LINCOLNSHIRE FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY

Serious Incident Reporting Policy and Procedures

Background

Under Charity Commission rules updated to reflect the Charities Act 2022, all registered charities - regardless of size - must promptly report significant adverse events directly to the regulator. For the Lincolnshire Family History Society, passing the £25,000 annual income threshold is the trigger for us to declare on our annual return whether any reportable serious incidents occurred.

A Serious Incident Reporting Policy gives our trustees a clear checklist to distinguish between a routine minor issue (like an accidental overcharge at a bookstall) and a reportable crisis (like a major ransomware attack on our website).

1. Purpose and Scope

As a registered charity, the Lincolnshire Family History Society (LFHS) must act transparently when significant problems arise. This policy outlines what constitutes a "serious incident" and the mandatory procedures the Executive Committee (Trustees) must take to report these occurrences to the Charity Commission for England and Wales.

2. What is a "Serious Incident"? [1]

A serious incident is an actual or alleged event that results in, or risks, significant harm to the Society's people, assets, or reputation. For LFHS, this is categorised into four main triggers:

- **Safeguarding and Harm:** Serious harm, abuse, or mistreatment of a member, visitor, or volunteer at the Lincoln Resource Centre or during a local branch meeting.
- **Financial Loss or Crime**: Major theft, deliberate fraud, or financial mismanagement of Society funds.
- **Data and Cyber Breache**s: A severe data breach under GDPR laws, such as hacking of the Members Only Area, membership database or a ransomware attack taking down the primary website.
- **Governance Failures**: Events preventing the charity from operating legally, such as mass trustee resignations or a forced bank account closure.

3. Immediate Procedure When an Incident Occurs

If a volunteer or branch coordinator suspects a serious incident has occurred, they must follow these steps immediately:

i. **Stop Further Harm:** Take immediate practical steps to protect individuals or secure the Society's property/IT assets.

ii. **Escalate Horizontally:** Notify the Society Chairman and Secretary within 24 hours with a factual, written summary.

[1] Note: Minor, everyday issues (e.g. a one-off minor typing error in a transcript database or a temporary website glitch resolved in an hour) are not serious incidents and should not be reported.

iii. **Contact Emergency Services**: If a criminal act is suspected (theft, physical assault), report it to the police immediately to obtain a crime reference number before notifying the Commission.

4. The Trustee Decision and Reporting Mechanism

The responsibility to report a serious incident rests collectively with the Board of Trustees.

- **Evaluation:** The Trustees will meet (virtually or in person) to review the incident, assess the ongoing risk, and decide if it meets the Charity Commission's reporting thresholds.
- **Submission**: If reportable, the Secretary or an authorized trustee will submit a Serious Incident Report (SIR) via the official digital government portal "promptly" (defined as, as soon as reasonably possible after the event is discovered).
- **Anonymity Rule**: In compliance with data laws, the initial report to the Commission must describe the event, the impact, and the solution, but must not contain the names or personal data of the individuals involved.

5. Annual Declaration

At the close of each financial year, the Trustees will review the incident log. When completing the Charity Commission Annual Return, the Trustees will accurately declare whether any serious incidents occurred during the period.

Review of this Policy

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Executive Committee at its first meeting following the Annual General Meeting. The Committee may review and amend this policy at any time if changes in legislation, Charity Commission guidance, best practice, or the Society's circumstances make this necessary. The date of the most recent review will be recorded in the Committee minutes.

Approved by the Executive Committee: 24 September 2026
Last reviewed: No reviews to date
Chairman: Colin Ashworth
Next review: First Committee meeting following the 2027 AGM