

The Commission has issued the charity with a Regulatory Action Plan to address governance weaknesses after a damaging internal dispute emerged.

The Commission has identified a lack of clarity around role descriptions and internal policies as the primary cause for weaknesses in the charity's management. It finds that this confusion exacerbated tensions, which culminated in a dispute and multiple resignations of trustees and both founding patrons.

The regulator has criticised all parties to the dispute for allowing it to play out publicly, and further concluded that the then trustees' failure to resolve disputes internally severely impacted the charity's reputation and risked undermining public trust in charities more generally.

## **Background**

In 2023, Sentebale's then trustees sought to implement a new fundraising strategy in the United States. In the period that followed, a serious dispute within the charity emerged between the charity's chair of trustees, Dr Sophie Chandaoka, some of the other trustees of the charity, and one of its patrons, the Duke of Sussex.

Concerns about relationships breaking down were first raised with the Charity Commission in February 2025. After a period of assessing the concerns raised, the Commission opened [a regulatory compliance case](#) in April 2025.

The purpose of the Commission's case has been to determine whether the charity's current and former trustees, including its chair, have fulfilled their duties and responsibilities under charity law. The Commission's role as regulator is not to adjudicate or mediate internal disputes in charities.

## **Findings**

A number of concerns were raised by different parties. After conducting interviews and thoroughly reviewing all evidence submitted, the Commission found:

- the delegation of certain powers to the chair, including consideration of an 'executive chair' role, was a confusing, convoluted and poorly governed process, with a lack of clearly defined delegations over time
- the then trustees failed to have proper processes and policies in place to investigate internal complaints
- more generally, a lack of clear policies contributed to the failure to resolve disputes.
- it was not satisfied that public statements made to the media and public criticism made in television interviews, were conducted in a way that served the charity's best interests

Based on the evidence provided and reviewed by the Commission, it found no evidence of:

- widespread or systemic bullying or harassment, including misogyny or misogynoir at the charity, but the Commission has acknowledged the strong perception of ill treatment felt by a number of parties to the dispute and the impact this may have had on them personally
- ‘over-reach’ by either the chair or the Duke of Sussex as patron, but the Commission is critical of the charity’s lack of clarity in delegations to the chair which allowed for misunderstandings to occur

The failure to clarify delegations within the charity to the chair, and the failure to have proper processes for internal complaints, both amount to mismanagement in the administration of the charity.

Separately, the Commission expects that in future, the charity should have a clearly defined patron role set out in writing.

## **Conclusions**

The Commission’s assessment of the various accounts that have been provided is that all the charity’s then trustees contributed to a missed opportunity to resolve issues which led to the dispute. The regulator observed that strategic and financial difficulties that had emerged for the charity following the Covid-19 pandemic contributed to the tensions that arose.

The regulator urges trustees of all charities, if in disagreement, not to lose sight of their charity’s best interests or the good work it does for those who need it.

As made clear to all parties in this case, if disputes do occur, the regulator recommends seeking mediation, showing good will and acting in good faith. It also encourages all trustees to be mindful to channel their belief in the charity’s mission in a constructive and collaborative way.

## **Next steps**

The charity currently has validly appointed trustees in place to take the charity forward. The Commission has issued a Regulatory Action Plan setting out steps the current trustees need to take, including to implement an internal dispute policy, improve the charity’s complaints and whistleblowing procedures, and establish clearer processes for delegating authority on behalf of the charity. The Regulatory Action Plan also sets out the importance of the trustees securing sufficient funding to enable the charity to deliver for its beneficiaries.

The regulator is monitoring the charity’s progress against the Regulatory Action Plan. Should it receive evidence that raises new regulatory concerns, it will assess this in line with its usual process.

## **David Holdsworth, Chief Executive of the Charity Commission, said:**

Passion for a cause is the bedrock of volunteering and charity, delivering positive impact for millions of people here at home and abroad every day. However, in the rare

cases when things go wrong, it is often because that very passion has become a weakness rather than a strength.

Sentebale's problems played out in the public eye, enabling a damaging dispute to harm the charity's reputation, risk overshadowing its many achievements, and jeopardising the charity's ability to deliver for the very beneficiaries it was created to serve.

This case highlights what can happen when there are gaps in governance and policies critical to charities' ability to deliver for their cause. As a result, we have issued the charity a Regulatory Action Plan to make needed improvements and rectify findings of mismanagement.

**He added:**

Moving forward I urge all parties not to lose sight of those who rely on the charity's services. The current trustees must now make improvements and ensure the charity focuses on delivering for those it exists to serve.