Negative Review Process

Decide what happens before a one-star review lands, not while you're upset. This sheet holds the five groups, the same-day steps, the escalation note for your tracker and the route for reviews you think are fake.

From lessons 3.2, 3.3. The full course and the reviews audit: reyse.co.uk/resources/reviews. November 2026 edition. General education, not legal advice.

Lesson 3.2, reyse.co.uk/reviewscourse/negative-reviews

A real process for negative reviews, and taking it offline

Do this first Write a one-page process: who sorts it, who replies the same day, and when it moves to a phone call.

Fix

Step 1: sort it into one of five groups

- [ ] Fair complaint: something did go wrong. Acknowledge it, apologise where it's due, fix it.
- [ ] Misunderstanding: the facts differ but the feeling is real. Reply calmly and move offline.
- [ ] Fake, or not a client: you can't match it to anything (lesson 3.3). Reply once, factually, and flag it.
- [ ] Abusive: threats, hate or private information. Flag it, and don't reply in kind.
- [ ] Legal: alleges a crime, discrimination or a safety problem, or threatens legal action. Post at most a holding line and go to a director or solicitor first.

Step 2: acknowledge it the same working day

- [ ] Thank them, apologise for how they feel (that isn't admitting the facts), name who'll call, and give a way to reach them.
- [ ] Holding reply: "Thank you for telling us, [first name]. We're sorry you're unhappy and we're looking into this today. [Name] will contact you directly."
- [ ] A review that arrives after hours is answered first thing next morning.

Step 3: one owner, and treat it as a complaint

- [ ] One named person owns each negative review until it's closed, and tells the branch manager the same day.
- [ ] Log it in your complaints log. Whether a public review counts as a formal complaint for your redress scheme is for you to confirm with them; treating it as one is the safe default.
- [ ] The Property Ombudsman's lettings code (from 1 May 2026) says acknowledge written complaints within 3 working days, send a formal outcome within 15 working days, and keep complaint records for six years.

Step 4: one calm public reply, then offline

Agree the rule in advance, so it isn't decided in the moment under pressure.

- [ ] One calm public reply. Anything involving dates, figures, documents or names goes to a call or a private message.
- [ ] Wording: "Thank you for raising this, [first name]. We'd like to understand and put it right. Please call [name] on [branch number] or email [branch email]."
- [ ] No personal mobile numbers or reference numbers in public, and no screenshots of private messages.

Know when not to move offline

- [ ] A plain factual error about public information (opening hours, a fee on your website): one short public correction is fine.
- [ ] A serious or legal allegation: post only a holding line and take advice first.
- [ ] Never use "let's take this offline" to bury a review, or make a fix depend on it being removed.

Asking for an update, the right way

- [ ] Only after a genuine fix, and never as part of the fix. Never offer money, a discount or a favour for changing or removing a review: Google, Trustpilot and the CMA all say no.
- [ ] If the matter is closed and the client is happy, you may say once, separately, that they're welcome to update their review if they feel it no longer reflects their experience, with no pressure. Often the best route is to say nothing.

> **Then:** Keep a row in your tracker for every negative review: date, platform, rating, group, owner, reply date, outcome and complaint reference. It's also your evidence if a review turns out to be fake.

Lesson 3.3, reyse.co.uk/reviewscourse/fake-and-defamatory-reviews

Fake, unfair and defamatory reviews: reporting, removal and legal options

Do this first Check whether you can match your last 20 reviews, including the good ones, to a real client.

Fix

Spot the signs (to investigate, not proof)

- [ ] You can't find the person or the property in your records.
- [ ] The details don't fit: a branch you don't have, a service you don't offer, a staff member who never worked for you.
- [ ] Several reviews arrive close together with similar wording.
- [ ] The reviewer is a competitor, a former employee or a relative, which Google treats as a conflict of interest.

Capture evidence first

- [ ] Screenshots with dates, the web address, the reviewer's name and profile, a note of what you searched for in your CRM (not a copy of client data), and a timeline.
- [ ] Keep it with the review's row in your tracker (lesson 3.2).

Report once, under the right rule

- [ ] Google: Read reviews, the flag, then a reason. Or use the Reviews Management Tool to report a review and track its status.
- [ ] Use your one appeal per review wisely, adding anything new. Don't keep resubmitting.
- [ ] Report the same review on each platform where it appears, using that platform's route. There's a separate Google route for anyone demanding money to remove a review.

Reply once, calmly

- [ ] "We take every review seriously but can't match this to an experience with our branch. We've asked the platform to look at it. If you did deal with us, please contact [name] on [branch number]."
- [ ] Say as little as possible, and never say who you think wrote it. Only mention that you've flagged it if you have.

Never retaliate

- [ ] Don't post fake reviews about a competitor you suspect, or glowing fake ones to bury a bad one.
- [ ] Don't offer anything for a review to be removed or changed, and don't pressure the reviewer.

Legal options, if it's serious

- [ ] Take a solicitor's advice before any legal step. They can tell you whether a notice under the Defamation Act or a letter is worth it.
- [ ] If a review includes private information such as a home address, flag it under the platform's rules first.
- [ ] If a competitor or supplier is publishing fake reviews, the CMA's online reviews case page lists a contact. It isn't a route for removing a review you simply dislike.

> **Then:** Check your evidence log monthly, so no suspected fake sits unreported.

Escalation note (copy into your tracker or shared inbox)

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Date and time found:
Platform and link:
Star rating:
Group (fair complaint, misunderstanding, suspected fake, abusive, legal, data request):
Branch and service (sales, lettings, management):
Holding reply sent (Y/N, time):
Owner:
Escalated to (name, date):
Logged as a complaint (Y/N, acknowledgement date):
Evidence saved (screenshots, CRM search note):
Platform flag made (date, reason):
Outcome and date closed:
Theme for the monthly report:
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Negative review tracker

Keep complaint records for six years (the Property Ombudsman's lettings code). No client details in the notes column.

Date	Platform	Stars	Group	Owner	Replied	Called	Outcome

Rather we did this for you? It's part of Found First, done for you: reyse.co.uk/products/reviews