

Complaints Procedure

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1. Policy purpose

This procedure explains how Essex Wildlife Trust will receive, record, review and respond to complaints about its activities in a fair, timely and appropriate way.

2. Introduction

Essex Wildlife Trust is committed to ensuring that all its activities are always appropriate and responsible. Despite this commitment sometimes things can go wrong. When this happens, we encourage individuals to inform us so that we can try and resolve the issue as early as possible.

2.1 Data protection and privacy

Where a complaint involves personal data, Essex Wildlife Trust will handle that information in accordance with applicable data protection law, including the UK General Data Protection Regulation, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025. Personal data will only be used to receive, investigate, respond to and record the complaint, and will be accessed only by those who need it for that purpose.

3. Definitions

- 3.1 Complaint: an expression of dissatisfaction about Essex Wildlife Trust's activities, actions, decisions or standards of service, where a response or resolution is sought.
- 3.2 Complainant: the individual or organisation raising the complaint.
- 3.3 Escalation: a request for the complaint to be reviewed at the next stage because the complainant does not consider it resolved to their satisfaction.
- 3.4 Data protection complaint: a complaint that alleges an infringement of data protection law in relation to the collection, use, sharing, storage, access to, or other handling of personal data, including concerns about responses to subject access requests.

4. Policy statement

- 4.1 Essex Wildlife Trust will deal with complaints fairly and appropriately, keep a written record of concerns raised, take reasonable steps to resolve matters as quickly as possible, and use complaints to identify and learn from mistakes where appropriate.
- 4.2 Essex Wildlife Trust will handle complaints involving personal data in accordance with applicable data protection law, including the UK General Data Protection Regulation, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025. Where a complaint concerns the use of, or access to, personal data, the Trust will provide a clear route for that complaint to be raised, acknowledged and investigated.

5. Roles and responsibilities

- 5.1 The recipient of a complaint or the Executive Team is responsible for logging the complaint and assigning an owner at Stage 1.
- 5.2 The Chief Executive Officer, or an appropriate member of the Executive Team, is responsible for reviewing complaints escalated to Stage 2.
- 5.3 The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for referring Stage 3 complaints to the Board of Trustees or a Trustee panel, which is responsible for providing the final internal response.

6. Procedure

We have a set procedure for dealing with complaints when they do arise to ensure that they are dealt with fairly and appropriately and that we learn from any mistakes that may have been made.

6.1 How to raise a concern – initial contact

- Email (preferred): feedback@essexwt.org.uk. Please include your name and contact details, what happened (including dates/locations if relevant), any supporting evidence, and **what outcome/resolution you are seeking**.
- Telephone: 01621 862960. If you leave a message, please provide your name, a call-back number and/or email address, a brief summary of your concern, and what outcome/resolution you are seeking.
 - Our phone lines are operated Monday to Thursday 10am to 3pm.
 - Outside of these hours you can leave a message, an email contact and a phone number and someone will return your call either by email or by phone.
- You can write to us at: Executive Team, Essex Wildlife Trust, Abbots Hall, Maldon Road, Great Wigborough, CO5 7RZ.

Once we have received your complaint, we will follow the procedure set out below.

6.2 Stage 1: Attempt resolution (initial response)

Who handles this: The recipient or Executive team will log your complaint and assign an owner.

What you must provide: Your contact details, a clear description of the concern (including relevant dates/locations), any supporting evidence you have, and what outcome/resolution you are seeking.

What we will do: We will make a written record, clarify any missing information, and take reasonable steps to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

Timeframe and how we will respond: We will acknowledge your complaint within **five working days (Monday to Friday)**. We aim to provide a full response within **10 working days (Monday to Friday)** after our acknowledgement by email (or by letter if you contacted us by post). If we need longer due to a complex

investigation or we need to clarify information with a third-party, we will explain why and confirm a revised timescale.

6.3 Stage 2: Escalation to the Executive Team

If, after Stage 1, you do not feel your complaint has been **resolved to your satisfaction**, you can ask for it to be escalated to Stage 2.

Who handles this: The Chief Executive Officer (or an appropriate member of the Executive Team) will review the complaint and the Stage 1 response.

What you must provide: Your complaint in writing (email or letter), the Stage 1 response (if received), and **why you believe the complaint remains unresolved** (what is still needed). Please restate the outcome you are seeking.

What we will do / timeframe and response method: We will review the information provided, carry out any additional enquiries required, and provide a written outcome within **20 working days**. If we need longer, we will explain why and provide a revised timescale.

6.4 Stage 3: Escalation to Trustees / Board

If, after Stage 2, you still do not feel your complaint has been **resolved to your satisfaction**, you can ask for it to be escalated to Stage 3.

Who handles this: The Chief Executive Officer will refer the complaint to the Board of Trustees (or a Trustee panel) for review.

What you must provide: Your complaint in writing, the Stage 2 outcome, and a clear explanation of why you believe the complaint remains unresolved and a suggestion of what action would be acceptable to you.

What we will do / timeframe and response method: The Trustees will review the case and provide a final internal written response within **20 working days** where possible. If this is not possible, we will confirm the expected timescale.

6.5 Stage 4: Referral to an independent/external body (where applicable)

If, after Stage 3, you still do not feel your complaint has been resolved to your satisfaction, you may be able to refer the matter to an appropriate independent or external body (depending on the nature of the complaint). We will tell you what options available and what information may be needed (for example, copies of our Stage 1–3 responses and any supporting evidence). Please note that not all complaints will be eligible for review by an external body.

6.6 Data protection complaints

Where a complaint relates to the Trust's handling of personal data, including data use, disclosure, retention, or access to personal information, it will be treated as a data protection complaint and handled in line with applicable data protection law and relevant guidance. The Trust will provide a way for individuals to raise such complaints by email, post or telephone, acknowledge receipt within 30 days, take appropriate steps to investigate and respond without undue delay, keep the complainant informed where necessary, and communicate the outcome once the complaint has been concluded.