unacceptable conduct and policy review

We will not disadvantage anyone for raising a complaint in good faith. Staff and volunteers should also be treated fairly. Where correspondence is repeatedly threatening, discriminatory or abusive, BLoT may make proportionate, documented adjustments to the channel or frequency of contact while preserving a genuine route for important complaints or safeguarding disclosures.

The Board conducts one scheduled formal review annually. Urgent corrections required for safety, law or service change must be dealt with when necessary and material policy changes referred for appropriate approval.

Appendix A — Complaint handling record (minimum fields)

Case ID; receipt date and channel; person affected and safe contact needs; complaint and requested outcome; safeguarding/data-protection triage; conflict check; assigned investigator; acknowledgement date; evidence and chronology; Stage 2 due date/response; extension reasons; remedies and owner; Stage 3 request/reviewer/decision; closure date; access controls and retention category.