Complaints procedure

Safeguarding and Complaints

Centre

https://centrethinktank.co.uk/

Date these procedures came into effect: 27/08/2026
Date these procedures must be updated by: 01/01/2027

This document sets out the complaints procedures for Centre, what to do if you have a complaint, what will happen if someone has made a complaint against you, and how incidents are dealt with.

Who is covered by this policy? This policy applies to all members of Centre. This includes the Administration, Spokespeople, Regional/State Chairs, ex-members of Centre, and members of Centre Students. You can also make a complaint as a member of the public.

Part one

Overview



Preventing issues from occurring. Within Centre, we want to create an atmosphere and a culture that ensures, as far as possible, people are comfortable making complaints and incidents do not occur to begin with. We will also learn from any past safeguarding breaches or complaints to prevent issues from recurring.

Our complaints team. We have a team within Centre that investigates complaints, minor issues, and whistleblowing reports. This includes our Head of Complaints or our Deputy Head of Complaints. However, the Deputy Head should only be used if there is a conflict of interest with the Head of Complaints. You can see our full safeguarding, complaints, and pastoral care team: https://centrethinktank.co.uk/safeguarding-complaints-and-pastoral-care-team/

Our Head of Complaints, Deputy Head of Complaints, Head of Safeguarding, and all members of our safeguarding team cannot have a position anywhere else within the Centre to maintain their independence.

We also have a Head of Safeguarding who handles complaints if both the Head of Complaints and Deputy Head of Complaints positions are not filled.

Vacancies in our Complaints Team. If the Head or Deputy Head of Complaints leaves within this process, the next person to hold that position will take over investigating the case. Once they are in the position, they will then have three months in which to investigate the case. They should hand over any email addresses and any information on cases they have as part of their role.

Sharing your information. For all cases, information about a complaint can be shared with the Head of Complaints, Deputy Head of Complaints, Complaints Committee, and the individual the complaint is against. This can include any of the information sent to Centre using the complaints form; this is also listed in the "Methods to make a complaint" section of this document. None of these rules prevents any individual from discussing any details with the police, social services, or councillors for issues such as mental health.

When registering a complaint on our website, our form asks whether you agree to our sharing information policy. This means the person who made the complaint and the person the complaint has been raised against should not share that a complaint has been launched, and they should not use identifying details whilst discussing the complaint. They should also not share any information given to them about the complaint that they did not know before the complaint was launched. A full explanation with examples can be found in our privacy policy.

Our Head of Complaints or Deputy Head can share information with the Complaints Committee during a complaint or if an appeal is launched. They can also share any information provided to them during the complaint to either the person making a complaint or the person being complained about.

These last whilst the complaint is ongoing or until any police investigations are concluded. If any information is disclosed against our rules by either individual, then the Head or Deputy Head of Complaints will need to sanction the individual, which can range from a warning to a suspension, depending on how serious the breach is. We will also inform the ICO if there is a data breach.

Pastoral support. Members or non-members may also get support from the Pastoral Care Officer during the complaints process or more broadly during their time in Centre if they wish. This may be necessary if the person is under 18 or a vulnerable adult. This can include when submitting a complaint, throughout the process, and after the process is complete if requested.

Complaints against or by former members. If the person making the complaint, or the person the complaint is against, leaves Centre, then the complaint will still go through the complaints system. This is to ensure we do not allow people into Centre who could harm our members, and members who have broken the rules are not allowed to remain within Centre. However, this means there will be no emails sent during the complaints process to former members if the complaint is against them.

Breaches of the law. When a breach of the law is believed to be involved, then the issue will be reported to the police by the Head of Complaints. If this happens, Centre will wait until the police investigation has been completed. If this takes more than 6 months, then we will follow up with the police to check when an internal investigation can take place.

Malicious complaints. If an individual makes three or more complaints that are not upheld, then the person can be reported using the complaints system for making malicious complaints.

The Head or Deputy Head of Complaints can also reject complaints if an individual makes two or more complaints that are not upheld. This will be on an individual basis if the Head or Deputy Head of Complaints believes a specific complaint to be malicious.

The reasons a complaint itself may be considered malicious include:

- Abusive behaviour or language from complainants, verbally or in writing.
- The complainant refuses to cooperate with the complaints procedure.
- The complainant refuses to accept that the issue is not within the powers of Centre to change, investigate or influence.
- Repeatedly insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular member of our team who is not stated in the complaints procedure.
- Repeatedly demanding responses within an unreasonable timescale, for instance, within hours.
- Repeatedly breaching our code of conduct when making the complaint, for instance, through comments made during the complaints process.

More widely, it should be assessed whether the complaint was submitted to:

- Create a disproportionate impact on the time and resources of volunteers who have to deal with them.
- Cause annoyance or disruption.

If a complaint meets these definitions, the Head or Deputy Head of Complaints will then write to the individual who made the complaint to explain why their complaint has been rejected. The individual who made the complaint can appeal this decision using the normal process for appealing complaints, but they may only do this once.

When considering whether a complaint is malicious, the Head or Deputy Head of Complaints should first take into account whether the cases previously submitted were difficult to decide on or whether they were clear-cut cases. They should also take into account whether the complaints were made purely to see a member suspended.

Methods to make a complaint. Complaints should be reported through the complaints form on our website in the complaints and safeguarding hub. This form can include your name and email address so you can be kept up to date with the process, whether you are a member of Centre, whether the complaint happened to you or someone else, whether you agree to our sharing information policy, whether you have done anything to try and resolve the issue, the categories the complaint falls under, an explanation of the complaint, the URL of the post if it is a social media post, whether there is currently a police investigation into the issue, whether there is any additional evidence in the case, the name of the person you would like to make a complaint about, how old they are, whether they are a member of Centre, what region they live in, what position they hold, what you would like to see happen with your complaint, whether it is a joint complaint, if your complaint is an appeal and whether you agree to our privacy policy. The form also asks whether it is a joint complaint, which means more than one person is making a complaint about the same issue or person. To make a joint complaint, the person filling in the form must list the names of other individuals making complaints alongside them.

Timeline for dealing with complaints. The complaint should be dealt with in full, excluding any appeals, within three months of the complaint being made. The member of the Complaints Team dealing with the complaint must also keep the person who made the complaint up to date with its progress and, if the complaint overruns, they must explain why.

Email checks. To ensure emails are checked regularly by our complaints team, we confirm with each member of the team that they will carry out these checks and will inform us when they are no longer able to do so. We ask our complaints team to check the email once every four days. Our wider team can also check for any submissions on our website, although the only information received is the number of reports and when they were made. No personal information is accessible, and individual responses are not viewable. Our complaints team will then be notified once an email is received.

Part two

Acknowledgment



Acknowledging the complaint. When complaints are received by the Head or Deputy Head of Complaints, they have four days in which to acknowledge that they have received the complaint. If you do not hear back from them within this time, you can email:

- Our Head of Complaints can be reached at complaints@centrethinktank.co.uk
- Our Deputy Head of Complaints can be reached at deputy.complaints@centrethinktank.co.uk
- Our Pastoral Care Officer at pastoral.care@centrethinktank.co.uk
- If you still do not receive a reply from any of the above, our main email address is info@centrethinktank.co.uk

Any communications should then take place only through the contact details provided by the person raising the issue or through the official email address for the Head or Deputy Head of Complaints.

They must then keep the person who made the complaint up to date with its progress, how it is likely to be dealt with, how long it will likely take and if no further investigation will take place, why it is not something that will be investigated.

Informing the person the complaint is against. The Head or Deputy Head of Complaints should request a copy of the latest membership data from the Director, the Deputy Director or the Membership officer. They should then email the person the complaint has been launched against to inform them within five days of receiving the complaint. This should also include the full details of the complaint.

Informing the Director that a case has been opened. At the beginning of the complaints process the Head or Deputy Head of Complaints, depending on who is managing the case, should send a small report to the Director stating the random number given to the complaint. At the start, it should simply say the rough nature of the complaint without any names or anything that could be used to identify the individual involved. They can also request the Director to suspend members of the team or the Centre networks.

Anonymising the complaint. The Head or Deputy Head of Complaints then ensures that the information of the person making the complaint is anonymised. This will involve any details that may be used to identify the person, such as their name, gender and age, being anonymised so any details that go before the Complaints Committee will be purely about the case itself. To do this, each case will be assigned a number using Excel, and the people within the case will only be referred to as person A, person B, person C and so on. The random number will be used for every email sent by the Head or Deputy Head of Complaints during the process. This process will be used for all cases, regardless of whether the person is remaining anonymous or not.

If you lose your email address during this process, then you should contact the Head of Complaints with your complaint number to change future emails to that address with your case number.

Complaints against members of our team. If a complaint is made against a member of the Centre team, then they will not be allowed to take part in the process other than to appear before the Complaints Committee.

If a member of the Administration, a Spokesperson or a Regional/State Chair has a complaint made against them, then the Head or Deputy Head of Complaints should decide whether to suspend them from their position. This should take into account both the severity of the complaint and the likely outcome of the complaint. If the Head of Complaints is the person the complaint is against, then the Deputy Head of Complaints will take on the roles originally carried out by the Head of Complaints in the process set out below. When this person is suspended, the Head or Deputy Head of Complaints will need to send an email to inform them that they have been suspended from their position within five days of the original email informing them that a complaint had been made against them.

Part three

Investigation



Investigating the complaint. When the investigation begins, the Head or Deputy Head of Complaints will email both the person who submitted the complaint and the person the complaint is against to inform them that the investigation has begun. It will be investigated regardless of whether the people involved are members or ex-members. Below is an outline of how decisions can be reached and what information should be compiled.

Gathering evidence. The Head or Deputy Head of Complaints should first gather evidence to help them decide on the case. This can include:

- Emailing those involved to better understand the case.
- Reviewing any items of supporting evidence submitted throughout the process, such as documents or screenshots.
- What links, if any, exist between the individuals in the case?
- Any statements from any witnesses.

Evidence must only be considered if it is:

- Relevant to the case and helps the person deciding on the complaint to reach a decision or understand the motivations involved. For instance, podcasts, TV episodes, and newspaper articles without direct links to the case itself are not usable evidence.
- Obtained through legal means. If there is any doubt about this, then the person providing the evidence can be asked about the background of the evidence during the investigation stage.

This should help the Head or Deputy Head of Complaints decide:

- What common facts can be agreed on in this case, where both the person who made the complaint and the person who is being complained about agree on?
- What points of difference exist, what each person states happened, and where do these accounts differ?

Once the investigation is completed, both the person who made the complaint and the person the complaint was against should be informed that the investigation has concluded.

Part four

Outcome



Deciding on the case.

- Weighing up only the usable evidence available impartially.
- The standard for deciding a complaint is the balance of probabilities (the individual deciding the case needs to be satisfied that it is more than likely the complaint is true).

Clear breaches. When there is a clear breach of safeguarding, our code of conduct, our safeguarding code of conduct, or our privacy policy, then our Head or Deputy Head of Complaints must immediately put in place any appropriate actions or repercussions.

Unclear complaints. The issue may be unclear, in which case it goes to the Complaints Committee. Only three members of the committee will decide on complaints; the members will be decided by the Head or Deputy Head of Complaints based on availability and ensuring that anyone involved in the complaint is excluded.

Each member of the committee will then be given the full details of the complaint without identifying information. If any member of the committee requests it, a virtual meeting can also be held. This allows the person whose complaint has been raised to appear in front of the committee along with the person who made the complaint, who can write down what happened anonymously. This will be alongside any evidence gathered by the Head or Deputy Head of Complaints and considering any previous complaints or complaints in the past four years, to make their decision.

Each member will then decide whether the safeguarding rules or the code of conduct were broken based on the balance of probabilities. Once each member has made a decision, they will then individually inform the Head or Deputy Head of Complaints. Once this has taken place, the Head or Deputy Head of Complaints will decide on any appropriate actions or repercussions that need to be put in place.

Possible incidents and repercussions. If repercussions are needed, these are the minimum repercussions, depending on the nature of the incident. The full definitions for all of these terms can be found in our “definitions” guide.

An apology, which may also include training if the incident was serious enough, during which time the person will be temporarily suspended as a member. If the person has already been suspended, for any reason, then this should instead result in their membership being revoked and a permanent ban.

- Consuming alcohol while undertaking any role, activity or responsibility on behalf of Centre Think Tank, including during meetings, events and other organisational activities.
- Serious, persistent or unreasonable disrespectful behaviour towards another member, volunteer, employee, partner, speaker or member of the public.
- Using our social media accounts and email accounts, including the personalised email account given to members, ZenZap or any other messaging platforms for personal purposes rather than their role.
- Agreeing to partnerships without a vote from our team.
- Misrepresenting your position, the position you hold, or your work.
- Breaching confidentiality

- Failing to disclose a relevant conflict of interest or failing to take appropriate steps to manage a conflict of interest.
- Dishonest behaviour

A temporary suspension of membership can be permanent, depending on the severity of the incident. If the person has already been suspended for any reason, then this should instead result in their membership being revoked and a permanent ban.

- Breaching data protection or privacy requirements.
- Bullying or cyberbullying.
- Harassment.
- Intimidation.
- Violent behaviour.
- Posting content of a violent nature.
- Breaking our safeguarding rules.

This will result in their membership of Centre being revoked and a permanent ban.

- Breaking the law.
- Rape.
- Assault by penetration.
- Sexual assault.
- Unauthorised photography, filming or recording of members or others in circumstances where this is inappropriate or breaches their privacy.
- Discrimination, bullying or derogatory behaviour towards a person because of their actual or perceived age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, or any other personal characteristic, including because of their association with a person who has, or is perceived to have, such a characteristic.
- Sexual harassment.
- Physical, emotional, sexual, discriminatory, financial or material and psychological abuse.
- Homophobia.
- Islamophobia.
- Racism.
- Transphobia.
- Antisemitism.
- Sending unwanted messages of a sexual nature.
- Ableism.

May fall into any of these categories depending on what specific issues are involved in the rule break.

- Conduct on social media, messaging platforms, email or any other online platform that would breach these rules if it occurred in person
- Defamation or libel.
- Academic malpractice which is intentional, repeated, or serious.

Once an outcome has been decided. The Head or Deputy Head of Complaints will email both the person who submitted the complaint and the person the complaint is against. The other person's name should be anonymised if this is an anonymous report, explaining the outcome of the case, and outlining the next steps. The Head or the Deputy Head of Complaints should also include a document explaining both the outcome of the complaint and the reasoning behind that outcome.

The outcome may include training or an apology, which will be arranged by the Head or Deputy Head of Complaints. It can also include their membership being revoked or suspended, in which case they will need to arrange this with the Administration section of the team to change the membership list.

Informing the Director of the outcome. At the end of the process, the Director should be emailed to inform them that the case has been closed, and they need to be told what action needs to be taken, if any.

Part five

After the conclusion



Appeals process. If either the person who made the complaint or the person who was complained against is unhappy with the outcome of the case, then an appeal can be made. The Head or Deputy Head of Complaints will then send an email to both the person who originally made the complaint and the person the complaint was against within one week to inform both that an appeal has been launched. They will also ask both individuals if there is any additional evidence they would like to submit.

The individuals dealing with the appeal will depend on who originally dealt with the complaint. There are the following options:

- If the original complaint did not go through the Complaints Committee, they will then be given anonymous details of the complaint, the ruling and any additional evidence submitted. The committee will decide whether to uphold the complaint, to change the sanctions put in place or to overturn the complaint. This process will mirror the process used for unclear complaints.
- If the original complaint went through the Complaints Committee, the appeal will be dealt with by the complaints team members who did not originally deal with the complaint. For instance, if the complaint was managed by the Deputy Head of Complaints, then the appeal will be managed by the Head of Complaints. On the other hand, if the original complaint was dealt with by the Head of Complaints, then the appeal will be dealt with by the Deputy Head of Complaints.

The appeal should be dealt with in full within three months. The original decision can only be appealed once, or when new evidence has been found that was not available before the original complaint was launched.

Learning lessons. These procedures will be reviewed if an incident occurs or if there is a ‘near miss’. To improve these measures, we will also talk to survivors of incidents to ensure our practices are as effective as possible. Centre will also publish a yearly review with anonymised data on all complaints, minor issues, and whistleblowing reports received that year and how long it took until these had been completed, including any appeals. We will also keep anonymous records of all complaints, whistleblowing reports and minor issues. This involves storing the information on a password-protected Excel document that only the Head or Deputy Head of Complaints can access. The records will be kept for four years and, after that date, this will be deleted.

Ensuring these measures are kept up to date. These measures will be kept up to date to ensure our organisation can prevent mistakes from happening or learn from them if they do occur.

Availability of these measures. To ensure these measures are accessible to those who may need to consult them or go through the processes in this document, this document will be available on our website. A copy of this policy will also be sent to every member of the Centre when it is updated via email.

Have any ideas to make these procedures better? Let us know by submitting any ideas on the “Contact” page of our website.

Centre

https://centrethinktank.co.uk/