

“Every complaint about charities matters” – Charity Commission urges charities to “listen and learn” when they receive complaints

The Charity Commission is urging charities to “listen and learn” when issues are brought to them.

The regulator has [reviewed complaints and reports about charities](#) that fall below the threshold for regulatory action, to help it, and charities, learn from the matters raised by the public. The review is part of the Commission’s commitment, set out in its 2018-2023 strategy, to ensure no complaint is ignored. All complaints about charities contribute to the Commission’s assessment of risks facing charities, even where no direct regulatory action is required.

The Commission says the review revealed that most complaints come from people invested in a charity – including beneficiaries, supporters, volunteers and trustees – and relate to issues that affect them personally. The Commission says that “it isn’t the case that people only complain about a few large household name charities”.

People who complain to the regulator often do so because they “felt their concerns had been ignored or dismissed” by the charity. Where a charity doesn’t respond appropriately to concerns or does not demonstrate genuine accountability in its public reports and accounts it risks generating “suspicion and frustration”, the regulator says.

The report points to the importance of recognising the heightened expectations people have of the behaviour and attitudes demonstrated by those involved in charity and responding accordingly to questions and concerns. It cites, in particular, poorly managed or handled conflicts of interest as a source of concern and suspicion. The regulator also highlights the trust charities inspire when they respond well to complaints.

Helen Stephenson, CEO of the Charity Commission, said:

Charity can and should lead the way in taking public expectations seriously. If you’re a charity, that includes showing that you take complaints and concerns seriously, and are responding appropriately. This review demonstrates that these high expectations are shared by those close to you: your own beneficiaries, volunteers, staff, supporters and trustees – and that, if they complain, by responding well in the first place, you can help avoid matters being brought to the regulator’s attention. I hope this review helps empower charities to take preventative

steps that avoid complaints, and to respond with care when problems do arise.

Today's report is the first thematic review of complaints the Commission has conducted under its new strategy; the regulator says it will undertake future reviews that may explore other themes and issues.

Ends

Notes to editors:

1. The Charity Commission received 600 complaints and reports about charities between April and June 2019 that did not meet the threshold for regulatory intervention; of these, it carried out in-depth reviews of around 200. The report findings are based on that review.
2. The Charity Commission is the regulator of charities in England and Wales. Its purpose is to ensure charity can thrive and inspire trust so that people can improve lives and strengthen society.